

7 Kisses

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Preacher: Andy Hunter

[0 : 00] The reading from God's Word this morning is taken from Song of Solomon, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. This is known as Solomon's Song of Songs.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes.

Your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you. Thank you, Celia. You can see why I asked a lady to read that out this morning. It would have sounded a bit strange coming from me. So our reading from the Song of Solomon begins, as we heard, with a woman expressing her passionate desire towards her lover in those words we just heard.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is more delightful than wine. It's just over a week since St. Valentine's Day was celebrated with the usual flowers and chocolates and cards and kisses.

[1 : 27] How many of you got a card? Hands up? Oh, two, three, four. Oh, good. Anybody get chocolates? Oh, yeah, a few.

Flowers? Not bad. But gentlemen, you'll have to do better next year. Here's a picture of my Valentine's card to my wife.

The X's at the bottom of the card, as you know, of course, stand for kisses. I chose this reading because of Valentine's Day and because the theme and title of the message this morning is The Significance of a Kiss.

It's probably fair to say that this man knows the significance of a kiss better than most people because he is, of course, Luis Rubiales, Spain's Football Federation president, who, whilst the eyes of the whole world were upon him, congratulated player Jenny Hermoso after Spain's women won the 2024 World Cup by kissing her fully on the lips, apparently without her permission.

This costly mistake has resulted in him losing his job and he is currently awaiting the outcome of a recent trial over this. Now, can anyone tell me how many kisses were on my card?

[3 : 01] Seven. Seven. Correct. I'm not usually that generous with kisses when I write cards to my wife, although she does deserve them all.

But knowing that I wanted to use this image this morning, I added a few extra because my plan is to share seven kisses with you this morning, if you will pardon the expression.

Each one is significant in its own way, but all are from the Bible, just in case you were getting worried, which you probably are by this time.

But I trust that the Lord will bless and encourage you through the message this morning. Kiss number one, inspired by a reading, is a kiss of passion.

You may recognize this famous sculpture simply called The Kiss by French artist Auguste Rodin. And I've tried to keep the image as modest as possible.

[4 : 02] The Song of Solomon is unique in the Bible in that it is the only book that deals exclusively with a love between a man and a woman. Although it is often expressed in quite sensual language, in Jewish tradition it is interpreted as an allegory of God's love for Israel, and in Christian tradition as that of Christ's love for the church.

Both interpretations are equally valid. It is in style very similar to Egyptian love songs of the era of Solomon. In it, the speech of the lover and the beloved alternate, interspersed at times with comments from a group of the woman's friends.

Some of its descriptions are very beautiful. Describing her lover, the woman says, My beloved is radiant and ruddy, outstanding amongst ten thousand.

His head is purest gold. His hair is wavy and black as a raven. His mouth is sweetness itself. He is altogether lovely.

He says of her, How beautiful you are, my darling. Oh, how beautiful. Like a lily amongst thorns is my darling amongst the maidens. But I wouldn't recommend any young man today telling his girlfriend, as Solomon did, Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead. [5 : 29] Or worse still, your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn coming up from the washing. Preachers don't preach very often on the Song of Solomon, But when they do, they usually, as I indicated earlier, spiritualize it as the love of Christ for the church.

Which is fine. But we mustn't overlook the fact that, in essence, it is a description of the love of a man for a woman. And a woman for a man. And we shouldn't be ashamed of that. We are told in chapter 1 of Genesis that God created mankind in his image, Making them male and female. Blessing them and saying to them, Be fruitful and increase in number. And I don't have to spell out how we do that. The devil didn't invent sexual desire, but he is an expert at perverting it. And despite abundant evidence of that in our society today, Scripture makes it clear that God designed marriage as a union of one man with one woman, And that sexual relationships belong in marriage and not outside of it. Hebrews 13 verses 4 to 6 warns us, Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure. For God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. [6 : 53] Moving on swiftly. Kiss number 2 is a kiss of homage. This picture shows a cardinal paying homage to a newly elected pope, And signifying that by kissing the ring on his finger.

