

1
Scripture: Song of ^{Solomon} ~~Songs~~ 2:8-15.

Text: Song of ^{Solomon} ~~Songs~~ 2:8a -- "The voice of my beloved!"

Theme: The Voice of Love.

Proposition: When the voice of that which we love speaks of God it is among life's sweetest treasurers and moves us to selfless deeds for our beloved.

Date written: July 4, 1957.

Dates and Places preached:

Grace Church, Cheyenne, Wyo.
11 a.m., July 3, 57

• OAKLAND PARK, FLA. SEPT. 24, 1972

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● Introduction: 1 (very first-opening)

● A man sat in a duck blind drinking from a flask with a friend who was drinking coffee from a thermos bottle. After no action for hours, a lone duck flew over. The coffee drinker jumped to his feet, fired, and missed. The other man then casually raised his gun and downed the duck. When ~~he~~ congratulated by his amazed friend, he replied, "Aw, it wasn't so good. I usually get three or four out of a flock that size."

It is difficult to understand how some things come about.

● Today we're studying something that is difficult, and are looking in it for another portion of God's word. That something is the Old Testament book called The Song of Solomon, or the Song of Songs.

Introduction: I (very first-orientation)

I was sat in a dock holding drinking
from a flask with a friend who was
drinking coffee from a thermos bottle.
After no action for some, a lone duck
flew over. The coffee drinker jumped
to his feet, fired, and missed. The
other man then casually raised his
gun and downed the duck. When he con-
gratulated by his amazed friend, he
replied, "Well, it wasn't so good. I
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It is difficult to understand how
some things come about.

Today we're studying something that
is difficult, and are looking in it
for another portion of God's word.
That something is the Old Testament
book called The Song of Solomon, or
the Song of Songs.

ILLUSTRATION

Introduction:

1. Of all the books in the Old Testament none is so difficult to interpret as the Song of Songs. About no other book has so much been written, and concerning no other are there such differences of opinion and such a variety of interpretations.

2. Yet, it is this book that gives us our theme for today, and therefore which we need to understand better.

I. The Song of Songs -- its background, purpose, and other information about it.

1. The title is, by evidence in the book itself, obviously an editor's work, after the book had been written. "The Song of Songs" would seem to be a superlative, like "The Lord of Lords" and kindred expressions. The editor treated the book as a single poem and apparently ascribed its authorship to Solomon, though there is insufficient evidence in the book to determine definitely if Solomon wrote it, if it was written to or about him, or just who did write it.

2. Among the ancient, pre-Christian Jews there was considerable discussion as to whether the Song of Songs should be in the canon, or collection of holy Scriptures. Eventually, however, it came to be accepted by all of the Jews, and

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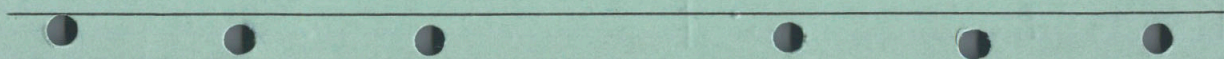
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anathema, or cursed, were those who ~~da~~ dared any more to sing it as a wine song in the banqueting halls, as some had been accustomed to do. Its erotic character, stressing features of physical love, manifestly caused it to be so used, and doubtless also this feature caused its place in the canon, or Scripture, to be questioned by some.

3. We know that the Song of Songs was written in or prior to the 8th. Century B.C., for a Jewish book written in the 8th. Century B.C. tells us that the Song of Songs was used liturgically by being read on the eighth day of the Passover celebration; or at the beginning of the New Year. A Seventh Century B.C. Jewish work implies that this Book was read publicly in these services of Passover. Even today it is still prescribed for orthodox Jews that the Book be read at the conclusion of the morning service on one of the Sabbaths of the Passover season. In most synagogues, however, outside of north Poland and Lithuania, it is read not publicly but by each individual privately in connection with the passover celebration.

4. The Song is unique in Hebrew literature: there is nothing even remotely like it anywhere else in the Bible. It is lyric poetry of exquisite beauty,

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full of sensuous symbols. It is the only Book in the Bible to have all its content put into the mouth of speakers, but it is a monologue with practically no dialogue. The speakers are not identified nor are their speeches introduced. The book has some dramatic characteristics, but it is not drama. It is marked by frequent repetitions, by refrains, and antiphonal (echoing) responses.

