

Series: The Greatest Song of All, #1  
Valley Community Baptist Church  
Avon, CT

Texts: I Kings 3:5-15; Song of Songs 1:1  
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## **Just an Old-fashioned Love Song**

What's your favorite love song? Love songs have existed forever, did you know that? I've got proof! After God created Eve from one of Adam's ribs, it says that God took her to meet Adam and the first words out of Adam's mouth were poetry. So, I guess that was the first love song! (Check it out – Gen. 2:23)

The U. S. Copyright Office has over 10,000 songs on file that begin with the words "Love Is..." Do you want to hear some of these titles?

*Love Is Like a Dizziness* – 1905

*Love Is a Sickness Full of Woes* – 1912

*Love Is Good for Anything that Ails You* – 1936

*Love Is Atomic* – 1950

*Love Is Groovy* – 1969

*Love Is a Funky Thing* – 1976

Then, there's the classic love song that doesn't have the words "Love Is" in it but it was #1 on the billboard charts in three different decades: Dolly Parton wrote it and Whitney Houston made it a classic:

*I Will Always Love You* – 1974, '82, '92 (#1 for 14 weeks!)

The Whitney Houston version has 109 million hits on YouTube.

So, love songs always have been and always will be very, very popular. Why is that? Well, actually, that's what we're going to explore over the next two months. How are we going to do that? We're going to do that by studying the greatest love song of all, the book of the Bible called *Song of Songs*, which means, "The greatest of songs." This book has been a confusion and source of debate for centuries (kind of like love!). And while it's true that it isn't really a self-revealing book, still, its meaning and purpose are discoverable. When our eyes are opened, we'll perhaps take the view of the Jewish Rabbi Akiba in 100 A.D. who said:

*"...all the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs [is] the Holy of Holies."*

So, let's begin our study. Today we're going to explore three questions. First:

### **I. What Ways Has This Book Been Interpreted Throughout History?**

Various Bible scholars have interpreted this book allegorically, literally and even a few have said it is an argument in favor of celibacy! (I have no idea how they arrived at that!) So, through the ages, the Church has bounced around in its interpretation of this book. Literalists claim that it is merely a human love story. One evangelical commentator I read said that "...it contains no clue as to hidden or spiritual meanings..." At that point, I stopped reading his commentary because he just contradicted II Tim. 3:16 that says that:

**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...**

So, what about the idea that it is an allegory? An allegory is a "symbolic narrative." *Pilgrims Progress* is a religious allegory and *Hunger Games* is a modern political allegory. This means that the characters aren't real, but the message is very

real. *Song of Songs* does NOT qualify as an allegory because the characters ARE real and the setting is historically accurate. So, that's how we SHOULDN'T interpret this book, not exclusively as just about an historical couple in love and not as an allegory where the people aren't real. Which brings us to our second question...

## **II. How SHOULD the Song of Songs Be Interpreted?**

What we need to see is that this is a song that pictures various truths. I Kings 4:32 tells us that King Solomon wrote 1,005 songs and this is one of them. So, this is not an allegory but an extended analogy. It's using one true story to teach multiple truths. What are some of those truths? First, *Song of Songs*, also called *The Song of Solomon*, highly commends the glory of wedded love. In a sense, this love story is showing us what real love is. But we absolutely cannot stop there because that would imply that real love begins and ends with us.

So, secondly, we must see that this book also teaches the love of Jehovah for Israel. This is certainly not the only book of the Bible that teaches this! Most of the prophets teach this and many of them use the analogy of marriage: God is the groom and Israel is the bride. In fact, to be clear, the prophets are simply quoting God! Their words are His words! Through Jeremiah, God says to Israel: (Jer. 31:3)

**I have loved you with an everlasting love;**

**I have drawn you with loving-kindness.**

**I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.**

Now, we're going to read some language more intimate than that in this book! You might even feel embarrassed reading it. But if your spouse wrote these same words to you, I don't think you'd find it inappropriate at all!! In fact, you'd probably ask for more!!

Then, thirdly we must see that this book shows us the ultimate picture of love, the love of Christ for His Church. The Church in the New Testament is the bride of Christ. The Church has not replaced Israel, but has simply been "grafted in," as a branch from a wild olive tree is grafted into a cultivated olive tree (Rom. 11). Does that mean God is done with Israel? Paul clearly says, "No." Listen:

**Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all!**

**Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious. (Rom. 11:11)**

Which brings us to our fourth and final picture. *Song of Songs* depicts the communion of Christ and the individual believer. If you're married, think back to when you and your husband or wife were first dating seriously. If you aren't married, think about the last time you were madly in love. If you've never been madly in love, think about a couple you know who IS madly in love. (I think that should cover everyone in this room and The Venue and over in Bristol! Are you guys all paying attention? Come on, stay with me!)