In Britain, the ceremony when a monarch appoints a new prime minister is officially called kissing hands. Because it is customary for the new prime minister to kneel And kiss the monarch's hand. Kissing the monarch's hand is a sign of deference, And is designed to show the politician's loyalty to the monarch, In whose name he or she will govern. Tony Blair in his memoirs recalls being told by a Buckingham Palace official To brush the queen's hand gently with your lips, Only to trip on a piece of carpet, Turning the kissing of hands, He says, Not so much as a brushing, As an enveloping them. Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm, That warns the rulers of the world to pay homage to Christ as king. Paul referred to it last Sunday when he was doing Psalm 1, But thankfully he didn't read it because I'm going to read it for you now.

[8 : 12] Why do the nations conspire, And the people plot in vain? The kings of the earth rise up against the rulers, And the rulers band together against the Lord and against his anointed, Saying, Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.

The one enthroned in heaven laughs, The Lord scoffs at them, He rebukes them in his anger, And terrifies them in his wrath, Saying, I have installed my king on Zion, My holy mountain. I will proclaim the Lord's decree. He said to me, You are my son, Today I have become your father. Ask me, And I will make the nations your inheritance, The ends of the earth your possession. Now who did this? I've got them out of order. That was all sorted out this morning. How did that happen? Right, Philip, Can I get that thing I gave you?

[9 : 18] I do apologize. Normal service will be resumed as soon as possible.

Right. Yes, so he carries on. You will break them with a rod of iron, You will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise. Be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, And celebrate his rule with trembling. Kiss his son, Or he will be angry, And your way will lead to destruction. For his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. Kiss number three, Is a kiss of devotion.

Here is a picture of a mother, Kissing her baby. No one is more devoted to a child, Than the mother that carried it for nine months, And nurtures and cares for it, After it is born.

[10 : 24] No matter what, A mother will love you, Till the day she dies. And incidentally, I am, My wife and I are going to be grandparents, This coming week.

For the second time, A little sister for Rosie, Should be born on Thursday, When Hannah goes in, David's wife Hannah goes in, For a cesarean. But a kiss of devotion, Is not always an indication, Of goodness and love. This picture is of Elijah, On Mount Carmel, After his contest with the priests of Baal. When he called down fire from heaven, To consume his sacrifice, And prove to the people of Israel, That the Lord was God, And not Baal. Afterwards, He commanded the people, To kill all the priests

of Baal.

However, When Jezebel found out, She sent him a letter, Threatening to kill him, For what he did. Fearing for his life, He fled to Mount Horeb, Which is Mount Sinai, Another word for Mount Sinai.

[11 : 29] It was there that the Lord spoke to Elijah, Not in the wind, The earthquake, Or the fire that passed before him, But in a still, Small voice.

What are you doing here, Elijah? To which he replied, The Israelites have killed your prophets, And I'm the only one left, And now they want to kill me too.

But the Lord told him, I have reserved for myself Seven thousand, Who have not bowed the knee to Baal, And whose mouths have not kissed him. There is something in these words, That I find rather chilling.

Not because of the seven thousand, Who had not bowed the knee to Baal, Or kissed his image, But because of the majority, Of those who had. To bow the knee, To me speaks of compromise.

It has always been the case, That people will often go, Along with things they don't know, The consequences, If they speak out. Only last summer, The BBC reprov, After he misgendered a pupil, Has lost a high court appeal, Against the decision, To ban him from teaching.

[12 : 42] You have to wonder, What has happened to this country, When a man can be banned for life, From teaching, For the heinous crime, Of misgendering a pupil. Whilst real criminals, Criminals often go unpunished.

No wonder, People keep quiet. Amos 5.13 says, The prudent keep quiet, In such times, For the times are evil. But, If bowing the knee to Baal, Speaks of compromise, Those whose mouths have kissed him, Are, I think, A different kettle of fish, Altogether.

