

Part 9: Love's Application

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One of my favorite movies is “The Emperor’s New Groove.” It’s a classic buddy film, and one particular scene captures Pacha (the friendly shepherd) and Kuzco (the lama king) tied together to a tree. The tree then falls off a cliff, into a river, and bobs through rapids, bouncing off of boulders. But just as they thought they made it through the worst of it, Pacha says, “Uh-oh.” Kuzco replies, “Don’t tell me, we’re about to go over a huge waterfall.” Pacha says, “Yup.” Kuzco then asks, “Sharp rocks at the bottom?” “Most likely,” says Pacha. The fame then fixates on Kuzco who says in exhaust, “Bring it on.”

For the past nine weeks we have been exploring the biblical book of Song of Songs—a divinely inspired love song which captures God’s ideal for marriage between a man and a woman, the deep joy of sexual intimacy, and the loving community in which all of that grows.

And while it literally sings on the pages—our own relational longing or lamenting often leaves us feeling more like Kuzco and Pacha than honeymoon lovers. We survive one day, one trial, one disappointment and then it’s onto the next.

Loneliness, divorce, dysphoria, abuse, pornography, shame, and endless striving seem to await us at every turn. While our world is sex crazy—nothing seems more crazy than making it unscathed through the realities of our world. But today—the end of the matter is at hand. And the question presented in these verses is the very question you might be asking yourself: “Where do we go from here? How can we avoid all the potholes of this world—and how can we help others safely navigate love and intimacy?”

In light of this, our main point this morning is a main question: **How will we find love in a loveless world?** But lest we despair—we are provided three answers this morning: **The Community of Love, The Exclusivity of Love, and The Love of Loves¹.**

Our first point this morning is, **The Community of Love.**

In the passage before this, the wife sings the climactic song of love—directing all of our hope to God as love is nothing more than, “the very flame of God.”

In light of such a high view, we hear her brothers ask her a question: **Song 8:8**, “We have a little sister, and she has no breasts. What shall we do for our sister on the day when she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver, but if she is a door we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

We haven’t heard from these guys since the opening chapter of this book and what we encountered there was a strained relationship. In chapter one, she’s self-conscious of her darkened skin. She tells us in **Song of Songs 1:6**, that her brothers “made me keeper of the vineyards,” but her own vineyard she had not kept. They forced her to work in the fields, and the result was she looked like a plowman, not a princess.

¹ I’m borrowing this title from Philip Ryken’s helpful little book, *The Love of Loves in the Song of Songs*

Why did the brothers do this? We can't know for sure, but chapter 8 does give us some insight. Over the song, we learn of her mom, and her brothers, but we never hear anything about the father. Through death or abandonment—he's not around. And in such a case as this, the care for the sisters would have fallen to the brothers.

Part of that protection was of her sexuality. They felt responsible to make sure she herself was chaste and they also wanted to protect her from the threat of men who would harm her. However—being young, and dumb, their best idea was to have her work alongside them in the vineyards.

This solved two of their problems: 1. They were easily able to keep an eye on her. 2. The darkening of her skin by the sun would identify her with a lower working class—and perhaps keep away any potential suitors or dangerous men.

But for her—the experience was the opposite of anything good. She described her experience of them as “their anger.”

But, this is why I love this book. It has corrected them. It didn't diminish their view of purity—but the beauty of love caused them to think that there must be a better way for them to love and care for their other little sister.

The book on being a better lover—made them want to be better brothers. A right view of love always flows downhill.

Convicted of the weight and importance of marital love—aware of the trials and tribulations there are in both singleness and marriage—the brothers don't want to withdraw care they want to redirect it.

Our world tells us that the romance and relationships of others are things we cannot touch. Let people love who they want, when they want, how they want. But this is just as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than the method of the misguided brothers. But the Bible, specifically the Song of Songs—points us to a better way of caring for others.

