June 13

Happy Monday, everyone.

Continuing with our walk through the books of the Bible in order, this week we will take a look at the book titled Song of Songs, sometimes called Song of Solomon, because it was written by King Solomon when he was a young man.

Song of Songs is an interesting and much-discussed book in the Bible that few people read in its entirety. In essence, Song of Songs is a series of poems about romantic, sensual love between lovers who become husband and wife. Many in the church are turned off by the somewhat erotic nature of its language, but the fact remains that it is inspired Scripture along with the other 65 books of the Bible.

At its core, Song of Songs teaches that intimacy and sexual union are gifts from God that are to be celebrated and enjoyed within the context of marriage. Marriage, as ordained by God at the outset of creation, is much more than a simple contract or legal understanding. It is the spiritual and physical fusion of a man and a woman, such that “the two shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

Some commentators believe that Song of Songs is best read as an allegory describing the relationship between God and His chosen people. Others state that its should also be read as allegory, but describing the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. For reasons that I'll save for another day, I find both of these understandings to be flawed and troublesome. For now, we will proceed with the understanding that Song of Songs is beautiful poetry inspired by the Holy Spirit in order to illustrate the wonder of the physical, emotional, and spiritual synthesis that God intends for married couples.

Song of Songs contains three characters: “Beloved,” a woman who is the object of Solomon's affection, “Lover,” who is Solomon, and “Friends.” With that, let's jump in:

“Beloved: I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Lover: Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens” (2:1-2).

This language may sound corny and overwrought to the modern ear, but to readers and listeners of the time, it would have had much symbolic meaning. The rose of Sharon and lilies of the valley were very commonplace flowers found throughout Israel. The woman here is essentially saying, “I'm nothing special.”

Solomon responds that she is no commonplace lily, but a “lily among thorns.” In other words, he is saying that you are unique, beautiful, and special.

This teaches us how God intends for us to treat our spouses, as “a lily among thorns,” unique, beautiful and special. I think this applies as well to all those in our lives who are
close to us. So guys, this one’s for you. Get up today, and buy your wife some flowers. If you are not married, but some for your girlfriend, or your sister, or your mother. And for today, make them roses or lilies. Better yet, make them both.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

June 14
Grace and peace to you this day.

Lover (Solomon):

“My dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hiding places on the mountainside,
  show me your face,
  let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
  and your face is lovely.
Catch for us the foxes,
  the little foxes
that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom” (2:14-15).

Here Solomon is expressing the simple desire to be able to gaze at the face of his beloved, a face he calls “lovely,” and to hear her words spoken with a voice he calls “sweet.” That’s easy enough to understand. But then we get to the business of the “foxes.” What exactly is he talking about?

Foxes are stealthy, opportunistic foragers and hunters that, in this case, have the ability to “ruin the vineyard.” They are not major predators but rather are creatures that sneak up and nibble away at the vineyard in “bloom.”

Solomon is saying, “let’s not let the trials of life ruin our relationship.” Said another way, “let’s not sweat the small stuff.” And very often, it’s the small stuff that nibbles away at our marriages and relationships until, well, it fails to bloom.

True story: When I was in law firm life, our firm did not handle family matters like divorce or custody disputes, but there were a handful of lawyers to whom we referred such matters. I remember one of them telling me that he was handling a divorce matter where “the straw that broke the camel’s back” was the fact that the wife sold their jello
molds at a garage sale. Turns out the husband’s mother had given the molds to them as a wedding present (editorial note: I personally think jello is vile and disgusting, and I eat pretty much anything). Upon learning that she sold them for a couple of bucks at a garage sale, off he went to divorce court.

Obviously, this couple had had years of the foxes nibbling at the bonds of their marriage, until the fox known as jello molds finally chewed through those bonds so they no longer existed.

So my prayer for you today is this: guard against the foxes. Honor and uplift the people and the relationships around you. And please, hold the jello.

IHS,

Pastor Lou

June 15

Grace and peace to you this day.

“How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from the hills of Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin; not one of them is alone.
Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate” (4:1-3).

Again, to the modern ear, language like this sounds almost laughable. But peel back the layers of time and you’ll see that it is deeply descriptive and loving.

To start with, Solomon is not saying that his lover’s hair is like goat hair. (I can only imagine how that would go over.) What he is saying is that the goats of Mount Gilead had long, flowing black hair, and that his lover’s hair is the same: long, black, and flowing in the wind like the goats descending the mountain.

Additionally, he is not saying that his lover’s teeth are wooly. He is saying that they are white and “each has a twin,” meaning they are even and uniform.
Solomon did not have modern marketing and communications means to define for him, for better worse, ideals of feminine beauty. Instead, he had (as do we), and employed, something much better: images from God’s creation.

Among the lessons for today is that God intends for us to bestow our love and affection, including verbal affection, on our spouses and those we love. And what better way to do so than to use images from the greatest and most beautiful tableau of all, the Creator’s creation?

IHS,
Pastor Lou

June 16
Greetings to you with Shalom, the peace of Jesus the Messiah.

Solomon’s lover, “Beloved,” begins the conclusion to Song of Songs with a compelling description of the power of love:

“Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire,
like a mighty flame.
Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot sweep it away.
If one were to give
all the wealth of one’s house for love,
it would be utterly scorned” (8:6-7).

To start with, the woman wants to be placed “like a seal” on Solomon’s arm, and on his heart. This is no small thing. Solomon, as king, affixed his personal and royal seal to documents. No one in the kingdom could break that seal. His lover here is saying that she wants to be that seal on his heart, such that no one else can enter it.

She goes on to say that her love is “as strong as death,” meaning certain, irreversible, and permanent. It is like a burning fire that not even rivers can extinguish, nor can it be replaced by any amount of wealth.

The power of love. As I ponder that, I am again brought to my knees by God’s ultimate expression of the power of His love: Christ crucified.
And so, I would encourage you today, as you express your love for those around you, be sure to express your love for the One who died, and rose, and waits for you, simply because He loves you.

IHS,
Pastor Lou

June 17

Happy Friday! Here’s your musical devotion for today. Turn up the volume and enjoy!
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9_0jiO5ZRM

IHS,
Pastor Lou