

Longing, Love, Sexuality & Spirituality

Song of Songs

What is the clearly erotic Song of Songs doing in the Bible?

Why don't we read it more often?

In fact the church has in its history struggled to figure out what to do with it. At some points it became ridiculous in analogy.

The Breasts of the woman are described as the OT and NT that feed us.

I cannot fault the imagination here, but really...

No, the Song of Songs must take its rightful place not only in Scripture

But also in its purpose for our lives.

The Song of Songs exists in the Scriptures to remind us that Sex is from God and sex is good.

We do not talk about sex enough in the church.

By remaining silent about this fundamental God-given aspect of our identities

We allow the world to define it in its own terrible terms.

Sexuality, the fact that God has created us in his image, male and female,

Is a wondrous gift.

All that flows from sex: love, affection, longing, attraction, eroticism is good.

When we see our sexuality in a healthy context, it is a reflection of heaven.

But when we take this gift and fill it with selfishness & objectification it is hell.

The promise of heaven is that we may become people who are other centred.

Growing marriages, resilient families, endurance, perseverance,

forgiveness, understanding, grace, faithfulness, constancy we celebrate.

The corruption of hell is that we become self-conscious, self-oriented.

Guilt, abuse, objectification, prostitution, sex-trafficking, divorce,

discrimination, promiscuity, betrayal, fear, is what we all want to avoid.

I can't cover every single thing here but let me allow the text to speak.

Solomon (v.1)

The invocation of Solomon's name is a curious one.

Solomon was a great and wealthy king with 1000 wives and concubines.

In the end, he himself proved unfaithful to God.

His achilles heel was that he loved his women more than God.

Hebrews knew this, we know this.

It is as if an early warning against unfaithfulness is embedded here.

Song of Solomon does not necessarily mean that Solomon wrote this.
More likely, it was written in his court, perhaps commissioned to celebrate
 Yet another marriage or conquest of the king.
Whatever the case may be, the songwriter is attentive the realities of love.
Some suggest that the woman is kept by Solomon but loves another.
But this is too much to guess at and unsupported.

The Power of Longing & Attraction (v.2-4a)

- v. 2 – Unabashed physical longing. We admit this boldly!
 We all experience this.
 Whether we are single, married, male or female.
 We long to be held, we long to be hugged, we long to be kissed.
 We should not be embarrassed by this reality.
 But we are, because our longings are often unfulfilled.
- v.3 - Call it infatuation, call it chemistry, it is a God given thing.
 It is not to be mocked.
 It sounds so sophomoric! (name, perfume)
 Realize too that this is in a time of arranged marriages.
 There is not room for attraction only economics.
 Already this book breaks ancient norms.
- v. 4 - Risque indeed to desire the privacy of the chamber
 She wants to belong to one person for a king does not share.
 Despite the fact that Solomon had 1000 women
 The love in this love is exclusive.
 There is only one man and only one woman.
 And the voice of the man does not sound like Solomon.
 “My perfect one” (6:9)
 “Love is as jealous as the grave.” (8:6)
 Even in the reality of Solomon’s court there is true love.
 Is the songwriter cleverly disguising a true love?

Love & Community (v.4b)

It is sad when a man and woman hide their love from others.
Either the community is a bad community that cannot be trusted
 Or it is a bad relationships that embarrasses the couple.
It is a matter of trust.
In this case, the community responds very well.
It encourages and supports the love of this woman.

I love watching couples get together.

At the same time I am aware of envy and jealousy.

My hope is that we will be a good community for all couples.

The Harsh Reality of Love in the World (v.5-7)

But there is more reality to be had.

v. 5-6a “Dark am I” self-consciousness.

She is dark because she labours in the sun. Not an aristocrat.

It is heartbreaking that this woman sees herself as unworthy.

Is there anything more hurtful?

Women and men who have to compare themselves to others?

The sense of inadequacy – not thin enough, not buff enough

Not big enough, not rich enough, not smart enough

v.6b - “Angry, take care of the vineyards, my own... neglect”

This is a very very subtle verse that treads lightly even secretly.

It speaks of oppression, abuse, discrimination, ultimately neglect.

She cannot tend to her own beauty, her vineyard – her charms.

She hasn't given up on herself but she had no choice.

v.7- Even worse, if she were to dress up and look for her lover

she would be objectified.

“A veiled woman” is a prostitute in that culture.

She has no face. Just a body.

Like modern day pornography. Just a body, not a person.

Who cares that she is a daughter or sister,

that she had hopes and dreams of love and life.

Her soul and personhood is invisible.

Community & Direction (v.8)

The good community comes again to her aid.

They call her the “most beautiful of women”

– isn't that something a self-conscious woman needs to hear?

It is so hard for women to believe that they are beautiful.

They encourage her not to be afraid.

They direct her to where her lover is.

The Voice of a Man (v.9-11)

Finally, she arrives and the voice of the man is heard.

First of all, none of her insecurities phase him.

He speaks plainly of his affection and doesn't beat around the bush.

v.9 – What's this about her being a horse?

Understand that Egyptian power was based on their horses.

There was nothing more graceful or powerful than a chariot.

To be a mare among such horse is to stand out.

To be equal among the stallions.

He does not discriminate against her womanhood.

v.10- She complains of her poverty, commonness and darkness

But he sees her adornment but always against her own self.

She is not a veiled woman to him, a body to use.

He see her cheeks, her neck – he sees her.

v.11- Moreover he will adorn her himself with riches.

He wants to provide for her beauty.

A Dialogue of Love & Affection (v.12-16)

Well, the chat goes well – in fact a swoon.

One thing to note about Hebrew poetry is to not take it literally.

It is about evoking feeling.

v.12-14 Perfume, breasts, henna, vineyards – lush imagery.

v.15 Eyes like doves – doves are soft and flutter...

v.16 Verdant bed – ooh la la.

A Stable House (v.17)

The dialogue continues and much can be said

but v. 17 is one of those hidden gems.

There is talk of a house – a home.

It is built with cedars and firs – images of stability and strength.

It secretly alludes to a family and exclusivity.

Conclusion

We only dabbled into this song.

It is about sexuality, love, harsh reality.

Even more interesting is that it is about subversion.

Solomon's palace is a pleasure palace filled with debauchery and intrigue.

That is the reality. There is one man who is lord over a thousand women.

He has absolute power and control over everything.

Yet this poet, this songwriter sings of true love, of commitment,

of affection in the very place where one should be most jaded.

But isn't that the invitation here?

It's a rotten world where over half the marriages end in divorce.

There is rape, abuse, sex-trafficking, pornography, promiscuity, insecurity.

Free love of the 60s has turned out to be a license to rut.

The Song of Songs declares that even in such a time and culture

True love can be found.

The hidden undercurrent is this -

God's plan for the sexes doesn't have to be lost.

God's gift of sexuality in your life does not have to be lost.

Whatever you have done – whatever was done to you

Can be redeemed.

The early church saw Jesus as that man who loved this insecure broken person.

And in that they are right.

There is one who loves us despite everything else.

You are loved.

You are loved.