Marriage and romantic love are extremely weighty matters and we should not let others carry those burdens alone. When Jesus tells his own disciples about the seriousness of marriage and how divorce is only allowed for two very specific reasons, they respond and say, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry!”

They were caught off guard by the seriousness of marriage—we need to help each other not be caught off guard by the same things. The Christian family, and the broader Christian community should care about this! What the Song of Songs has shown us is that it takes a community to preserve, prepare and protect biblical love. Lone ranger lovers never go far.

How might we help others prepare for marriage and hopefully, Lord willing, sin less along the way? I think the brothers model three helpful ways.

First, ***present a high view of marriage***. In chapter one, the brothers saw marriage as more of a hassle than a good. They weren't interested in helping her get there, because they were more concerned about their own livelihood and didn't want to take the necessary time to disciple and care for her. But now,

they are actively attempting to hold up marriage, “the day when she is spoken for” as something to be aspired to.

There are two simultaneous influences we have in the church. First, there are unmarried people in the church! Second, the world idolizes sex and sometimes the Christian can idolize marriage. An unfortunate side-effect of these two influences is that we often are too quick to read the few verses of the Bible which commend singleness—and find it easier to plant our flag there! Don’t desire to be married, just be content being single.

The good news of the gospel is that you don’t need to be single or married to have a full, and joyful Christian life. Yet, both singleness and marriage are gifts. Marriage is a good aspiration—even if not all of us will attain to it!

I often joke that I don’t want my daughters to get married—and I need to be careful about how I communicate that. I do want them to be married, because I want them to be loved by a godly man in that way. I want them to know I’m praying for them to that end too.

Second, ***adorn the beauty of purity***. They say, **Song 8:8**, “If she is a wall, we will build on her a battlement of silver.” In other words, if she is chaste and pure, we will add to that beauty. Silver has very little value in defense—it’s more beautiful than it is durable. But that’s the point. We don’t pursue purity, or call others to it, for the sake of purity itself. We do so because we believe and desire to experience the beauty of obeying Jesus in every area of our lives.

The world will laugh at those who resist the sexual and relational demands it places on us—but the church should seek to point out and encourage those all the more. Jesus says in **Matthew 5:8**, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Staying pure would mean striving to not see intimate pictures or intimate parts of others. This makes no sense to our fallen nature until we realize that there is a greater joy in seeing God!

Do the girls you’re discipling or the boys you’re raising understand that there is more joy found in seeing God than in all the world—and do you believe that? Have you seen that?

Third, ***provide a deep experience of grace***. They continue to say, **Song of Songs 8:9**, “But if she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.”

Have you ever re-watched a movie with a jump-scene or scary moment in it and tried not to jump? It seems like no matter how hard we prepare to not be surprised—we can’t escape it. Pastors, parents, and friends—you can prepare all you want for someone to come to you with sexual sin—but when the moment comes it will always shock us.

We will always be caught off guard. If we are not careful our tendency will be to return to the tactics of the brothers in chapter one: bind them, lock them away, and withdraw from them. But grace changes us—and grace changes how we respond to others. Here, they say that if she is a door, open sexually, they will board her up with boards of cedar.

While correction and discipline is assumed—cedar isn’t the best means for restraint! Bricks, mortar, metal—all of these are stronger. But cedar is fragrant, firm and beautifully sweet smelling. While sin is

real, and it is serious, no sin is stronger than God's grace. For sinners trapped in sin, or caught for the first time, we must show them the sweetness of God's discipline for us.

Sin doesn't define you, and neither does purity save you. But when we realize the danger of sin, and the need to be disciplined in regard to it, we find it sweet. For Jesus has taken our punishment on the cross. While parents and the church may need to discipline at times, we board them up with nothing but the sweet offer of forgiveness that is found in Christ alone.

These brothers ask their older sister to affirm these three actions—and interestingly enough—she neither affirms them nor condemns them. Where they focused on their actions towards their sister—she focuses on the affections of the sister. That's because ultimately nothing changes unless the heart changes.