For they, Are the true believers, And that's what, I find chilling. Deeply devoted, To their cause, Their ideology, Religion, Or lifestyle. But just as Baal is a false god, Opposed to the one true God, So too, Their beliefs are false, Opposed to the truth, To God, And to all reasonable people.

They cannot be, They cannot be reasoned with, Or persuaded, By sound arguments, Or even by truth, When it is plain, To see before their eyes, But are instead implacable, To all but their own, Ungodly beliefs, And wicked desires.

You only have to listen, For instance, To those who vehemently, Accused Israel at every turn, But refused to apply, The same standards to Hamas, Over the atrocities, Committed by them, On innocent women and children, On October, The seventh, Attack on Israel.

[14 : 19] To reason with such people, Jesus warns us, Is to cast peril before swine. Their conscience, According to Paul, Has been seared, As with a hot iron.

Jude calls them, Clouds without rain, Blown along by the wind, Autumn trees, Without fruit and uprooted, Twice dead. To kiss Baal, Is a most unholy thing to do.

But if there is an unholy kiss, There is also a holy one. Paul encourages the Christians in Rome, To greet one another, With a holy kiss. Similarly, Peter says, In 1 Peter 5.14, Greet one another, With a kiss of love.

Kiss number four, Is therefore, A kiss of greeting. This is a picture, Of the Queen of the Netherlands, And a late queen, Greeting each other, With a kiss. The kiss of greeting, In the church, Is not like the kiss of homage, Which signifies status.

Kiss. The cardinal, Who kissed the ring, Of the Pope's finger. The prime minister, Who kissed the hand, Of the monarch, Were by acknowledging, The other, As their superior.

[15 : 30] But when in the church, Men and women, Greet one another, With a holy kiss, They are acknowledging, Each other as equals. The Gentile believers, Who eventually made up, Much of the early church, Were drawn from all walks of life.

Some were slaves, Some were soldiers, And some were masters, And mistresses. But imagine, How a Christian slave, Must have felt, When he or she, Met with other believers, And was welcomed, With a kiss of love, By a fellow Christian, Whose station in society, Was far above their own.

A kiss, That was not condescending, But was as brother to brother, Or sister to sister. That is the power, Of the gospel of Christ.

Paul writing to the Galatians, Tells them, In Christ Jesus, You are all children of God, Through faith. For all of you, Who were baptized into Christ, Have clothed yourself, With Christ.

There is neither Jew, Nor Gentile, Neither slave, Nor free, Nor is there male, And female. You are all one, In Christ Jesus. The kiss of greeting, Is common, In many cultures, Where friends greet one

another, With a kiss on the cheek.

[16:51] In France, They call it, La bise. But in the UK, By some quirk of culture, We don't do this, Except perhaps, To greet close family, Or friends.

But the further north you go, In Britain, The less likely you are to see it. In fact, It could be said, That we have infected, The whole of the English speaking world, With our British reserve, For a kiss of greeting, Is also not commonly practiced, In Canada, America, Australia, Or New Zealand.

A good example, Of that British reserve, Is found, In the 1959, New Testament translation, By Englishman, J.B. Phillips, Who attempting, To make the Bible, More relevant, To the youth of his day, Did not translate, Romans 16, 16, As greet one another, With a holy kiss, But instead, Translated it, Give each other, A hearty handshake all round, For my sake.

I think, That that, Is hilarious. Kiss number five, Is a kiss, Of gratitude.

This is a picture, Of a woman, Who Luke tells us, In his gospel, Came into the house, Of the Pharisee, Of a Pharisee, Where Jesus was, And standing behind him, At his feet, Weeping, She began to wet his feet, With her tears, And wiped his feet, With her hair, And kissed, And anointed his feet, With ointment.

[18:26] It would have taken, A great deal of courage, To come into the Pharisee's house, Uninvited. And do this, For she was, As the saying goes, A woman of ill repute.

But something, That Jesus said, Had said or done, Had impacted her life, And changed her. And she wanted to show, She wanted to show him, Her deeply felt gratitude.

