

ADDRESSES ON THE SONG OF SOLOMON

by

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CHAPTER ONE

SONG OF SOLOMON 1:4

"We will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine" (Song of Solomon 1:4).

THE Song of Solomon is a little book which has had a peculiar attraction for many of the people of God all through the centuries, and others of them have had great difficulty in understanding just why such a book should have a place in the canon of Holy Scripture at all.

Frequently I have heard those who, it seemed to me, ought to have known better, say that as far as they were concerned they could see nothing of spiritual value in this little book, and that they questioned very much whether it were really entitled to be considered as part of the inspired Word of God. As far as that is concerned, it is not left to the Church in our day to decide which books should belong to the canon of Scripture and which should be omitted. Our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has settled that for us, at least as far as the Old Testament is concerned. When He was here on earth He had exactly the same Old Testament that we have, consisting of the same books, no more and no less.

Those that are sometimes called the Apocryphal books did not belong to the Hebrew Old Testament which He valued and fed upon, and which He commended to His disciples, and, more than that, upon which He placed His divine imprimatur when He referred to the entire volume and said, "**The Scripture cannot be broken.**"

Therefore we do not have to raise any question as to the inspiration of the Canticles. He declared the Hebrew Bible to be the Word of the living God, and there are many figures from this little book in various parts of the New Testament; for instance:

- “**The well of living water**” (John 4);
- “**The veiled woman**” (I Corinthians 11);
- “**The precious fruit**” (James 5:7);
- “**The spotless bride**” (Ephesians 5: 27);
- “**Unquenchable love**” (I Corinthians 13: 8);
- “**Love strong as death**” (John 15:13);
- “**Ointment poured forth**” (John 12:3);
- “**Draw me**” (John 6:44);
- “**The Shepherd leading His flock**” (John 10: 4, 5, 27);
- “**The fruits of righteousness**” (Philippians 1:11).

Who can fail to see in all these allusions to the Song of Solomon?

If we grant that it is inspired, what then are its lessons? Why do we have it in Holy Scripture?

Many of the Jewish teachers thought of it simply as designed of God to give a right apprehension of conjugal love. They thought of it as the glorification of the bliss of wedded life, and if we conceived of it from no higher standpoint than this, it would mean that it had a right to a place in the canon.

Wedded life in Israel represented the very highest and fullest and deepest affection at a time when, in the nations surrounding Israel, woman was looked upon as a mere chattel, as a slave, or as the object of man’s pleasure to be discarded when and as he pleased. But it was otherwise in Israel. The Jewish home was a place where love and tenderness reigned, and no doubt this little book had a great deal to do with lifting it to that glorious height.

But down through the centuries, the more spiritually minded in Israel saw a deeper meaning in this Song of Solomon; they recognized the design of God to set forth the mutual love subsisting between the Lord God and Israel. Again and again, in other scriptures, the Lord God is likened to a bridegroom, Israel to His chosen bride, and so the spiritual in Israel, in the years before Christ, came to look at the Song in this way.

They called it “*the Book of Communion.*” It is the book that sets forth the Lord God and His people in blessed and happy communion. And then all through the Christian centuries those who have had an insight into spiritual truth have thought of it from two standpoints.

First, as typifying the wondrous relationship that subsists between Christ and the Church, the glowing heart, the enraptured spirit of our blessed Lord revealing Himself to His redeemed people as her Bridegroom and her Head, and the Church’s glad response.

And then, looking at it from a moral standpoint, as setting forth the relationship between an individual soul and Christ, how many a devoted saint has exclaimed with gladness,

Oh, I am my Beloved’s, and His desire is toward me.”

Rutherford’s meditations were evidently based on this little book when he exclaimed:

“Oh, I am my Beloved’s,
And my Beloved’s mine,
He brings a poor vile sinner
Into His house of wine;
I stand upon His merit,
I know no safer stand,
Not e’en where glory dwelleth
In Immanuel’s land.”

Therefore we may think of the book from four standpoints.

- Looking at it literally, we see the glorification of wedded love.
- Looking at it from a dispensational standpoint, we see the relationship between the Lord God and Israel.
- Redemptively, we find the wonderful relationship between Christ and the Church.
- Studying it from the moral or spiritual standpoint, we see it as the book of communion between an individual soul and the blessed, glorified, risen Lord.

It is a bit difficult to get the exact connection of the different portions of the book. It is not a drama, as the book of Job is; it does not present to our consideration any continued story. It consists rather of a series of love lyrics, each one complete in itself. It is the lover with heart enraptured setting to music the thrill of the soul, and thus you have this cluster of song-flowers, each one setting forth some different phase of communion between the beloved and the one so loved.

And yet, back of it all, there must be some kind of story. What is this background?

