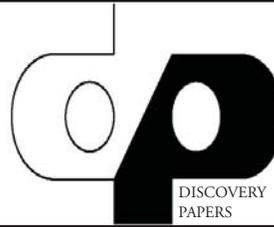


YOU HAVE MADE MY HEART BEAT FASTER

SERIES: FAIR AS THE MOON, BRIGHT AS THE SUN



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Song of Songs 3:7-5:1
4th Message
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All good stories contain a surprise. Often we discover that a key character is much different than we'd first assumed—the timid guy displays unexpected courage, or the ugly duckling becomes a beautiful swan. In J. R. R. Tolkien's masterwork, *Lord of the Rings*, the Hobbits encountered a solitary figure in rugged attire, a ranger known as "Strider." He turned out to be Aragorn, heir of Isildur, the king of Gondor, and his coronation is the climax of Tolkien's story.¹

There is a surprise as well in the Song of Songs. The story is sometimes difficult to follow because it is presented as a series of poetic snapshots, if you will, and they aren't necessarily in chronological order. We have to work a bit to piece together the story, but we will see that this is also a story of unexpected royalty coming to light.

The Wedding Day

Thus far in our study, we have been observing a couple in rustic surroundings, but now, suddenly, Solomon and his royal retinue seem to march from nowhere into the middle of the text. What is happening here? Let's look at chapter 3, verses 6-11:

BRIDE

**Who is this coming up from the desert
like a column of smoke,
perfumed with myrrh and incense
made from all the spices of the merchant?
Look! It is Solomon's carriage,
escorted by sixty warriors,
the noblest of Israel,
all of them wearing the sword,
all experienced in battle,
each with his sword at his side,
prepared for the terrors of the night.
King Solomon made for himself the carriage;
he made it of wood from Lebanon.
Its posts he made of silver,
its base of gold.
Its seat was upholstered with purple,
its interior lovingly inlaid
by the daughters of Jerusalem.
Come out, you daughters of Zion,
and look at King Solomon wearing the
crown,
the crown with which his mother crowned**

him

**on the day of his wedding,
the day his heart rejoiced.**

Commentators disagree about how many men are in this story. Clearly there is only one woman, the bride, but whether the story features one man or two is not so clear. There are three possibilities. The first is that there are two men, one of whom is the rustic shepherd boy, the bride's true love, and the other is a powerful king who tries to win the girl away from her true love. I think this is the least likely scenario.

The second possibility is that there is only one man and that he is Solomon, born in a palace, ruling as king. In this scenario, all of the rustic language is metaphor, so, for example, when we read of the groom pasturing his flock, we are to understand it as the ruler caring for his people.

The third possibility is that this is a story of ordinary people, one man and his bride, and the "royal" scenes are the metaphorical ones in which the eyes of love see in an ordinary person a regal countenance. One reason I am persuaded that this is the correct interpretation is because it is consistent with the gospel. God sees in us more than we can see in ourselves, and His love transforms us so that we become what our Lover sees. United with Christ, we become royal sons and daughters. The obscure are rendered beautiful; the isolated are embraced.

Wedding ceremonies in our culture customarily have the bride approach the groom. In this passage, however, the groom comes to the bride, and she sees him approaching from a distance. As she tells the story, drawing perhaps from the memory of a parade she once saw or perhaps from her own imagination, she calls him Solomon, her love transforming him in her eyes from an ordinary young man into a figure of grandeur. Perhaps he rides in a farmer's cart, but she sees it as the carriage of Solomon, inlaid with gold and covered with purple. His companions may be his brothers and a couple of friends, but she sees sixty gallant warriors. She does not see this falsely; she sees through the eyes of love.

Love is like that. Loving and being loved changes us. In verse 6 of chapter 1, the woman cries out, "Don't look at me." Her life has been hard, she struggles to believe the best about herself, and she doesn't like the way she looks. But her lover replies, "You are completely beautiful to me." She is stabilized by hearing his voice speak love to her, and now she speaks lovingly of her groom as a royal figure.

Let me make a comment about weddings in our time

and place before moving on to chapter four. When Leslie and I were married, the common thinking was that weddings should be “spiritual.” They tended to emphasize lengthy sermons rather than hearty laughter. Nowadays, the emphasis seems to have shifted to high production values and stressing over insignificant details such as the color of the napkins for the thirteenth course of the reception dinner. Both extremes steal the joy that I am convinced should be at the heart of a wedding. I believe that was Jesus’ attitude as well, and that it is precisely why He did not allow the wine to run out at the wedding in Cana. Weddings are supposed to be joyful, especially among those who have been shaped by the love of Christ.

Returning to the text, notice that, in verse 11 of chapter 3, the bride sees her husband as a king “on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.” Chapter four follows with a description of their wedding night.