She begins by saying that she was destined to fail! **Song of Songs 8:10**, "I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers." She's not trying to be crude here. But what she's saying is that unlike this other sister, when she was younger she had no brothers trying to care for her well, and she was more physically mature. If there were anyone who would have been set up to fail and fall when it came to love it would have been her.

But this is where she points out the heart of the matter: **The Exclusivity of Love**.

How did she manage to make it through the trials and traps of love in the world? Look at what she says in **Vs. 10**, "then I was in his eyes as one who finds peace."

She found the right guy. She was able to make it through the rapids of sex and singleness because she was loved, and because she loved.

This exclusive affection is contrasted with Solomon. So far in the book, Solomon has served as an illustration of what not to do! This is humbling considering, he probably wrote this book. The man who had 700 wives and 300 concubines didn't find what he was looking for! While his bedroom was full—his heart was not. His legacy, the legacy of wisdom, is that after everything he is left signing the surpassing beauty of exclusive, monogamous love between one husband and one wife in marriage. That's what he missed.

She draws out this parallel by speaking of each of their sexuality as a vineyard: **Song of Songs 8:11-12**, "Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon; he let out the vineyards to keepers; each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver. My vineyard, my very own, is before me; you, O Solomon may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit the two hundred."

Notice how the contrast is in Solomon's economic view of his vineyard and her exclusive view of it.

Solomon models all the things we try to do with our own love and sexuality. We try to leverage it to get something out of it. He tried to use it politically to secure alliances with other nations. He certainly tried to use it physically to satisfy his own desires. And he probably used it romantically, genuinely loving all who took it.

But notice how those who came also sought to profit off of it. The principle of good economics is that if I'm paying you money for something, I'm also benefitting from what I'm buying. Solomon let out his vineyard of love and there were all sorts of investors. They wanted a piece of the pie.

They would pay Solomon an access fee of thousand pieces of silver for the right to pick the vineyard. But they would then get to keep the leftover profit for themselves.

Everyone used the vineyard, but no one wanted it. They wanted the thing it provided. This example is proven in our world every day. It seems everyone has sex—but no one has what they want. We go from date to date, bed to bed, lover to lover, web site to web site. But what do you have? What have you purchased? "Use it or lose it!" is the message we have regarding our own vineyards.

But notice how this lady takes a different approach—she says, "My own vineyard is my own!" In the face of endless buying and selling she says, "Keep your money! Keep your profit! Keep your endless streams of revenue!"

Why? Because she already has something more beautiful than silver, more sturdy than cedar, and more satisfying than money: she has love. She has better affections.

The author Brian Hedges draws out this contrasts between two fables. Both of which involved sirens, mythical sea creatures who would allure sailors by their sweet sounding songs only to eat them alive. Both men crossed a portion of the sea where the sirens were known to sing. The first man instructed his men to chain him to the mast, and had wax poured into the ears of all the rowers on his boat. When the sirens sang, he heard their call, but his rowers couldn't. All he wanted was to go to the call, to run to the source, to experience is beauty more deeply. But he was chained. Safe as he was, he was tortured in heart.

The second man, knew the danger of the sirens. So he hired the most beautiful harpist in all the land to come aboard. When the sirens sang, he instructed the harpist to play. Unchained, unbound, and able to hear—the boat made it safely through. Why? Because they had found something more beautiful—a song more captivating.

We can, and we should make boundaries and barriers to keep us from sin—but a heart is best protected when it is lovingly preoccupied.

As she talks in the Song about turning down the myriad of other options—that better song rings out. Her husband speaks up, **Song 8:13**, "O you who dwell in the gardens with companions listening for your voice, let me hear it."

If you remember at the beginning of the book, she speaks of herself as undesirable to the men around her—but here her lover affirms the opposite. He says, "You're surrounded by my peers, all of whom would love nothing more for you to turn and speak to them—to invite them to take of your vineyard. But let me hear your voice."

