

Part 6: Love Lost and Found

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"This here's the story of a girl, who cried a river and drown the whole world. And while she looks so sad in photographs, I absolutely love her...when she smiles."

My guess is that most of us have heard that song, but I wonder if you know the backstory of it? The Writer, John Hampton, had an argument with his girlfriend one night. She was frustrated he wouldn't commit, he was frustrated she needed him to. Upset and irritated, he went on stage to warm up, and she settled down in the back in conversation.

From the stage, John saw her in conversation, he saw her smile and laugh and in that moment he realized that despite he loved her. Their love had been hard, and disappointing, but despite all of it—she's who he wanted to be with. It was this moment that led to the two of them getting married.

Which is why the song's title isn't, "Story of a Girl," but instead, "Absolutely." Was their relationship difficult? Absolutely. But does he still love her? Absolutely.

As we have been working through the book of Song of Songs we have been following two lovers deeper into their relationship. We have seen their dream wedding, and the garden joys of their wedding night.

But in our passage today, the proverbial honeymoon is over. Conflict, frustration, fear, and doubt creep back in. The story of their relationship wasn't sex and then "happily ever after" even when the sex was rightly placed. I heard it said once that marriage happily ever after is really possible, but happily ever after doesn't mean effortlessly ever after.

Even marriage properly pursued, and intimacy properly placed doesn't mean it's all smooth sailing. One pastor wrote a book on marriage titled: "When sinners say I do." And that's what we see in our passage today—two imperfect lovers who prepare us for problems while showing us that there is a way to still say, "I absolutely love you."

This is our main point this morning: **The gospel is a story of broken people finding unbreakable love.**

We are going to see this in three main points today: **The Reality of Broken Lovers, The Danger of Broken Counselors**, and lastly **The Remembrance of Unbroken Affection.**

Our passage begins immediately after the wedding night with our leading lady singing this: **Song of Songs 5:2-6**, "I slept, but my heart was awake. A sound! My beloved is knocking. 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.' I had put off my garment, how could I put it on? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt. I opened to my beloved by my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer."

Here is our first point this morning: **The Reality of Broken Lovers.**

Following the wedding of her dreams—she shares her relational nightmare. This passage, just like the one we saw in chapter 3 is a dream. That dream, was short lived and easily resolved. But here, in the context of marriage—her dreams have a heightened ability to haunt her. Why? Because in marriage our intimacy and vulnerability and joy are increased—but because of that—the potential of pain increases as well.

It's important for us to understand what is happening in this dream of hers, because the rest of the book is mostly spent dealing with this conflict and resolution.

Here's the summary: In dream she was woken up out of deep sleep by her husband knocking at the door. He has come home late from the fields where he was tending his flock. And while being hot and sweaty—he's also excited for what might await him as a newlywed back home. He begins to sing out to her the wonderful words of affection that we've seen so many times: "my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one...let me in."

She on the other hand, seems to have been ready hours ago. Maybe she was herself looking forward to surprising him when he got home--she had taken a bath, she had slipped into something more comfortable, and she had set her perfumed myrrh out on the nightstand. But as the hours went by, he was late, and she settled into bed and fell asleep.

Now, she's not interested. The proverbial "not tonight..." was her first response. "Do I have to get up? Do I have to be ready?" As she delays he attempts to at least let himself inside the house—jimmying the door. Even if the answer was no, he wanted to come home and be with his wife.

He didn't yell, he didn't kick down the door. And as he expressed his gentle willingness to accept her decision—her heart was thrilled within her. She's ready. She thinks, "I'm being silly, of course I want him." So, she gets up, grabs the perfume off the table, throws it on her hands and runs to the door to receive him. But, as she opens the door, he's gone.

She's now the interested one but it seems he's disinterested. Maybe he decided to go back to the sheep pen for the night because he didn't want to wake her. Maybe he's headed to a friend's house, a bit miffed that he was not only turned down, but that she locked the door and left him outside.

Whatever the reason, he's voted with his feet. And so has she. Notice how the change of heart, changed her feet. She's up and searching everywhere for him.

What a contrast from what we saw in chapter 2! These two, like every engaged couple, imagined they'd never leave the bedroom. But as life begins—we are often surprised at how hard it is to get to the bedroom! Like ships in the night, they pass each other by.