The Pharisee, Thought to himself, If this man were a prophet, He would have known, Who and what sort of woman, This is, Who is touching him, For she is a sinner.

But Jesus said to him, Simon, I have something to say to you. A certain money lender, Had two debtors, One owed five hundred denarii, And the other fifty.

When they could not pay, He cancelled the debt, Of both of them. Now, Which of them, Will love him more? Simon answered, The one, I suppose, For whom he cancelled, The larger debt.

[19:32] And he said to him, You have judged rightly. Then turning to the woman, He said to Simon, Do you see this woman? I entered your house, You gave me no water for my feet, But she has wet my feet with her tears, And wiped them with her hair.

You gave me no kiss, But from the time I came in, She has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, But she has anointed my feet with ointment.

Therefore, I tell you, Her sins, Which are many, Are forgiven, For she loved much, But he who is forgiven little, Loves little.

Kiss number six, Is a kiss of betrayal. I was in Edinburgh, One summer, A few years back, When the Scottish National Gallery, Was exhibiting, Some of Caravaggio's works.

Outside the gallery, There was an enormous screen, Advertising the event. The type of screen, You would sometimes see, Outside buildings, That are being renovated. On that screen, Was a huge reproduction, Of this painting, Of the betrayal of Christ, By Caravaggio.

[20:50] It so caught my attention, That the image stayed with me, Over the next few weeks. It was that painting, That eventually inspired this message.

The kiss, With which Judas betrayed Jesus, Is surely, The most infamous kiss, In all of history. To betray Jesus for money, 30 pieces of silver, Was bad enough.

But the sign, That Judas gave, To identify Jesus, To his enemies, Was that he would greet him, With a kiss. You have already seen, That a kiss of greeting, Speaks of welcome, Of friendship, And of affection.

So it is doubly chilling, That this is a sign, That Judas, Prompted by Satan, Chose by which, To betray the Lord. His response, Judas, Do you betray the Son of Man, With a kiss?

Must have cut like a knife. These words, Will surely torment him, Torment him, For all eternity. For although the disciples, Abandoned Jesus, And fled when he was arrested, And although Peter, Denied him three times, They were all forgiven.

[22:09] But Judas, Never found forgiveness. Filled with remorse, He hanged himself. Jesus knew in advance, That Judas would betray him.

But as Caravaggio, Attempts to betray, He must have still felt, That betrayal deeply. He was a man, Who walked with Jesus, Who ate, And drank with him, And saw the many great miracles, That he did.

Yet he must never, Have truly believed. It's a sobering thought, That Jesus says, In Matthew chapter 7, Verses 22 to 24, Many will say to me, On that day, Lord, Lord, Did we not prophesy, In your name?

And in your name, Drive out demons, And in your name, Perform many miracles. Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you, Away from me, You evildoers.

So we come to our final kiss, Which I have called, A Kiss of Reconciliation. This is Dutch artist Rembrandt's picture, Of the return of the prodigal.

[23 : 22] It hangs in the Hermitage Museum, In St. Petersburg, In Russia. It's a very large painting, About eight and a half feet tall, By six and a half feet wide.

And it was completed, Within two years, Of Rembrandt's death. It might not look, Too impressive on our screen, But art historian, Kenneth Clark, Has said, Those who have seen the original, In St. Petersburg, May be forgiven, For claiming it, As the greatest picture, Ever painted.

Another calls it, Monumental, Saying, Rembrandt interprets, The Christian idea of mercy, With great solemnity, As though this were, His spiritual testament, To the world.

The story of the prodigal son, Or in modern language, The lost son, Found only in Luke's gospel, That Jesus uses, To illustrate the love of God, Is surely not only, The greatest of all Jesus' parables, But undoubtedly, One of the greatest stories, Of all time.

In it, You will recall, That Jesus tells of a son, Who asked his father, For his share, Of the inheritance, Which was very disrespectful, Given that his father, Was still alive.