The Wedding Night

Chapter 4, verses 1-7:

GROOM

**How beautiful you are, my darling!
Oh, how beautiful!
Your eyes behind your veil are doves.
Your hair is like a flock of goats
descending from Mount Gilead.
Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn,
coming up from the washing.
Each has its twin;
not one of them is alone.
Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon;
your mouth is lovely.
Your temples behind your veil
are like the halves of a pomegranate.
Your neck is like the tower of David,
built with elegance;
on it hang a thousand shields,
all of them shields of warriors.
Your two breasts are like two fawns,
like twin fawns of a gazelle
that browse among the lilies.
Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
I will go to the mountain of myrrh
and to the hill of incense.
All beautiful you are, my darling;
there is no flaw in you.**

I think what is happening here is that the groom is undressing his bride. He comments first about her eyes

behind her veil, and then, as he removes the veil, he speaks of her hair, then her face, then her neck and her breasts. Clearly there is strong emotion here. Passion, exalted language, gentle caresses—all this creates intimacy, and it is very beautiful.

Intimacy of this sort is not just about reproduction. The Scriptures say that human beings are made in the image of God, and it is the divine likeness that enables us to have a relationship that is more than merely physical. We are not simply bodies that host genetic code to be passed on to the next generation; rather, we are capable of tender speech, of emotional oneness, of spoken promises, of a shared future, of connection as whole human beings with each other, and we see such wholeness in these verses.

The groom continues in verses 8-15:

GROOM

**Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
come with me from Lebanon.
Descend from the crest of Amana,
from the top of Senir, the summit of
Hermon,
from the lions’ dens
and the mountain haunts of the leopards.
You have stolen my heart, my sister, my
bride;
you have stolen my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
with one jewel of your necklace.
How delightful is your love, my sister, my
bride!
How much more pleasing is your love than
wine,
and the fragrance of your perfume than any
spice!
Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb,
my bride;
milk and honey are under your tongue.
The fragrance of your garments is like that
of Lebanon.
You are a garden locked up, my sister, my
bride;
you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.
Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates
with choice fruits,
with henna and nard,
nard and saffron,
calamus and cinnamon,
with every kind of incense tree,
with myrrh and aloes
and all the finest spices.
You are a garden fountain,
a well of flowing water
streaming down from Lebanon.**

Two ideas here are important. The groom does not see his bride's beauty as generic and external; it is personal. He knows her history, and he knows *her*. She grew up walking the hills and drinking from the streams of Lebanon, and he invites her to leave that life and join him in his.

The other thing that is significant here is the reference to a locked garden. He praises her beauty as he begins to disrobe her, but then he waits for her to respond in acceptance of his invitation to make love.

Verses 4:16-5:1:

BRIDE

**Awake, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow on my garden,
that its fragrance may spread abroad.
Let my lover come into his garden
and taste its choice fruits.**

GROOM

**I have come into my garden, my sister, my
bride;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
I have drunk my wine and my milk.**

CHORUS

**Eat, O friends, and drink;
drink your fill, O lovers.**

The bride speaks, extends her arms, invites him to her, and there is a graceful and mutual consummation of their love on their wedding night.

What is the chorus doing here? The chorus shows up throughout this book, and it functions in different ways. Sometimes the chorus represents real people, and sometimes it functions more as a diary to help the bride sort her thoughts.

But sometimes the chorus is the voice of the heavenly Author, and I think that is clearly the case here. "Eat, O friends, and drink your fill, O lovers" is God's blessing on the life that these newlyweds have begun together. It says something about God, doesn't it? He gives us everything that makes life really worth living, and then He blesses our enjoyment of His gifts. It is a powerful picture of His goodness to us.

A Taste of Transcendence

So the door closes on the bedroom, and, as we step away, we should ask ourselves a couple of questions. In our setting, the pursuit of personal accomplishment often seems to be a higher priority than beginning a marriage. Why is this?

Many folks set aside the possibility of a lasting love relationship until they first accomplish some important thing. I have to get my degree. I have to get the perfect job. I have to achieve a certain status, and then I'll be ready for a relationship. And of course the person I love will also have accomplished all the same things. Individual circumstances vary, of course, and waiting to marry occurs for many different reasons. But the widespread pattern of marrying late in life is an historical anomaly. Marriages are made strong when two people make the decisions of early adulthood together. Beginning together, learning together, stumbling together and getting back up again—in most respects, this is wiser than attempting to establish yourself before marriage.

So what happens when the honeymoon ends? What happens when exalted language becomes mundane exchanges about paying bills and changing diapers? God gives us good gifts, and He wants us to enjoy them. But nothing in this life can last. God gives us a taste of transcendence to make us thirsty for eternity, and He sometimes even withholds what we hope for so that we will be sure that this life isn't going to pay off, that we are made for another place. We are headed to a wedding day like no other, to a place of indescribable intimacy with Christ and with one another.

As we prepare to take communion, I want to reflect on Jesus' words in Matthew 26:29. He said, "I will not drink this cup again until I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Communion looks forward to a day when we will all drink this cup and eat this meal together again. It is a reminder of the past, of the cross, but it is a down payment on the future as well—a glorious day when we will share in the great wedding feast together with Him in His kingdom.

So please pray with that in mind as you come forward. Lord, thank you for your presence. Thank you for your gifts and your blessing to go along with your gifts. Thank you for beautiful things that we wish could last forever but know that they can't, and so we long for great things that will never fade. In Jesus' name, Amen.

NOTES

¹ Tolkien, J.R.R. (1991). *The Lord of the Rings*. HarperCollins.

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