

LOVE TRIUMPHANT

Song of Songs 6:4–8:14

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Tonight we're looking at the last of a three-week series on the Song of Songs. For those of you who have not been with us previously and as a review for those who have, we have taken the view that the Song of Songs is a book capable of many different interpretations. By the year 1850, there were over six hundred commentaries written on the Song of Songs, and no two of them saw everything eye to eye. The first evening we looked at some major schools of interpretation. Since it has pleased the Holy Spirit to allow a variety of interpretation to exist in this book, then we should be comfortable with seeing this work from a number of different viewpoints. Maybe it is God's abstract painting of love in the Scripture, which suggests that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. It has pleased the Lord to allow a number of viewpoints to exist.

I have suggested that the viewpoint of interpretation I am the most comfortable with in the Song of Songs is to see it as a three-part drama. A three-part drama in which there are three main characters. First, the Shunammite—so called because she is from the northern Israel town of Shunem. Second, King Solomon who is not seen in the three-part drama view as a positive character, but rather is seen from a negative reference point. And this would suggest that the book was written by someone else, perhaps a prophet in the Northern Kingdom who protested (as did the prophet Ahijah in 1 Kings 11) against the corruption of Solomon's regime. The third major actor in the drama is the shepherd. He is the true friend and lover, and he is later the bridegroom of the Shunammite girl.

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We have divided the book into three acts. The first evening we looked at “Love Tested” in chapters 1:1–3:5. We looked at three different scenes—the Shunammite’s arrival in the harem room; the reverie at the banquet table as she sits dining with Solomon, thinking about her relationship with her shepherd friend; and the dream she has, which is quite an understandable dream. She dreams she loses her shepherd, and she goes out looking for him.

The second act, which we looked at last week, we called “Love Strengthened.” It was also divided into three scenes. The first scene was Solomon’s palanquin procession. A palanquin is a sedan chair born as a litter on the shoulders of men walking in front of it and behind it.

Following Solomon’s very splashy arrival, the second scene emerges where there are two proposals made to the Shunammite. One proposal is made by Solomon where he recites her physical charms again. The other proposal, perhaps once more like a dream kind of reverie and reminiscence, is given by the shepherd where he not only celebrates her physical beauty, but he celebrates the joy and being of her life. Then thirdly, once more there is a frightening dream.

This time the dream is after they are married, and she is unresponsive to her shepherd. The she goes out looking for him at night and suffers wounds because of love neglected.

As we come to the third act, we find a title I’ve called “Love Triumphant.” We pick up the story tonight in Song of Songs 6:4–8:14. I’ve indicated that this is the “Song of Songs” rather than the “Song of Solomon.” The first verse reads, “The Song of Songs which is Solomon’s,” which can mean “which is about Solomon.” We have understood this book not to be written *by* Solomon, but to be written *about* him. It is a Song of Songs—a Holy of Holies. This is the song above and beyond all songs about love. There are two scenes in tonight’s third act.

I. The first scene is the end of the Shunammite’s stay in Solomon’s court found in chapters 6:4–8:4.

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In 6:4–10, we see Solomon’s renewed attempt at courtship. His first attempt at courtship was in 1:9–10. Remember what he said to her when he first saw her? He said, “I liken you, my darling, to a horse harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh.” This was his way of giving a compliment to the Shunammite. Of course, Solomon was a great connoisseur and fancier of horses. For him, that was a positive compliment. And, by the way, he also promised her better jewelry. See verse 11. His second attempt at courtship was in 4:1–7, where he praises seven aspects of her physical beauty. To the Hebrew, the number seven suggested completeness. He articulates seven components of her physical beauty.

This is his third attempt. It builds upon his previous two attempts. And it shows once more how much Solomon is enamored with her physical beauty, but he has little to say about the grace of her life, being, and personality. Basically, Solomon makes four comparisons in his pursuit of the Shunammite. He compares her, first of all in this third attempt, to two capital cities. “You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners” (Song of Songs 6:4, NIV). In his first compliment, he compares her to two capital cities and to an army banner. How would this be a compliment? Tirzah was the capital city in the north of Israel during the time of the divided kingdom—when there was a northern Israel and the kingdom of Judah. For a long time, Tirzah served as the capital of Israel after Solomon’s time. The name of the town itself meant “delight” or “pleasant.” It was a beautiful town. Jerusalem was the southern capital. It was the city set on a hill. It is indeed a beautiful city to behold. He says to her, “You’re like the two favorite cities in my life. You’re just as charming. There are as many avenues of your being that I am interested in as there are streets in Tirzah or Jerusalem. You have a stunning beauty when seen from afar. And when encountered close up, there are also delights and charms in you.” He says, “She is majestic as troops with banners” or “majestic as an army with banners.”

