

Series: The Greatest Song of All, #3  
Valley Community Baptist Church  
Avon, CT

Texts: Song of Songs 2:3-7, 10-13, 16  
Jan. 17/18, 2015  
Pastor Jay Abramson

### **His Banner Over Me Is Love**

Do you ever sing to your children? Or, if I asked your children what your favorite song was or what your favorite type of music was, what would they say? What would you want them to say?

Sara Groves is a Christian songwriter. We sing some of her songs in worship. *He's Always Been Faithful* is one of her songs. In 2007 Sara recorded an album of songs that were mostly addressing social issues, but the first song on the CD was called, "*Song for My Sons*." When asked about that, Sara said,

"I wondered how my kids would finish the statement, 'My mother always said...' What would they say? Besides, 'You get what you get,' or 'Don't throw a fit,' and 'That doesn't fit in your nose.' I would hope there was something that stood out as the message of my life.

"'Songs for my Sons' is based on Matt. 24:12-13, where Jesus tells the disciples that in the end times, there will be an increase of evil. He says, '*The love of most will grow cold, but some will stand firm to the end and they'll be saved.*' I think my sons will face things that I can't even comprehend. And that evil, that darkness, that hurt will make them want to shut their hearts. Even now believers are shutting up their hearts and they're closing the windows and locking the doors. But Jesus says, 'I want you to keep your door open in the face of terrorism, in the face of all the ills that the world has to offer. I want you to keep your heart open and love your God and love your neighbor.'" <sup>i</sup>

Paul McCartney proudly titled one of his songs, "Silly Love Song." The Song of Songs is far from that. Yes, it speaks of and demonstrates the love between a man and a woman but it also describes what real love is built upon. In chapter two we see the three foundational building blocks of Commitment, Fruitfulness and Companionship. Let's consider each of these together. First...

#### **I. The Foundational Block of Commitment**

In verses 3 through 7, the Beloved (which is the woman), is singing about her commitment to the one she loves and his commitment to her. First, she says:

**Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest  
is my lover among the young men.**

**I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. (S of S 2:3)**

Poetically, she's saying, "Like a luscious apple in the shade on a hot day, I can't get enough of my man!" Then, she sings of his commitment to her: (Song of Songs 2:4)

**He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.**

The banquet hall is a reference to what we might call the wedding reception. The banner is a military symbol which seems odd here until we understand what a military banner was used for. It really symbolized three things. **First, it symbolized conquest.** When an army conquered another army, it drove its banner into the ground saying, "This is now OUR land!" Now, ladies, don't panic. This isn't

symbolizing some chauvinistic, courtship by force. Just stay with me through each symbol.

Secondly, this banner symbolized protection. When a military force took over another land, it took on the responsibility of protecting the innocent civilians living there. If they captured a city, they took down the city's flag or banner and raised their own. Now, a new government was in control and responsible for protecting the people.

Thirdly, a military banner in Solomon's day was used to designate the place of enlistment. They didn't have a standing army, so, when they needed to go to war, they enlisted men at the sign of the banner.

Most military leaders today have stated that they'd prefer to lead an all-volunteer army. Why? Because a volunteer soldier's commitment is much higher than a drafted soldier's commitment. The woman's voice in this song, has already made it clear that she is not forced into this relationship. She is here completely by choice. You can be the judge of who conquered whom, but it sounds to me like mutual submission.

So, let's talk about what this has to say about our commitment to Jesus. What we see as this song unfolds is a commitment on both the man and woman's part to the marriage, more than just to the wedding ceremony. Here at Valley, we have a pretty extensive pre-marriage counseling requirement. A Valley pastor can't officiate at any wedding if the couple has not gone through the pre-marriage counseling. Sometimes, not often, but sometimes, the couple seems to be more interested in talking about the wedding ceremony than they are to talk about their marriage. They want to talk about the music and the decorations and the reception more than they want to talk about boring topics like:

- How will we resolve conflicts in our marriage?
- What will our parenting style be?
- What will it take to make sure our in-laws don't become out-laws?

Do you see the problem? The wedding ceremony lasts a few minutes. The marriage will last the rest of their lives! Where should their effort be focused?

So, in your relationship with Christ, where's your focus? Oh, you love to pull out the photos of the day you were saved. You love to tell the story of your courtship with Christ and how He swept you off your feet and how awesome it felt to know that your sins were forgiven. And yes, that's all great. But what about the rest of your life? How would you describe your commitment to Him right now, today? Jesus says:

**"Remain in me, and I will remain in you."** (John 15:4) Do you read His Word and talk to Him in prayer every day? Would you ever go through a whole day and not talk to your husband or wife?

**"...go and make disciples of all nations..."** (Matt. 28:19) What part are you playing in that? Are you doing anything, are you giving any money to help us "make disciples of all nations"?

Jesus asked Peter THREE TIMES, "Do you love me?" And when he said, "Yes," Jesus said:

**"Feed my lambs... take care of my sheep... feed my sheep"** (John 21:15, 16, 17) What are you doing to feed and care for the members of this church,

who are the sheep of His flock? He asked us three times to do that. What part are you playing? Do you know that it takes our staff on average ten phone calls to get one person to volunteer to serve one hour a week in our Children's Ministry? Christ's commitment to you has not changed one iota since the day you were saved. How's your commitment to Him?