This book holds in tension two wonderful truths—sex is deeply satisfying, but sex doesn't change us. The garden we saw last week between a husband and a wife is one of the sweetest places of earthly love—but earthly love doesn't save. Marital love can remove our clothes, but only the garden of glory can remove our sin and struggles.

Marriage reminds us that, while intimacy is powerful, we don't have a sex problem. We have a heart problem. There's only one spouse who can fix that problem, and it's Jesus.

I remember attending a Bible study in High School where a married man shared the way in which pornography was destroying his marriage. He warned all of us that just because we get married and can have sex—it won't change your battle with lust. I thought he was crazy.

You might think that if you were to get to that wonderful garden, everything would fall in place. You wouldn't be lonely, you wouldn't be insecure, you wouldn't be tempted, you wouldn't be anxious.

But sex doesn't change any of that. Marriage doesn't change any of that. Whether it's lingering temptation for lust and pornography, longing glances at others at the gym, or timelines that don't match up--we are still sexually broken people.

We could easily read a text like this and say: "If only she would have been ready, and if only he would have waited, they would never have had any issues." But it's not that simple is it! Jesus reminds us of this in **Matthew 15:19-20a**, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person."

If our heart is the problem, then the greatest date night can never cure it. I think it's God's kind grace that he allows us to wrestle with this reality inside of marriage. If sex finally and fully satisfied us physically we would become idolatrous in our pursuit of something that could never actually save us. But just as God did at the Tower of Babel, he inserts frustration into our relational life at times so that we might not busy ourselves with such an impossible and fruitless task. Augustine captured this well when he said, "I panted for sex...but you refused to let me be satisfied with anything that wasn't you."

I think our passage today shows us a general tendency: men often want intimacy the most after a long and hard day, women often want intimacy the least after a long hard day. And while the Bible holds out the possibility for selfless action and selfless deferral—I think the principle is God's wise grace to remind couples that our peace isn't dependent upon the bedroom. It's wonderful, beautiful, and soul stirring--but it's not soul saving nor is it soul satisfying.

We will take the Lord's Supper this morning and just as that bread and cup points us towards the greater meal in glory—so too God has designed sex to be a blessing that calls us forward to something beyond it.

We need to be aware of this issue because the world will come right into our relational issues and offer advice on their own. This is our second point this morning: **The Danger of Broken Counselors**.

Her dream continues: **Song of Songs 5:7**, "The watchmen found me as they went about in the city; they beat me, they bruised me, they took away my veil, those watchmen of the walls.

We've all had dreams in which the details themselves don't make sense, but the fears and emotions are clear and obvious. Here, her search for her beloved takes her into the public square--the same place she found her lover in her first dream. But now, her insecurities and vulnerabilities are taken advantage of.

First, the watchmen find her. The sum of their advice can be summed up as this: "You're the problem!" They seize her and begin to discipline her. Maybe it's because she's in the streets wearing nothing but

the sensual outfit she had on for her husband. These men might have mistaken her for a prostitute attempting to gain access to the city. Or, maybe it's because these were simply evil men. But whatever the reason, those who were meant to uphold justice treated her unjustly.

They take no interest in knowing her or understanding her—they simply demean and discipline her. The watchmen of the world are eager to force their answers upon you when you wonder why you're single, unsatisfied, or lacking in sex. Do this, read this, wear this, perform this, demand this and you'll never be dissatisfying. But that advice, further dehumanizes and distances us from finding hope that actually helps. The cure of legalism is often worse than the pain of brokenness.

As the church—we ought not make the same mistake. We need to be careful about our advice—does it look like the world's and sound like the world's? Does it seek to know the unique circumstances of the individual and apply gospel grace? Or does it read more like a legalistic rule ripped from Men's Health? We must also be aware that sometimes, silence is violence. To encounter people with real sexual pain and sin and to do nothing is to further drive them away. I wonder what it would look like for you to strategize at lunch a plan for how you would help someone who comes in confession or in confusion.

We must learn to speak godly counsel—because ungodly counsel abounds. Here we see this second group of counselors, “the daughters of Jerusalem.” Here our lady speaks to them: **Song of Songs 5:8-9**, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him I am sick with love. (they respond) 'What is your beloved more than another beloved, O most beautiful among women? What is your beloved more than another beloved, that you thus adjure us?'"