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Probably most of you would not think of comparing the girl in your life to an army going to war. But banners were used as collecting places for the units of an army. In ancient times they didn't fight with guns, but with weapons that had a more limited range. It was possible for armies to cluster together in relative close proximity to one another. Seeing the brightly colored bannered army was a fearsome and awesome sight. He's simply saying, "Not only are you as beautiful as my capital cities, but you are as awe inspiring as a bannered army."

The next thing he praises her for is her facial attributes. See verses 5–7. We have seen him do this before. There's one difference this time. Previously, he had compared her eyes to doves. This time to him, her eyes are an overwhelming experience. In fact, he cannot bear to look at her eyes. "Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me" (verse 5, NIV). The piercing glance of her eyesight has somewhat taken Solomon aback. Maybe this is the Shunammite's only protection in Solomon's court—that she has a purity of vision and gaze.

One asks, "How can a look penetrate another human being and bring that person to a sense of reality?" We know, for example, in the gospels that when Peter denied the Lord for the third time Scripture says, "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered" (Luke 22). And I think Peter dropped his eyes away from the glance of the Lord. I believe the purity of the Shunammite had an effect upon Solomon in regard to the kind of life he was living. He could not bear to look at the straight gaze she gave him.

He then goes on to do what he has done before. He compares her teeth to being a flock of sheep coming up from the washing. He's complimenting her on the whiteness of her teeth and on the fact that not one of them is missing. He says, "Each has its twin, not one of them is alone" (Song of Songs 4:2). This was important in the days before false teeth, crowns, and caps. He was able to look at her and say, "All your teeth are still in place."

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He also points out to her that her cheeks or temples behind her veil are red—ruddy like the halves of a pomegranate. Therefore, he finds her facial features both awe-inspiring and delightful to his eye.

The next comparison he makes is to his harem. “Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines, and virgins beyond number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The maidens [the harem] saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her” (Song of Songs 6:8–9, NIV). He is essentially saying here, “You’re better than all the rest.” We know from 1 Kings 11:3 that Solomon actually had many more wives and concubines than are indicated here in this particular passage. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines. His wives led him astray. Here, he has sixty queens and eighty concubines. He is either underestimating the number to the Shunammite, or it is at an early point in his life. He is simply saying to her, “I want you more than all the rest.”

I would simply say, “Beware of flattery.” The Shunammite was very aware of flattery. Solomon is an example of the kind of sensual man who will give love in order to gain a sexual relationship. The Shunammite avoids the womanly temptation to give a sexual relationship in order to gain love. It’s not enough for her that she’s the best among many. What the Song of Songs celebrates is the exclusiveness of love—which knows no other at all.

The fourth thing Solomon compares her to is the heavenly lights in Song of Songs 6:10. “Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?” (NIV).

Solomon is glib—extremely glib. By the way, you may be a little bit bothered by the rough time I’m giving Solomon. “How can I ever read Proverbs again?” Solomon didn’t write all the

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Proverbs, but the ones he wrote reflect wisdom. God sometimes gives a person the ability to speak truth even though they don't live it. Solomon is a tragic example of one God caused to speak truth even though he didn't live it. He is like the ones of whom Jesus said, "They preach but do not practice. Therefore, do what they say but not as they do." To me, that describes Solomon, and that's how I cope with the proverbs. They are indeed the advice of God coming through a man who discounted the advice the Spirit of God gave him.

The Shunammite responds to Solomon in verses 11–12. "I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth in the valley, to see if the vines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom" (NIV). She's recounting now the theme of her being in charge of the vineyard. That was a theme in 1:6. Her brothers left her in charge of the vineyard. She is recounting how she came to be in the king's harem. In the spring, she had gone down to check out her responsibilities in the garden. Verse 12, "Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people" (NIV). This is a notoriously difficult verse in the Hebrew to translate. It can also read, "Before I realized it, my desire set me among the chariots of the people of the prince." In other words, her being in the vineyard that day—in the place where the vines were budding and the pomegranates were in bloom—placed her in a position of vulnerability where she was discovered. Being there later caused her to be in the position she had been in all during the Song of Songs—in Solomon's court, captive.

