

The Beauty God Sees in You

Douglas O'Donnell has written a commentary on this book, the Song of Songs. Regarding the impact that this book can have, even on non-Christians, he writes:

Think with me for a moment. Imagine a woman coming to church for the first time in ten years. She hears a sermon [based on the unabashed celebration of marital sex found in the Song of Songs]. When she returns home after the service, her husband is reclining on the couch, watching the football game. It's a commercial, so he generously mutes the television and asks, "So, how was it?"

"Fine," she says.

"Well, what did the pastor talk about?"

"Oh," she says, "he talked about how wives should be more aggressive in bed."

"What??!!" He turns off the TV.

"Yeah," she replies, "he said... it's in the Bible, I guess. Some book called the Song of Songs."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

He looks down, rubs his chin and says, "So, what time is the service next week?"ⁱ

In this sixth chapter, we hear the Lover, the groom, repeating his list of reasons why he finds his bride so beautiful.

- her hair is like a flock of goats
- her teeth are like a flock of sheep
- her temples are like the halves of a pomegranate

Does this sound familiar to you? It should. He said these exact same things back in chapter 4. But if you were the bride, do you think you'd get tired of hearing them? When someone overwhelms us with compliments, we basically have one of three reactions. That's what we need to consider today. The first reaction is...

I. Do You Really Mean It?

Who was your favorite teacher in school? Who was your favorite uncle? Who was the best boss you ever worked for? Is there anything those favorite people had in common? Let me take a wild guess – they all treated you kindly, respectfully. They complimented you, they noticed good things about you and they spoke those things right out loud. And they meant it!

And what they didn't do or say was also important. For example, they didn't mock you or make jokes at your expense. Oh, some of these favorite people may have had a healthy sense of humor and joked WITH you but it wasn't mean joking or sarcastic comments that cut you down or made you feel small.

So much of who you are today is connected to who you believe you are, and who you believe you are is connected to who people told you were as you were growing up.

Throughout this song, the groom is singing the praises of his bride and extolling her beauty. But if you think back to the first chapter, she didn't really have that high a view of herself. Remember? In chapter one, she couldn't believe that this guy even found her pretty. She said:

**Do not stare at me because I am dark,
because I am darkened by the sun.
My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the
vineyards; my own vineyard (my own appearance) I have neglected.**
(Song of Songs 1:6)

She's talking about being suntanned. I think we're all aware that different cultures and different generations have different definitions of what is beautiful. In the 1800's a suntan was thought of as "ugly" and "unhealthy." Today, we have tanning beds to be able to maintain a tan year-round!

But it's not just her outward appearance. In chapter two, she says:

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. (Song of Songs 2:1)

When we hear the word "ROSE", we think of a very expensive, rare flower. That's not what this means. This means a common wildflower, a lily you can find in any field, any ditch along the road. She sees herself as a common flower of the field.

Now, where did she get this unhealthy self-image? Well, as we'll see in a moment, it's actually not so unhealthy. But it didn't help any that her brothers didn't exactly treat her like a princess. They sent her out to do field work - pruning, weeding, cultivating. This wasn't like queen Esther who, before her wedding, got a year of beauty treatments! No, this bride's view of herself was that she was just a common, ordinary, country girl.

So, let me ask you this: **do you ever question God's love for you?** Is it hard for you to believe that this awesome, amazing, perfect-in-every-way God could actually love someone like you? Do you find that hard to believe or do you refuse to believe it? The girl in this song found it hard to believe but her groom won her over by His words and actions. In the first chapter he calls her beautiful three times!

What do you hear God calling you? Listen to God! He said to His people of old:

**I have loved you with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you with loving-kindness.** (Jer. 31:3)

In I John it says:

**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be
called children of God!** (I John 3:1)

But maybe you're saying, "Okay, I know God loves Israel and He loves the Church and He loves the world, but does He really love me?" In Gal. 2:20, Paul makes it personal when he writes: (Gal. 2:20)

...I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And in John 14, Jesus Himself says:

**He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and
show myself to him.** (John 14:21)

In our song, chapter 6 verses 4 and 5, the groom says:

You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners.

Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. (Song of Songs 6:4, 5)

This is not the first time the groom has spoken of his bride's eyes. Nor will it be the last. To describe someone's eyes, you have to be close enough to see them. This is face-to-face, eye-to-eye intimacy. A poet has said that the "eye is the window to the soul." God said to the prophet Samuel:

The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. (I Sam. 16:7)

David said:

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. (Ps. 139:1)

When the Bible says that God loves you, it's not a mistake. It's not because He has you mixed up with someone else or because there's been a glitch in heaven's computer system. No, the Lord has searched you and He knows you inside and out and still, He looks at you and sees you as beautiful. He means it.

And immediately, our next reaction is...

II. How Can This Be True?

If that's your question, it's proof of one thing: you are a very spiritually healthy person! I mean that! Unfortunately, as Rob Rienow reminded us last week, there are many people today who, when you tell them that God loves them, their response is, "Of course He does! That's because I'm so lovable!" That attitude does not lead to success in life, but failure; not to mental health, but to mental illness; not to a relationship with God, but to estrangement from God.

Two men are models of this in the Old Testament. One is Moses and the other is Solomon, the composer of this song. Both were brought up in royal households. Moses was brought up in the Egyptian house of the ruler Pharaoh and Solomon in King David's house. Moses did not become the leader of Israel until the age of 80 but then lived an honest, faithful and heroic life before God. Though the nation went through great trials, Moses successfully delivered them to their destination – the Promised Land. His last words to the nation were:

Blessed are you, O Israel!

Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD?