Something like a hundred years ago, Ewald, the great German critic, who has been called the father of higher criticism, suggested that the story was something like this. In the hill country north of Jerusalem there was a family in charge of a vineyard belonging to King Solomon. The young shepherdess had been won by a shepherd who had drawn her heart to himself, and their troth had been plighted. But King Solomon, as he rode along the lane one day, saw this young shepherdess in the vineyard, and his heart went out to her. He determined to win her for himself, and so tried by blandishment to stir up her affections. But she was true to her sylvan admirer. By-and-by the king actually had her kidnapped and taken to his palace, to the royal harem, and there again and again he pressed his suit and tried to alienate her from her shepherd lover in the hills. Sometimes she was almost tempted to yield, for her case seemed a hopeless one, but then she would remember him, her former lover, and she would say, “No, I cannot turn from him. ‘I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.’” Eventually King Solomon set her free and she went back to the one she loved.

That view of things has been accepted by a great many Bible students, and I have been a little surprised at times to hear some of my fundamental brethren set it forth, apparently without realizing its source.

Personally, I reject it. I do not think it at all likely that a man like Ewald, who had no real spiritual insight, ever understood this little book of communion.

A man who could be called the father of higher criticism, who gave the start to the present modern trend of handling the Bible, refusing to recognize its true inspiration, does not seem to me to be such an one as the Spirit of God would use to open up this little book to us.

There are several other reasons why I refuse this view.

First and foremost, it would make King Solomon “the villain of the piece,” and when we turn to the Word of God, we find that Solomon is viewed by the Holy Spirit of God as a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. You will find that in the Psalms Solomon is portrayed as the prince of peace succeeding David after years of warfare, and setting forth Christ’s coming again to reign as Prince of Peace.

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus says, **“The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here”** (Matthew 12:42).

When I say that Solomon is a type of Christ, I do not mean Solomon personally. Whenever any man is spoken of as a type of Christ, you are not to think of what the man is in himself, but what he is officially.

David officially was a type of Christ; David personally was guilty of very grievous sin, but the Lord is the sinless One. Solomon was guilty of very serious departure from God during certain periods of his life, but officially he represented our Lord Jesus Christ as the Prince of Peace.

It is not the way of the Spirit of God to present a character, or some other animate or inanimate object, as a type of Christ in one place and a type of that which is wicked and unholy in another; and if we were to take Ewald’s suggestion as the real story behind this book, we would have to think of Solomon as the type of the world, the flesh, and the devil, trying to win the heart of this young woman away from the shepherd who represents the Lord Jesus Christ.

Another reason why I reject this is that it would mean that we would have to understand some of the most lovely and tender passages of this little book in which the king addresses himself to the shepherdess, as mere blandishment instead of a sincere and holy love. These very passages are those which all down through the centuries have thrilled the heart of the people of God. They have reveled in them; they have delighted in them, and fed their souls upon them.

It is not likely that they have been misled, that the Holy Spirit who came to guide into all truth has thus deceived, or allowed to be deceived, so many of God’s most spiritual people throughout the centuries, and therefore, I refuse to take the story that I have given you from Ewald as the explanation of the Song of Solomon.

Let me give you another story, the one that came to me one day when I was alone on my knees.

I had to teach this little book and was a bit perplexed about it. I did not like the story of Ewald, and so I went to the One who wrote the book and asked Him to tell me what was behind it.

“Oh,” you say, “did you know the Author of the book?”

Yes, I have known Him for a long time. At that time I had known Him about thirty years, now it is forty-one years.

“Well,” you say, “the book is rather a recent thing if you know the author.”

No, not at all, it is a very old book; but the Author is the Ancient of Days and I have known Him ever since in grace He saved my soul. And so I took Him at His word and reminded Him of His promise that when the Holy Spirit came, He would take of the things of Christ and show them unto us; and I said, “Blessed Lord, I am all perplexed about this little book; by Thy Spirit show it to me so that I will really understand its meaning.”

I am going to give you the story that it seemed He gave to me. You may not think I am correct. Very well, you go to Him and ask Him about it, and if He tells you something different, come and tell me, and I will be glad to correct my story if you can show me that I am wrong.

This is what I thought I could see behind it all. Up there in the North Country, in the mountain district of Ephraim, King Solomon had a vineyard (we are told that in the 11th verse of the last chapter), and he let it out to keepers, to an Ephraimite family.

Apparently the husband and father was dead, but there was a mother and at least two brothers, two sons.

We read, “**My mother’s children were angry with me.**” In Hebrew it is, “*My mother’s sons.*”

There may have been more sons, but there were at least two. And then there were two daughters, two sisters, a little one spoken of in the 8th chapter — “**We have a little sister.**” She was a little undeveloped one. And then there was the older daughter, the Shulamite. It would seem as though this one was the “ugly duckling,” or the “Cinderella” of the family. Her brothers did not appreciate her and foisted hard tasks upon her, denying her the privileges that a growing girl might have expected in a Hebrew home. “**My mother’s sons were angry with me.**” That makes me wonder whether they were not her half brothers, if this were not a divided family.