It lacks structure. There is no movement to a conclusion. Matters are as far advanced in 1:4 or 2:4 as in 8:4. It is manifestly folk poetry, simple and naive, not the work of a professional of the world of literature. It is full of extravagant imagery. There is a remarkable appreciation of the beauties of nature in the poem and nature is prominent throughout. There is an elusive geographical background -- sometimes Judean, sometimes Isrealite, or Trans-Jordanian, or Syrian. It is Palestinian, generally, rather than just Hebraic. It has a wider range than just the Hebrew people. In its present form it is purely secular in character, with no apparent theological religious or moral attributes. God never once appears in it.

5. How can such a book be interpreted? What does it mean? For centuries

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there have been many varieties of allegorical interpretations, with the bride of the book being in one ^{INTERPRETATION} the church, in another the virgin Mary, in still another the Christ, or in others a large variety of interpretations. The allegorical interpretation could make the Book mean anything. You could choose your things for which its characters stood. In the end the extravagances of this method of interpreting the Song of Songs ~~disappeared~~ were its undoing, so it has nearly disappeared now.

6. Some have tried to interpret the Song of Songs as a drama, but this, too, is faulty interpretation. It simply is not written as a play, lacking dialogue, movement, and point, which drama must have.

7. For a while a popular interpretation of the Song of Songs was that it was a collection of Judaen wedding songs but in recent years further study and evidence shows that this can not be so.

8. Another view of the book is that it is a secular love song, actually having no rightful place in the collection of sacred literature. This is a strongly-held view, but various bits of obvious evidence both within and without the book would seem to deny this theory. It is, indeed, a religious

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book, ~~the~~ large number of scholars seem to agree.

9. This, then, brings us to a religious interpretation of the Song of Songs, or to what is called the liturgical interpretation. According to this theory, the Song of Songs is the survival in conventionalized form of ancient Hebrew New Year's liturgies (forms of what is said in a service) that celebrated the reunion and marriage of the sun god with the Mother goddess, which in the ancient world typified the revival of life in nature which came with the growing season. It is the remainder in literature of a myth. It harks back to the ancient fertility cult which in its many forms was found throughout the whole world, and is not without its survivals even in our own day, as witness features in our Easter celebration. At least part of this song was used in various festivals of Old Testament times, and the festivals themselves hark back to features of more ancient New Year's celebrations connected with the fertility cults. In course of time, however, the early connections of the book were forgotten, and it became so secularized that it appears today as a simple anthology of love poems without any religious connections whatever. In the liturgies

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of the fertility cult women always play a prominent role, the speakers are not named, and their speeches are more monologue than dialogue, and very repetitious; the goddess is sometimes bride, sometimes sister, sometimes mother; the beloved is sometimes king, but more often shepherd; the liturgy was acted out in part, with the king taking the role of the god, and it is the nearest approach to drama that has come to us out of the ancient near East. In short, the peculiar characteristics of the Song of Songs ~~already mentioned~~ ^{BEST} are more fully explained than in any other manner by saying it is a New Year's liturgy of love and life, ^{WHICH CAME} deriving originally from ancient fertility cults known to the Hebrews before they came to believe in one God, Jahweh, or Jehovah.

10. With all this, the Song of Songs is still difficult to understand. We know it was included in our Bible because those who put it there thought it suggested the love of God for Israel. Does it have any meaning for us?

One thing is clear: it is a poem in praise of love. It is expressed in romantic and radiant language. And so any meaning we may find in this most unusual Bible book is to be found in the theme of love; -- and at that in love

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Song of Solomon 2:8-15

Introduction to Point II (before stating the point)

One evening a large family stopped at a local ice cream shop. The mother warned the children: "Now, remember, just get cones -- I haven't much money tonight."

Disappointed, the four-year-old in the family shyly asked, "Well, can I have ice cream in it?"

That four-year-old knew what would give her ~~pleasure~~ ^{PLEASURE} at that point, and she didn't want to miss it!

our scriptural book points out
that

Introduction to Job II (before
the point)

One evening a large family stopped
at a local ice cream shop. The
mother warned the children: "Now,
remember, just eat cones -- I haven't
much money to buy..."
As recounted, the four-year-old in
the family shyly asked, "Well, can I
have the cream in it?"
That four-year-old knew what would
give her happiness that night,
and she didn't want to miss it!

between man and woman, youth and maiden.

11. The Scripture which we read today begins with words which are true to the theme of personal love which is the strong and beautiful, yet realistic, theme of the Song. Those words are "The Voice of my Beloved!" These words are not introductory to anything. They stand for and by themselves and end with an exclamation mark. "Behold, the voice of my beloved!" They suggest to us the topic, "The Voice of Love," as being one true to the Scripture and of value to the Christian. Let us think of "The Voice of Love."