## **II. The Foundational Block of Fruitfulness**

In verses 10-13 we hear the woman quoting the man as he invites her to, "...come with me." Where does he want to go with her? To spring, the place and time of fruitfulness. What is she being invited to leave? Winter, the symbol of her childhood, the time of being 'silly,' being immature, being unfruitful. Now, I want to be appropriate here, considering that this is a family service where all ages are welcome. So, let me ask you this: Do you know what a *double entendre* is? It's a word or expression that can be understood in two ways, with one way usually referring to sex. Some of the phrases in this song are *double entendres*, but not for the purpose of being racy. In fact, it's for the purpose of being modest! But what is being expressed here in the description of leaving the winter of life and entering the spring of life is the beauty of human procreation – the incredible privilege of being used by God to create another human being.

So, what principles are being expressed? First, a man or woman alone cannot create a child. It takes two. And secondly, you must both be physically mature for this to happen. The intimate physical act was created by God and is a holy privilege. It was created as a gift to give us a way of expressing committed love AND as a means of joining God in the miracle of creation. Do you see how far from God's righteous ideal it is, then, to use this gift of intimacy to sell soap or as a means of "recreation"? It literally is a sacrilege: using something holy with great disrespect.

Now, let's consider the deeper meaning. In the spiritual world, our "husband" is Jesus Christ. He invites us to leave our childhood, the time of playing silly games, and join Him in the place and time of spiritual maturity, the place where we are spiritually fruitful. The principles that we saw on the physical level are in full force on the spiritual level – we can't produce fruit alone and we must be mature. Spiritual fruit in Galatians is called "The fruit of the Spirit." You must be intimately connected with the Spirit to produce any of it. Jesus said:

**No branch can bear fruit by itself. (John 15:4)**

Without the Spirit, you don't bear less fruit, you bear no fruit.

And secondly, you must be spiritually mature to bear fruit. You must leave home. Heb. 5:12, 13 says:

**...though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.**

In the physical world, a fruit tree that doesn't bear fruit will probably be cut down. Why? Because it's not doing what it was planted to do. But in the spiritual world, it's never necessary. We are called to be fruitful and we can be fruitful if we will "remain in Christ," if we will grow in Christ. Jesus said, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit... by their fruit you will recognize them." (Matt. 7:18, 20) We must leave home to bear fruit. And Jesus calls us:

**Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.** (S. of S. 2:10)

He's calling us to a life of fruitfulness. Finally, we see...

### **III. The Foundation Block of Companionship**

The bride confirms her commitment and maturity in words of companionship with her lover:

**My lover is mine and I am his.** (Song of Songs 2:16)

This is so similar to what Jesus said in John 14:

**...I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.** (John 14:20)

He said these words knowing that he was going to die and, after being resurrected, He would leave His followers, the Church, His Bride; and not be physically with her again for a very, very long time.

Dr. Duane Garrett says:

*This is perhaps the most beautiful line of the Song... It implies devotion to the other but also implies that one has the right to expect fidelity from the other.<sup>ii</sup>*

During every human war, husbands and wives have faced the same heart-breaking separation that Christ went through with His bride. Only soldiers and their wives or husbands have no promise of being reunited. Soldiers have written words of promise and longing like Jesus wrote to us, but none so eloquently as Sullivan Ballou, a major in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhode Island Infantry Regiment during the Civil War.

Please listen:

[Play "Honorable Manhood" PBS The Civil War: Episode 1 - 131:30 to 135:02]

Ballou was a committed man of God. The actual last line of his letter referred to his boys and said, "...I call God's blessing upon them. O Sarah, I wait for you there! (Heaven!) Come to me, and lead thither my children."

Do you understand that, as deep as Sullivan Ballou's love was for his wife and boys, Christ's love is deeper for you? Sullivan could only hope that his spirit might remain on this earth to continue to express his love to his family. In reality, that can't happen. Jesus told the story of the man who went to hell and begged to come back to warn his brothers, but God would not let him. But Jesus' Spirit IS here to walk with you, to provide intimate companionship with you, to remind you of His love and to one day usher you into His presence. All of that is contingent on one thing: that you have asked for His forgiveness and received His mercy. Have you? Oh, how could you not want to be loved like this?

And if you are already in an intimate friendship with Jesus, are you living faithful to Him until He returns? Though Sarah Ballou was only 25 when her husband died, and though she had two small boys to raise, she never remarried and died in 1917 requesting that she be buried next to her husband. In fact, the original version of this letter has never been found, but it is rumored that she asked her boys to place it in her coffin with her.

Jesus has written you a love letter, right here. As you read through the rest of this Song, imagine that you are The Beloved and the words of The Shepherd will come alive for you. Or, read John 14, 15, 16 and 17. There you don't have to imagine anything because it is, in fact, Jesus' love letter to you.

Commitment, fruitfulness and companionship; these are the solid foundation blocks that will hold up a marriage or any friendship through the most violent

storm. Do they describe your relationship with Christ? If not, will you put them in place now with these words, **"I am his and he is mine"**? Let's pray...

---

<sup>i</sup> Carolyn Arends, "Running to Justice," ChristianMusicToday.com (11-12-07)

<sup>ii</sup> Dr. Duane Garrett, *Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 23B* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2004), p. 162