The abuse of sexual legalism is, “You're the problem,” the abuse of sexual looseness is, “He's the problem.” It's easy to see the evil of the former, but don't miss the poison of the latter as well. It's this advice that is often celebrated today.

Was the sex bad? Then find someone else! Did she not cater to your every whim? Then look for another.

This is part of why pornography is so powerful for both men and women because it allows us to walk away from unfilled desires without any relational baggage. From click to click, from app to app, from date to date, from night to night, we are more concerned with single-use plastics than single-use souls.

If we place the burden of perfect performance and endless satisfaction on any human relationship--we will never find one that satisfies. But, like a dog returning to its vomit we will try again and again in hopes that maybe this time we won't find a dud.

That's really the motivation behind their question. These women know that our lady looking for her husband because at one point she didn't want to move from the bed to the door for him. But now she's trying to tell her friends to go at night, and search the city for him. “What gives?” they say. “If he's that bad, maybe find another guy.”

They ask her to define the compelling attributes he has that would require them to put in the work of restoring her relationship. And as she begins to think more clearly, her answer to them gives her the answer she was looking for.

This is our third point this morning: **The Remembrance of Unbroken Affection.**

She answers him saying, **Song 5:10-16**, "My beloved is radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand." She says, "Oh, you'll know him. There's not another one like him." And then she begins to describe him in the same sort of descriptive praise he described her on the wedding night.

She describes him from head to toe. His hair is wavy, his eyes are dreamy, his lips are smoochable. He's got strong arms, and he doesn't skip leg day--they are like columns, or cedars of Lebanon.

And as she's describing him to them, something happens. **Song of Songs 5:16**, "His mouth is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem."

Now, if you go to a police station and file a missing person's report—they will be not be helped when you describe the taste of his mouth and title of "friend." If her goal was to help her friends find him—she's not being helpful!

But it doesn't matter because she's found him. She has been caught up in her own description—from his quads to his character she remembers that he is not just a sexual encounter or an attractive man. He is her beloved, and he is her friend.

It's not because of her description, but because of her desire that her friends now want to join. There was something evangelistic, if you would, about the way she speaks of her lover. **Song 6:1**, "Where has your beloved gone, O most beautiful among women? Where has your beloved turned, that we may seek him with you?"

But now notice how odd her answer is, **Song 6:2-3**, "My beloved has gone down to his garden to the beds of spices, to graze in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my beloved and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies."

You can imagine their initial confusion! "Wait? You were just out running around the city frantic because he's lost and now you're telling us that he's back? Back with you? Enjoying the garden of love?"

While she doesn't answer them, the answer is clear, "Yes." As we will see next week, at this point they are not physically back together yet. Yet, as certain as the fear was in her nightmare—now she has a dreamlike confidence that this will not tear them apart. The shock of their humanity was jarring—but the hope of the relationship is in their love, and friendship. He is her beloved, and he is her friend.

Sex is not making love. What happens in the bedroom isn't the creation of something that is otherwise non-existent. It's the celebration of love already present. This is why our dating efforts should be more concerned about cultivating friendship and discovering relational knowledge than worrying about body mechanics and bedroom acrobatics. Sex doesn't sustain a marriage, friendship does.

She doesn't need anyone's help anymore. Though the bedroom was contested, her beloved wasn't lost. Though the fleeting passion of sex was frustrated, the enduring flame of friendship remained. It wasn't sex which sustained the marriage—and therefore it wasn't sex that was going to save it. Love was. And she knew he loved her, and that she loved him and that this love was unbreakable.

But with physical intimacy now properly placed inside of committed affection—she returns to the battleground of her heart earlier that night. In verse three she repeats an idea we have already seen, but she now expresses the same truth in a different order. In **Song 2:16**, she says "My beloved is mine, and I

am his; he grazes among the lilies." But now she sings, **Song 6:3**, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he grazes among the lilies."

Is this the same truth? Yes! But as she's experienced the beautiful and vulnerable reality of marriage, she realizes the need to remind herself of the priority of selfless love. It's easy for all of us to say: "You love me, and I love you." But what we often mean by that is, "You love me, and I *will* love you."

It's easy to respond with the giving of one's body, time, and attention to someone who has already given it to you. But she here realizes a principle that is true in all relationships—romantic or not—that often times we are called to love sacrificially before we experience love symmetrically.