→ ILLUSTRATION

II. The voice of that which we love is sweet and gives much pleasure.

1. In the Scripture the lover obviously has said all that needs to be said about her beloved, so far as she is concerned. "The voice of my beloved!" She hears him, he is near, and she is as happy as she can be. What they say to each other doesn't matter nearly as much as that they are together, can hear and see and be with each other.

2. All who have been in love know of what we speak, and those who **have** not loved another strongly and passionately can never understand the pleasure that just the voice of one's beloved

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can give.

3. If your young folks hang onto the phone for hours as they talk to their beloved, to their sweethearts, you're probably providing the cheapest-priced pleasure you can for them. The voice of love indeed is sweet.

III. The voice of ones beloved causes one to perform selfless deeds for the service of the beloved.

1. This is the aspect of love that gives it meaning, the part that causes lovers to buckle down to sacrifice, hard work, and clear-headed thinking that builds well for the future.

2. A youth working for months to buy his girl that thing she so much would like to have is learning that to love is to discipline oneself. The thought of the exclamations and expressions of pleasure that he anticipates hearing from her when she receives his hard-earned gift keep him going, denying himself many things he would like to have.

3. The love of a parent for a child is what causes him to stick by the child through sickness, waywardness, educational expense.

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IV. Life's greatest personal satisfactions are found in the sweetness and selfless service which the voice of love calls forth.

1. In our Scriptural love song she responds to the sweetness of his voice, and is ready to rise from her rest and go with him as he says "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

O my dove, in the clefts of the rock
in the coverts of the cliff,

let me see your face,

let me hear your voice,

for your voice is sweet,

and your face is comely."

To respond to the sweetness of his voice is for her the greatest of pleasures, the most in satisfaction.

2. ~~From~~ The sound of the voice of love is enough, when the sleepy-headed drowsy childish voice just before dropping into sleep says, "I love you, Mommy."

3. Parents, tired after a day of work to earn the money with which to buy the clothing, pay the medical and educational bills and give various advantages to their demanding children, often before they retire at night will step lightly into the room of the sleeping children, and as they gaze at the still, sweet faces of their beloved little

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ones will say "They're worth every bit of it."

4. Our greatest satisfactions in life do come when we heed the voice of love and serve those whom we love.

V. Such satisfactions are far greater and more lasting when in the voice of love we hear God and seek to serve Him through the service to our beloved.

1. Nowhere does the Bible minimize the importance of the love of man and woman. In both the Old Testament and the New such love not only is mentioned frankly and in detail, but often. In Hosea of the Old Testament, and in the works of Paul in the New Testament, particularly, love of man and woman leads to a realization of the love of God, and because of the realization of the love of God the Bible helps the love of man and woman for each other to be enriched, made more beautiful, made more meaningful.

2. For the lover, death itself can be borne in service of protection of his beloved. Christ's death reminds us that God loves us as strongly as death itself, and, indeed, that Christ died for us. Christians find in Christ a cause and a person deserving of all they have to give, and one who, unlike some

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human lovers, never lets them down.

3. A story is told by S. H. Moffett in "Where'er the Sun" (Friendship Press, 1953) about how the Communists came in to a North China village and found a little group of Christians. Probably because the Christians refused to participate in the hate campaigns against the landlords, the Communists lost their tempers. "We will take away your land" they said. And the Christians only replied, "That is all right. Our possessions belong to the Lord Jesus Christ." The Communists said, "We will beat you." And the Christians replied, "That is all right. Our bodies belong to the Lord Jesus Christ." The Communists said, "We can kill you." And the Christians replied, "Even our lives belong to the Lord Jesus Christ."

4. Strong love always ennobles us, makes us better able to stand whatever must be stood in the service of the one we love. If as a man loves a woman he sees in her God's finest gift to him; if as he seeks to make her life happy he sees in her happiness a way of thanking and praising God; if his love and service grow through the years, he finds that his capacity to love and serve reaches out to more and more of God's children. Then indeed he finds

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that his satisfaction in life is at its greatest. The voice of love to him is that of his opposite, his mate, and through that love he has come to know and love God and others.

Conclusion:

1. The Song of Songs, the Bible's book speaking mostly of love between man and woman, can help us to understand the selfless love which Christ showed us, and which ~~then~~ we in love for Him can show others. As the lover of our Scripture exclaims, "The voice of my beloved!" we too can so exclaim of our loved ones here and of our God both now and in eternity.

2. When the voice of love speaks of God, it is among life's sweetest treasures and moves us to selfless deeds for our beloved.

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