Remember, this is a rather fluid drama, and a lot of it is surrealism. There is a lot of blending things together. For the harem, there's an entry where they entreat and praise the Shunammite. This is a different tact from what had been previously done by the harem. Previously, they had been very scornful of her. They had commented on the fact that she was not fair—that she was sunburned. That was not a mark of beauty as it is in our culture. They now sense that she wants

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to leave, so they're asking repetitively, "Come back, come back!" She responds, "Why would you gaze on the Shunammite as on the dance of Mahanaim?" One has to know what the dance of Mahanaim is in order to interpret the Scripture. One of the difficult things for us is to ascertain what the dance of Mahanaim was. We know there was a town of Mahanaim. It was located near the River Java, not far from the Jordan Valley. David fled to this town when he was a fugitive from Absalom. See 2 Samuel 17:24. It was probably near here when Jacob returned from his service with Laban. An angelic host appeared to him on his return home to the Promised Land and gave him assurance that God was with him as he entered the Promised Land.

Mahanaim itself means "two companies." This dance is called "the dance of two companies." Some have thought maybe this describes the dance of the angels. Or in a sense, it describes the dance of women who dance as angels in the eyes of men. The harem begins praising the outward beauty of the Shunammite and describing her beauty in terms of a very familiar dance—the dance of Mahanaim. It is a very sensual dance.

They start by describing her feet—beginning with her feet, they go to her head. It is the reverse of most of Solomon's praise which started with her hair and descended to her feet. They describe her feet, "How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter! Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of craftsman's hands. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies" (Song of Songs 7:1-2, NIV). We know that the Hebrew's eastern mind was a very agricultural mind. There was beauty in agricultural products. For example, the harvest, whether it was the harvest of grapes or the harvest of wheat, always was a time of great rejoicing. It stood for bounty. It stood for God's blessing. It stood for beauty. For them, the harvest was a symbol of bounty. God had provided. They see her abdomen being a place of bounty. They go on to describe her breasts as "two fawns, twins of a gazelle"

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(verse 3, NIV). Her neck is like an ivory tower—standing for a precious and noble quality. They then describe her eyes as “pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim” (verse 4, NIV). Bath Rabbim was a town to the south of Jerusalem. Perhaps the pools of Heshbon symbolized the ability to have quiet reflection—clear, sparkling, and refreshing. Then they give a compliment that most gals would not like. “Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus” (NIV). To the eastern mind, a prominent nose is a sign of beauty. “The tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus” was the defense on the north side of Jerusalem. In fact, in Jerusalem today, you would go through the gate of Damascus. It is the gate that looks toward the north. Damascus was the eternal enemy of the Jewish people—as Syria is today. The tower that looked toward Damascus was the tower which contained soldiers—it protected them from their worst enemies. To look at the tower of Damascus was to be reminded of protection. It was to bring one a sense of national pride—to bring one a sense of security and safety. And all this is wrapped up in her nose. They said, “Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel” (verse 5, NIV). Mount Carmel is the beautiful mountain on the coastal side of Palestine—a mountain which abounds with flowers of every kind. And they say, “Your hair is like royal tapestry [there’s a purple sheen to it]; the king is held captive by its tresses” (NIV). Here is a unique way to describe the captivity of the king. He is not bound by fetters, but by the locks of her hair which hold him captive.

Then Solomon comes in at this point, expressing his desire. Here in the Song of Solomon is the most explicit approach by Solomon to the Shunammite. He compares her to a palm tree and to a vine, and he says to her—and in my interpretation of the Song of Songs, these are among his last words to her—“I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.’ May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the

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best wine” (verses 8-9, NIV). Very explicitly here, he states his sensual desire for the Shunammite.

The Shunammite’s response is discrete. It has been throughout the book—she declines Solomon’s invitation. She treasures the relationship she has enjoyed with the shepherd. She responds, and perhaps again we have a soliloquy—a talking to herself. When he talks about wine she says, “May the wine go straight to my lover, flowing gently over lips and teeth” (NIV). That is, “My love is exclusively the possession of the one who loves me. Not you, Solomon. I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.” Here she is beginning to state her desire for the shepherd—her lover. She does it through a number of snapshots.