“**My mother’s sons were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept**” (1:6).

They said to her, “*No; you can’t loll around the house; you get out and get to work. Look after the vineyard.*”

She was responsible to prune the vines and to set the traps for the little foxes that spoiled the vines. They also committed to her care the lambs and the kids of the flock.

It was her responsibility to protect and find suitable pasture for them. She worked hard, and was in the sun from early till late.

“**Mine own vineyard have I not kept.**” She meant, “*While working so hard in the field, I have no opportunity to look after myself.*”

What girl is there that does not value a few hours in front of the looking-glass, the opportunity to fix her hair and to beautify herself in any lawful way? She had no opportunity to care for her own person, and so she says, **“My own vineyard have I not kept.”**

I do not suppose she ever knew the use of cosmetics of any kind; and yet as she looked out on the road she would see the beautiful ladies of the court riding on their palfreys and in their palanquins, and as she got a glimpse of them, or as she bent over a woodland spring and saw her own reflection, she would say, **“I am sunburned but comely, and if I only had the opportunity, I could be as beautiful as the rest of them.”** That is all involved in that expression, **“Mine own vineyard have I not kept.”**

One day as she was caring for her flock she looked up, and to her embarrassment there stood a tall and handsome stranger-shepherd, one she had never seen before, gazing intently upon her, and she exclaimed, **“Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me.”**

And then she gives the explanation, **“My mother’s children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards ; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.”**

But he answers quietly without any offensive forwardness, **“I was not thinking of you as swarthy and sunburnt and unpleasant to look upon. To my mind you are altogether lovely; behold, thou art fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”**

Of course that went a long way toward a friendship, and so little by little that friendship ripened into affection, and affection into love, and finally this shepherd had won the heart of the shepherdess. Then he went away, but before he went, he said, **“Some day I am coming for you, and I am going to make you my bride.”**

And she believed him. Probably no one else did. Her brothers did not believe him, the people in the mountain country felt she was a poor simple country maiden who had been deceived by this strange man. She had inquired of him where he fed his flock, but he put her off with an evasive answer, and yet she trusted him. He was gone a long time. Sometimes she dreamed of him and would exclaim, **“The voice of my beloved,”** only to find that all was quiet and dark about her. But still she trusted him.

One day there was a great cloud of dust on the road and the country people ran to see what it meant. Here came a glorious cavalcade. There was the king’s bodyguard and the king himself, and they stopped just opposite the vineyard. To the amazement of the shepherdess, the royal outriders came to her with the announcement, **“The king has sent us for you.”**

“For me?” she asked.

“Yes, come.”

And in obedience she went, and when she looked into the face of the king, behold, the king was the shepherd who had won her heart, and she said, **“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.”**

One great reason why I think this is the story of the Canticles is because all the way through this wondrous volume, from Genesis to Revelation, we have the story of the Shepherd who came from heaven's highest glory down into this dark world that He might woo and win a bride for Himself. And then He went away, but He said, "**I will come again, and receive you unto Myself.**" And so His Church has waited long for Him to come back, but some day He is coming to fulfil His word, and,

"When He comes, the glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing,
'Hallelujah, what a Saviour!'"

And so I think that is the background of the expression of loving communion in this little book, the Song of Songs.

You notice that very title reminds you of the holy of holies; it is the transcendent song.

The Jews did not allow a young man to read the book until he was thirty years of age, lest he might read into it mere human voluptuousness and misuse its beautiful phrases, and so we may say it is only as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ that we can read this book understandingly and see in it the secret of the Lord.

I think the first chapter divides itself into three parts.

*1. The first four verses give us the soul's satisfaction; it is the expression of the bride's delight in her bridegroom. She exclaims, "**The Song of songs, which is Solomon's. Let Him kiss me with the kisses of His mouth: for Thy love is better than wine.**"*

I remember a dear servant of God saying at one time, "I have sometimes wished there were only one masculine personal pronoun in the world, so that every time I say, 'Him,' everyone would know I mean the Lord Jesus Christ."

You remember Mary Magdalene saying, "**They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.**" Then, looking up to the one she supposed to be the gardener, she said, "**Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.**"

She did not think it necessary to use the name Jesus. There was only One to her, and that was the Lord who had saved her; and so the enraptured soul says, "Oh, to enjoy His love, His communion; to enjoy the blessedness of finding satisfaction in Himself."

"Because of the savour of Thy good ointments Thy name is as ointment poured forth, therefore do the virgins love Thee" (1:3).