Okay, now consider this: If you read ahead, if you read all the way through the book of *Song of Songs* when you come to the end (besides possibly being embarrassed) what will you find? This points to a huge application for every follower of Christ today. Here it is: In the New Testament, we're told that, collectively, we are the Bride of Christ. But technically, are we fully "with Him" now? NO!!! Rev. 19:6-9:

**Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:**

**“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.**

**Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!**

**For the wedding of the Lamb has come,**

**And his bride has made herself ready.**

**Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.**

**(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)**

**Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”**

The book of the Songs of Solomon, is telling the love story of how Solomon met his fiancée, how they fell in love and how that love grew. It also tells some of the difficulties they had in their relationship and how they got through them. But beneath it all was a real, growing, passionate desire for each other that was both exciting and satisfying, but still there is this deep longing for more. At the end of the book, the final exchange between the man and woman is this:

**(Lover) You who dwell in the gardens  
with friends in attendance,  
let me hear your voice!**

**(Beloved) Come away, my lover,  
and be like a gazelle or like a young stag  
on the spice-laden mountains. (Song of Songs 8:13, 14)**

That’s how the book ends! Do you see how this is exactly what you are experiencing in your relationship with Jesus Christ? Oh, you have a unique and intimate relationship, but it’s not all that it will be one day. If your relationship with Christ is healthy, you’re still longing for more! Oh, we have so much we can learn from this book about living in our engagement with Christ. So, finally...

### **III. What Are the Primary Teaching Principles of This Book?**

Like the book of Esther, there is no explicit mention of the name of God in the entire book. But as we also saw in Esther, human relationships have much to teach us about spiritual relationships. And we can trust that this is wise counsel because of what we read in I Kings 3. There we see Solomon, the author of this book, when he first became king. God comes to him and makes him an open-ended offer. (This is such an interesting encounter.) God says:

**...Ask for whatever you want me to give you. (I Kings 3:5)**

Can you believe that offer? If God came to you in a dream tonight and made you that offer, how would you answer? Why are we looking at I Kings? Because I want you to see the man who wrote this song! I want you to see what kind of life this song came from. Was Solomon perfectly faithful to God all his life? No! But here at the beginning, he was “locked in”. Solomon replied to God’s offer by saying:

**...You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David,  
because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You  
have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to  
sit on his throne this very day.**

**Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties... So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. (I Kings 3:6, 7, 9)**

Some of you are sitting here today and, as I've been explaining where this series is going, you've been getting more and more uncomfortable. You've been thinking, "Oh, boy, not this! Eight weeks on what a perfect marriage looks like? No, thanks!" The reason you're thinking that is because your marriage is far from perfect. Or you've already blown through one marriage and you don't even know what happened! Or you've never been married even though you've begged God to give you someone, anyone, but He hasn't come through. So you're thinking, "Where can I go for the next eight weeks because I really don't need to hear this!!"

But before you walk, listen to me... Did you hear what Solomon said to God's offer? The Hebrew word translated '*a discerning heart*' literally is, "Give me a listening heart." Solomon's attitude was: "Lord, you've given me an assignment that I don't think I can handle. Oh, my dad did great! He was awesome, but I'm not my dad. Look, I'm not quitting, I'm not asking that you buy me out or give me another assignment. I'm just asking that you give me what I need to accomplish Your will for the sake of the other people who are depending on me. That's all I'm asking. Give me ears to hear both You and them. Give me a listening heart."

And what did God do? He gave Solomon what he asked for and a whole lot more:

**So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have [you] asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked." (I Kings 3:11, 12)**

So, rather than running from this topic, why don't you do what Solomon did and ask for "a listening heart?" The first principle we need to see in this book is that biblical love is not about my getting what I want, but my giving what others need. We can't do this on our own. As much as we need and desperately want love, on our own, every one of us will mess it up. The first principle in this book is that love is not something we innately do well.

The second big principle we'll see is that selfless love on the human level is impossible without a passionate love of God on the spiritual level. Song of Songs demonstrates that love on the human level begins with desire and attraction, which then produces great motivation that results in sheer joy in serving the other person. If you haven't experienced this yourself, you've seen it a thousand times. The person "in love" is the most selfless person on earth! Right? They will do anything, including laying down their life for the person they love.

But here's the deal: What we need to understand is that human love isn't the model for how to have a relationship with God. No, it's just the reverse. We learn this four-step process of how to be "in love," first on the spiritual level with God and then, and only then, are we able to implement it in a sustained way on the human level. You see, God is "in love" with us over the long haul, like for centuries!! Look:

Step #1 - God has a deep desire for you (Jer. 31:3) *The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness."*

Step #2 - God is strongly attracted to you (John 3:17) *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

Step #3 - God is highly motivated to be with you (Rev. 21:3) *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*

Step #4 - God experiences sheer joy in a growing relationship with you. (Ps. 147:11) *"...the LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love."*

Do you want to learn how not only to "fall in love" with someone but to stay in love with them for decades? First, you must fall in love with God! That's what these eight weeks are going to be about! It all starts when you ask God to give you what He gave Solomon – a listening heart! Let's pray...