Sunday School Commentary Lesson

By

Dr. Jason Thrower

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The Most Beautiful Bride, Song of Songs 6: 4-12

A long time ago, thoughtful Jewish rabbis tried to decide if Song of Solomon should be included in the Bible. We believe these rabbis were guided by the Holy Spirit. On what basis did they make the decision to include Song of Solomon in the Bible? We know there was vigorous debate. The Palestinian school of Shammai did not want this book in the canon (the approved books of our Bible). The Babylonian school of Hillel wanted to included it.

God was the lover pursuing Israel. The entire Old Testament is witness to God's unfailing love. God's love for Israel was like the love between a man and a woman. It was strong, passionate, and unrelenting. This interpretation gave justification for this text's inclusion in our Bible. Put simply, this interpretation got Song of Solomon into our Bibles.

After the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Christian theologians borrowed from the rabbis' theology in interpreting Song of Solomon. God has remained the faithful, pursuing lover, but the object of God's love is now the Church. With variations, this interpretation endured for most of the Church's history. Origen, Jerome, and Martin Luther gave this reading to the text. They saw God as the lover of first Israel and then the Church. This interpretation makes the poetry bend to religious purpose. More than a thousand years of interpretation by both rabbis and Christian theologians is not lightly dismissed.

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The woman is compared to beautiful cities (Tirzah and Jerusalem) or as an army "with banners." The lover begins to speak of her eyes, her hair, her teeth. Such is the language of young love. Through the eyes of love, the beloved is exalted.

Isn't this the way most of us have felt on occasion when we ponder the love of God? By the love of God, we are exalted. John Newton wrote of "Amazing Grace." How could God love us?

The Apostle Paul said, "Someone may die for a righteous person, but Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God's love for us." (Romans 5:8).

If we were clean and pure, strong and true like Jesus through and through, then we could understand how God could love us. But we aren't nor were we ever like Jesus. Still God loved us enough to send Jesus. It's a love story written on a grand scale, and maybe only the poetry of lovers can begin to catch the feelings.

Early in life, I was aware of love's affect on me. My parents loved me, they told me so and acted as if they loved me. They desired good for me and it showed.
What effect did this knowledge that my parents' loved me have upon my life? It made me think I had worth. When I faced set backs and disappointments, my parents' love empowered me with the awareness of being loved which gave me the confidence to make my way. In December of 1991, I met April Baggett, my future wife. Over the past twenty-three years her love has given me the courage and strength to overcome obstacles and rise above them. Throughout the poetry of Song of Solomon, the couple draws strength from each other. Multiply that idea a thousand times over and you have the effect of God's love on ordinary human beings like you and me. To be loved by God is the greatest joy we can know in this life. As special and enriching are types of love - like the love of parents or a spouse - these types of love are only a shadow compared to the wonder, power, and life-changing effect the passionate love of God can have upon our hearts and lives. Several times in Song of Solomon, maidens question the woman about the one she loves. Is he faithful? Is he all you think he is? Are you sure he is yours and yours alone? In 6:1, other maidens offer to help in the search for this most wonderful of men. The woman is never distracted from her conviction of both the faithfulness and the excellence of her beloved. The woman remembers who she believes her beloved is. The Old Testament calls to us remember the goodness and constancy of God. Remember what God did for us in rescuing the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. Remember the way God delivered his people at the Red Sea. Remember all that God did for his children in the wilderness. Now fast forward to today. Why does the Church observe Holy Communion? It is a reminder of all Jesus has done for us. We are forgetful people by nature. But God does not forget. Great is His faithfulness to us! The words take on the extravagance of poetry, and ordinary people like you and me have found the poetry to be true.

Contact Jason - throwerjason@gmail.com