Their affection, affection oriented on God's design for love and marriage, cut through the voices in the vineyard and the gentlemen in the garden. She's not selling, and he's not buying. Instead they are freely giving and freely receiving each other. There is no profit here, just the exclusive privilege of personal, private, passionate love. The person, not the profit, has captivated their hearts.

She responds to his voice. **Song 8:14**, "Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices."

She is fitted with an exclusive love—a clear view of marriage and a desire only for the one who loves her as God would have him.

And here's the irony of this conclusion. The end of the book is here—it's time to apply all that we have learned.

They ask her one question: "How can we prepare our sister for marriage?" "How can we help one another make it safely to the joy of biblical love?"

Her answer is: "Be biblically loved." Isn't that what she's saying? They say, "How can we prepare her to be given in marriage?" And her answer is, "Be loved by a husband." In other words, "Be married."

If that's not odd enough, the book about sex ends without sex! This book doesn't end in the bedroom, it ends with two lovers apart anticipating and longing for their reunion.

This is an odd place to end the book on sex and marriage unless this book isn't ultimately about sex and marriage. The book about sex and marriage is also a book about salvation and redemption.

This is our final point this morning: **The Love of Loves.**

A central story line of the Bible is not only that of a marriage, but of a vineyard. God's people were described in the Old Testament as God's vineyard. And yet, we invited others in. God didn't sell us, we sold ourselves.

We were a door! We opened ourselves up to others all day. God says this in **Jeremiah 12:10-11**, "Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard; they have trampled down my portion; they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. They have made it a desolation; desolate it mourns to me. The whole land is made desolate, but no man lays it to heart."

In regards to human lovers some of us may get to the wedding as a pure wall! But when it comes to approaching God—we are all unfaithful. We were made to find our joy by exclusively giving ourselves to God—but separated from him by our sins we have tried to replace and replicate God at every turn. But each attempt to profit left us less and less satisfied. And no one lays us to heart.

But, despite our low state--there is one who sees us. **Hosea 2:14-15, 19-20**, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth as the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband,' and no longer will you call me, 'My Ba'al.' ...19, "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord."

How will we make it to that day where we will know God? Not by any effort of our own. Not because we cleaned up our own lives and made it to that great and wonderful day. But because God loved us. Because he moved towards us. We will know the Lord because the Lord knew us.

Listen to the affection of God in **Isaiah 27:2-4a**, "In that day, 'A pleasant vineyard,' sing of it! I, the Lord, am its keeper; every moment I water it. Lest anyone punish it, I keep it night and day; I have no wrath."

Our hearts cannot keep themselves pure. We can't. But there is one who has set his eyes on you. There is one in whose eyes we can find peace.

In **Jeremiah 31:3**, God promises to restore his people despite their unfaithfulness. Why? He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Whatever man may marry one of my daughters—he has not yet started to love her. There was a point where I didn't even know Sarah. But God's love is an eternal love.

One theologian said that we can rest assured that God hasn't stopped loving us because he never started! If you want love, go to the voice that never started! Only there is love which will never end. Only there is a love which washes us clean. And that love calls out to you—as Jesus does in: **John 10:27**, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."

Do you hear the voice of your savior calling out to you? Do you realize that there is one better than all the world offers? When we find his voice, we can turn without the need to profit off the other voices because we already have the love that satisfies.

It's fitting then that the book on sex ends without sex—lovers at a distance. But how divine that the book which follows is Isaiah and the promise of the birth of Jesus. Might we say to the world—keep it all, give me Jesus. Might we organize our hearts on him and sing with the old hymn: "In the morning, when I rise//give me Jesus, Dark midnight was my cry//give me Jesus, I hear the mourner say, give me Jesus//Oh, when I came to die, give me Jesus//You may have all this world, but give me Jesus."