We are reminded how the house, was filled with the odor of the ointment when Mary broke her alabaster box and poured it upon His head.

“How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer’s ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.”

And now the heart cries out, **“Draw me, we will run after Thee: the King hath brought me into His chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in Thee, we will remember Thy love more than wine: the upright love Thee”** (1:4).

The shepherdess has been brought from the hill country into the royal palace, as you and I from the distant country into the very presence of the Lord Himself, and how often our hearts have sung,

“I am Thine, O Lord, I have heard Thy voice,
And it told Thy love to me;
But I long to rise in the arms of faith,
And be closer drawn to Thee.

“Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To the cross where Thou hast died;
Draw me nearer, nearer, nearer, blessed Lord,
To Thy precious bleeding side.

“We will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine.”

She has been claimed by the King. What a wonderful picture we have here of real communion.

No one has ever entered into the truth of communion with Christ until He Himself has become the all-absorbing passion of the soul. His love transcends every earthly joy, of which wine is the symbol in Scripture. Why is it so used? Because of its exhilarating character.

Wine speaks of anything of earth which stimulates or cheers.

When a worldling is cast down and depressed, he says,

“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more” (Proverbs 31:6, 7).

And so wine speaks of the joys of earth to which we once turned before we knew Christ. But after we know Him, we say, **“We will remember Thy love more than wine.”**

For that reason I am always grieved in spirit when some young Christian comes to me with the old, old question, “Do you think there is any harm in this or that?—any harm in the theater, in dancing, in a game of cards, in the social party that has no place for Christ?”

I say to myself, “If they only really knew Him, they would never ask such questions.”

“We will remember Thy love more than wine.”

One minute spent in fellowship with Him is worth all the joys of earth. That is what this book is designed to teach us.

There is a fulness in His love, a sweetness found in fellowship with Christ, of which the worldling knows nothing. If you are in Christ, these things fall off like withered autumn leaves.

I often hear people singing:

“Oh, how I love Jesus,
Oh, how I love Jesus,
Oh, how I love Jesus,
Because He first loved me!”

And yet the same people who sing those things sometimes never spend half-an-hour a day over the Bible; never spend ten minutes alone with God in prayer; have very little interest in the coming together of the Lord’s people to wait on Him. Invite them to a prayer-meeting and they are never there, but invite them to a social evening and they are all present. It is evident that the love of Christ is not yet the controlling passion of the heart.

The surrendered soul exclaims, **“We will remember Thy love more than wine.”** And in Ephesians we read, **“Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.”**

The Spirit-filled believer never craves the follies of the godless world. Christ is enough to satisfy at all times.

2. The next section takes in verses five to eleven.

Here you have that little retrospect that I have already given you. It looks back to the time when she first met her lover and inquired of him as to where he fed his flock.

He answered,

“If thou know not, O thou fairest among women, go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids beside the shepherds’ tents” (1:8).

In other words, it is as when the disciples of John came to Jesus and said, **“Master, where dwellest Thou?”** And He said, **“Come and see.”** And so the soul cried out, **“O Thou shepherd of my heart, where feedest Thou?”**

And he said to her, **“Just go along in the shepherds’ path, feed your flock with the rest, and you will find out.”**

If you take the path of devotedness to Christ, you will soon know where He dwells. If you walk in obedience to His Word you cannot fail to find Him.

3. *In verses twelve to seventeen we have a wonderful picture of communion with the king.*

There he and his beautiful bride are together in the royal palace, and she says, “**While the king sitteth at his table**”—and the table is the place of communion—“**my spikenard sendeth forth the smell thereof. A bundle of myrrh is my well-beloved unto me.**”

In other words, “*He is to me like a fragrant nosegay in which my senses delight.*”

And so as we enter into communion with Christ, He becomes all in all to us and the heart goes out in worship and praise, like Mary, as already mentioned, in the house of Bethany bringing her alabaster box of ointment and pouring it on the head of Jesus. The king sat at the table that day, and her spikenard sent forth its fragrance and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. That is the worshiper. There can be no real worship excepting as the heart is occupied with Him.

It is common nowadays to substitute service for worship, and to be more taken up with hearing sermons or with ritual observances than with adoration and praise.

God has said, “**Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.**”

He tells us He dwells amid the praises of His people! It is the satisfied heart that really worships. When the soul has been won for Christ there will be appreciation of Himself for what He is and not merely thanksgiving (important as that is); for what He has so graciously bestowed upon us.

“**Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.**”! This causes the spirit to go out to Him in worship and praise.

“**The Father,**” Jesus told the Samaritan woman, “**seeketh such to worship Him.**” He yearns for the adoring love of devoted hearts. May we indeed respond to His desire and ever “**worship Him in spirit and in truth.**”

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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