Notice the joyful clarity she possesses. She's not shamefully admitting, "I guess I shouldn't have been lazy—and I wouldn't have gotten into this mess." Her change of heart is not an attempt to manipulate him—nor is it the effect of his manipulation of her. She instead remembers him, and how much she loves him—and regardless of the circumstances she wants to love her beloved, and her friend. Even that stinky man-child, is her man-child.

She's not saying, "Sex fixes everything—so therefore I will be ready." That's a terrifying, and easily abused idea. Instead she says, "Our love us hope that our bond is stronger than our brokenness."

Biblical love, in any sphere, is other oriented love. Paul makes this clear in **Philippians 2:3-4** when he says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each one of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interest of others."

For marriage—this applies to both parties—in every area: doing the dishes, taking out the trash, planning the meals, managing the budget. But it also applies to the bedroom. Paul puts it this way **1 Corinthians 7:3-4**, "The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does."

I was speaking to a woman whose ex-husband abused her sexually and often used passages like this as his justification. She said that she wants Christian spouses, specifically wives, to realize the Bible encourages you to be available to your husbands. But she also talked about how dangerous those verses can be for those who are inside of abusive relationships.

But notice how this passage in the Song, the Corinthians passage, and the Philippians passage already protect from such abuses. It is her who changes her heart apart from any guilt or shame from him. In 1 Corinthians Paul uses words like "rights" and "authority" and yet the commands are mutual and the verb is to "give." Love is a call to lay down one's rights, not to fight for them. Love is freely given, never taken by force or manipulation.

This is why the Philippians passage is so helpful. Paul says, "Let each one look not only to his own interests but also to the interest of others." We ought to be interested in sex with our spouses. But sometimes our interests won't match up. But when that happens, we find joy in pursuing their interests over ours. Husbands, the model we get in Ephesians 5 is that while we are the head, we are also the CSO: the chief sacrificial officer. Don't mistake biblical authority for worldly entitlement.

It's ok to ask for sex. But as Paul says **Ephesians 5:28-29**, "In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it just as Christ does the church because we are members of his body."

If the purpose of sex is the satisfaction of the other—there might be times were we realize something other than sex will nourish and cherish the other. If rest is needed, we rest our body. If comfort is needed, we comfort our body. And we find it wonderfully satisfying.

But that's why all of us can hold sex loosely. Sex isn't what makes love unbreakable. Biblical love makes love unbreakable. And Biblical love, is just broken lovers relying on a perfect savior.

In this story—this woman's own thoughts on her husband rekindles her love and reorients her pain. This is a great example for all of us of what it looks like to preach the gospel to ourselves.

When we feel far from Jesus, our comfort, our confidence and our hope for restoration is always limited by how we think of him. Like this lady did first, it's often all too easy in our sin and separation to busy ourselves with our own effort, or seek the words of the world. But none of those things can bring us perfect confidence.

Yet as we fix our eyes on Jesus, who Hebrews says, is the "author and perfecter of our faith," we realize that his love for us is unbreakable. His loving friendship for us means that reunion and restoration is always possible—if we return he will be there.

This is the unbreakable confidence that broken sinners have with Jesus. It's why I love how Paul frames this question in **Romans 8:35**, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ?" He doesn't ask "what." Because nothing in all the world can keep you from it—that's what he just worked through and he concludes saying this: **Romans 8:38-39**, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Again—the question is "Who?" And the answer is, "You." Jesus' broken body produces an unbroken love—and while we are married to such a perfect husband by grace—we are still sinners being washed clean. As we sing, "Prone to wander Lord, I feel it, prone to leave this God I love."

But take heart, and remind yourself that this Jesus never leaves the front door. He is ready, and when your own heart turns within you—he is always there. We often use this analogy as one for coming to Jesus for the first time—but the context of what follows is Jesus writing to a church, Christians, wrestling with sin. And in **Revelation 3:20**, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to eat with him, and he with me."

We will have missed doors, dark nights, and broken dreams—but this door is always manned. The unbreakable hope for marriage, the unbreakable hope for the Christian, is coming to this door with the full confidence that he has loved us, and he will love us again. So let us with great joy—take up the work of following him sacrificially—for the sake of love—in all of our lives.