He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. (Deut. 33:29)

Solomon became king at an early age (he was probably a teenager) and ruled over Israel at the zenith of its wealth, power and size. But after his death, the nation began an immediate disintegration, breaking into two countries, never to be reunited again. His life as a monarch began with his being faithful to God, but as time went on, he turned off of God's path. For example, he had over 1,000 wives and concubines. Some of his last words are found in the book of Ecclesiastes:

"Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher.

"Everything is meaningless!" (Eccl. 12:8)

What happened in the lives of these two men that caused their leadership to have such drastically different outcomes? I believe it was their very different responses to God's love. Moses, like Solomon, committed grievous sins but, unlike Solomon, Moses repented and learned humility from God. Solomon never really

repented. Repentance isn't just being sorry for what you did but actually turning around and going in another direction. In I Kings 11:6 it says of Solomon:

So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.

The result was not only that his life's work was eventually torn apart, but he died a depressed, hopeless man. What made the difference in these two men's lives? They both started with such privileged upbringings. And Solomon seemed humble when he first became king, asking for wisdom from God and building the Temple exactly as God instructed him. But slowly, one sin seemed to lead to another. For example, his sin of marrying many wives eventually did him in.

As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. (I Kings 11:4)

Moses, as a young prince of Egypt, was perfectly positioned to save his Hebrew nation. He was IN the Pharaoh's palace! But he too sinned, by killing an Egyptian who was beating a Jew. This blew up everything and Moses had to run for his life, living eventually for 40 years in the desert as a shepherd. But his life in the desert was not the end. Because he accepted the humbling of the LORD, it was only the beginning of his life's work. And though it took a lot of bargaining to get Moses to actually go back to Egypt, he did go and he did do what God told him to do. And at the end of his life, far from being depressed and hopeless, through the obedience of the last third of his life, he had become, next to Jesus, the greatest prophet Israel has ever known.

So, how can it be true that God loves you as He loved Moses? It can be true because He says it's true, as we read earlier, and because He proved it is true by His actions over and over again. God loves us but Adam and Eve, through Satan's influence, started a rebellion that separated all humanity from God. He loves us, but by our rebellion we distance ourselves from Him. Nevertheless from early on in human history, God promised He would do something to bridge the gap. The prophets gave hints of this over and over again. The prophet Isaiah said:

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse (father of David, ancestor of Jesus); from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him... (Is. 11:1, 10)

Revelation's 5:5, which is a revelation from Jesus to the apostle John, is referring to the Messiah who is being worshipped in heaven and it says: (Rev. 5:5)

...See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed.

How can it be that a perfect God loves you? It can be because the Son of God humbled Himself and came down and paid your debt, which you could not pay, by going to the cross and paying with His life for your rebellion. If, like Moses, you will humble yourself, no matter what you've done – it will be forgiven, not because you're such a nice person or because of anything you've done, but because Jesus paid your debt with His life. If you will do that, instantly you will become the bride of Christ, and instantly you will be able to say of Jesus what the bride in this song says:

I am my lover's and my lover is mine. (Song of Songs 6:3)

And it will be so forever. Why not do that now? Lastly, we must respond to love by saying:

III. How Can I Live Up to This Love?

Moses and Solomon both grew up in palaces. They were both given incredible privilege and tremendous advantages. We might say that they both started life with an abundance of love. But what did each of them do with that abundance? As a young adult, Solomon started so well. He humbly told God that he needed help and he especially needed wisdom, which God gave him. Solomon's first response to God's love was really good.

Moses, as a young adult, made a very bad start. He was not humble and he let his emotions control him, which led to his taking the law into his own hands and killing someone. This caused him to have to leave his position of authority and privilege and go hide in the desert for 40 years.

So, you might say that Solomon and Moses had opposite beginnings as adults. But as we watch their lives progress, we see that they also moved in opposite directions – Moses moved from the desert to the palace and Solomon moved from the Palace to the desert. What was the difference? The difference is found in what each of them did with his relationship with God.

Solomon knew God but over his lifetime, let go of his trust in God. In place of that, he put his trust in himself and the gift God gave him of wisdom. Solomon wrote three books in the Bible – Proverbs, Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes. In Proverbs we see the wisdom of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes we see the foolishness of Solomon. He speaks in Ecclesiastes of trying every philosophy and experience that life has to offer and in the end he said, "It's all meaningless!" That phrase appears 37 times in the book. But in the last two verses he says:

...here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments... For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing... (Eccl. 12:13, 14)

Solomon knew what to do. He needed to trust God. He just didn't do it.

Moses moved in the opposite direction. Failing big early in life, he did not fight God's humbling of him in the desert. And while he was extremely reluctant to say "yes" to God's assignment at age 80, he still obeyed; he went. And things got incredibly tough! The people he rescued from slavery actually wanted to go back! But it got worse! They refused to go into the Promised Land and so they all had to go to the desert and wait until an entire generation died off. And what did Moses do? If it had been me, I'd have said, "That's it! I'm going to Florida!" But not Moses! An eighty-year-old spends the last 40 years of his life helping rebels die well and, at the same time, disciplining their children to ignore what their parents did and instead put all their trust in God. Do you think that was easy? It was not!! Do you think it was rewarding? Consider this: when God needed to send someone to encourage Jesus before He went to the cross, whom did He send? He sent Elijah and Moses. Moses didn't just know that he needed to trust God, he actually trusted Him.

So, which track are you on – Solomon's track that might give you an easy life but ends in despair, or Moses' track that will probably give you trouble and years of difficult service but ends in unimaginable respect, honor and joy? God sees great beauty in you. He does. What do you see in Him? Let's pray...

ⁱ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), pp. 72-73