[24 : 38] But then, To add insult to injury, He leaves his father, And goes off to a foreign country, Where he squanders it all, In wine, Women, And so on.

At the same time, There is a famine in the land, And he is forced to take up, A menial job to survive, A job, That no self-respecting, Jewish boy would ever do, Feeding pigs.

So hungry was he, We are told, That he would have happily, Eaten the pigs food. After a time, However, Coming to his senses, And remembering, How well off his father's servants, Are in comparison to him, He decides to run, Return to them, His father, Acknowledge, That he is no longer, Worthy to be called his son, And ask only, To be given a job, As one of his servants. Now, Listen to the words of Jesus, As he describes, What happens next. But while, He was still a long way off, His father saw him, And was filled with compassion, He ran to his son, Through his arms round him, And kissed him.

I called that kiss, A kiss of reconciliation, But I recognize, That it is a very, Inadequate description, For in that one embrace, And kiss, Are bound up with it, Love, Compassion, Joy, The angels in heaven, Rejoice, Don't they, Over one sinner that repents, Mercy, Grace, Forgiveness, Restoration, And more.

[26 : 12] But the story doesn't end there, Of course. As the son launches into this speech, That he must have rehearsed, Over and over again, On his journey home, Father, I have sinned against heaven, And against you, I am no longer worthy, To be called your son.

The father, Doesn't let him finish. Instead, Calling to his servants, He says, Quick, Bring the best robe, And put it on him. Put a ring on his finger, And sandals on his feet.

Bring the fatted calf, And kill it. Let's have a feast, And celebrate. For this son of mine was dead, And is alive again. He was lost, And is found. We were discussing this one day, In the Christian heritage, When a godly old man, From the Western Isles, By the name of Billy Graham, Believe it or not, Remarkd, That this verse, Was the inspiration, Behind one of the, Great Negro Spirituals, Sung by the African slaves, In America.

Often, Barefoot, And in rags, They would sing, I got a robe, You got a robe, All God's children got a robe, When I get to heaven, Going to put on my robe, Going to walk, All over God's heaven.

I got shoes, You got shoes, All God's children got shoes, When I get to heaven, Going to put on my shoes, Going to walk, All over God's heaven.

[27 : 38] When John Newton, Penned the well-known words, Amazing grace, How sweet the sound, That saved the wretch like me, He was echoing, The words of the father, When he continued, I once was lost, But now am found, Before concluding, Was blind, But now I see.

And surely Charles Wesley, Was inspired by the picture, Of the father, Throwing his arms around his son, When he wrote, In one of his great hymns, Oh, That the world would taste and see, The riches of his grace, The arms of love, That compass me, Would all mankind embrace.

Grace, All good evangelicals know, Is God's unmerited, Or undeserved favor, To mankind. That is the definition of grace, But anyone who wants to know, What that looks like, In practice, Needs look no further, Than the parable, Of the prodigal son.

We rightly make much, Of Jesus dying on the cross for us, But we often forget, The part that God the father, Has played in our salvation. Jesus himself tells us, God so loved the world, That he gave us his son.

And Paul says, In 2 Corinthians, Verses 5 and 13, That God was in Christ, Reconciling the world to himself, No longer counting people's sins, Against him.

[29 : 05] It's an incredible thought, That as Jesus walked, The dusty roads of Palestine, Proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, And healing the sick, And when, Despite all the good that he did, He eventually stood before Pilate, And the baying crowd cried, Crucify him.

And their shouts prevailed, And he was led away to be nailed on a cross, And bled and died. God himself, Was all that time, In Christ, Reconciling the world, To himself.

The parable of the lost son, Perfectly illustrates, The message of the gospel, And the character, Of a loving, Patient, Forgiving God, Who is not willing that any should perish, But that all should come to a knowledge of the truth.

It fills me, With gratitude, And love, And joy, To be able to say this morning, That this is my God, And this is your God.

All other gods, Pale, Into insignificance, In comparison with him. Amen. Our final song is, Oh love, That will not let me go.