The first snapshot is the verses we have just read—she compares her love to the drinking of wine. That which is exhilarating, that which is refreshing, and that which is intoxicating. Love should not be dull. Love should not be hum-drum. God has ordained that the love between a man and a woman—a husband and a wife—should be an intoxicating experience. Therefore, she describes their love as wine.

The next snapshot she gives us says, “Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages” (verse 11, NIV). She longs for a night in the country. She wants away from the court atmosphere—the citified atmosphere of Solomon. She loves to be outdoors and in her home.

She then compares a third snapshot of her love with the shepherd to an early morning walk in the country. She’s thinking about being back home in the village. She says, “Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom—there I will give you my love” (verse 12, NIV). He looks forward to their meeting again in the countryside. “The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every

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delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my lover” (verse 13, NIV). These are among the most romantic words she speaks to the shepherd as she compares their love to walking in a garden and being refreshed by the colors and the smells in the garden.

The fourth snapshot she gives is a public embrace. In our culture, we don’t really appreciate this. We need to understand their culture for just a moment. She says, “If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother’s breasts! Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me” (8:1, NIV). It was unacceptable for a man and woman to embrace in public, unless they were brother and sister—unless they were family. In Eastern culture then, or today, you didn’t see a teenage guy and gal walking down the street, holding hands, and kissing. There are very strict standards in Eastern countries in terms of contact between men and women. She longs for the day she can publicly embrace him as she would have the right to embrace her brother. She liked a public display of affection that was appropriate. She also looks forward to an evening together with him at home. “I would lead you and bring you to my mother’s house” (verse 2, NIV). There can’t be anything wrong with a relationship when a girl wants to take her boyfriend to her mother’s place. There’s a sense of family. “She who has taught me” (NIV). She wants an evening together at home.

She comments on this, “I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates. His left arm is under my head and right arm embraces me” (verses 2-3, NIV). She looks forward to the expression of their marital relationship in the safety of her own home.

She speaks once more to the harem. She has spoken to the harem a number of times. Basically, she has always said the same thing to them. “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires” (verse 4, NIV). We’ve commented that where this phrase occurs, it is a rebuke against the artificial stimulation of love which has been practiced in

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the harem. It is saying that appropriate love will, in its own proper time, express itself. Love must not be hastened. We have indeed seen throughout this book an emphasis on purity and loyalty. At one time, she told her shepherd that he must leave her until the day breaks and the shadows flee. That is a poetic way to say that they must only let their relationship go so far until the night of their wedding. Again she's rebuking the harem for wanting to think that love could be expressed only in sensual terms. That's the end of scene one in the third act.

II. Then we come to scene two, where the drama comes to its final moment in chapter 8:5–14.

All good love stories have a happy ending. This love story has a happy ending. The lovers are home again. The family is speaking, "Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?" (verse 5, NIV). As the family looks out over the distance from their cottage in the village, they see coming up from the wasteland the couple—the shepherd and the Shunammite. She is leaning on the shepherd. It's interesting that the family identifies her as coming up from the desert. We know that she has been described as being in two places—one metaphorically and the other literally. In chapter 4:8, she is described by the shepherd as being in the mountains of Lebanon which was an inaccessible place. To him, she was inaccessible. But she literally was in Solomon's court. Now she's described as coming out of the desert, which perhaps this experience in Solomon's court has been a desert for her. It has been a very dry, difficult, and barren time. She has been at the king's table and in his court. But in reality, she was in the mountains and in the desert.

The shepherd then gives a tribute to love. "Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth" (NIV). That's the shepherd's statement. The rest is the Shunammite's. "Under the apple tree." What does that specifically

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mean? It's probably a symbol of love. For the ancients, the apple tree was a symbol of love. In the ancient culture, an apple tree might stand for what a red heart stands for in our culture. It's a symbol of love. It can be that, or it might be a way of saying that the great apple tree shaded the house of the Shunammite's mother. He is saying that it is there they fell in love. In that home, shaded by that apple tree, their love first awakened them.

She responds to him, "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned" (verses 6-7, NIV). What is she doing here? The seal was a mark of ownership. In the ancient times when you would signify that something was yours, you put a seal on it. She is saying that she wants to be owned by the shepherd—in his heart and on his arm. She wants to be owned by him in her inner life—to know the safety and total security of the fact that she is his and his alone. No one else belongs to him. Therefore, there is absolute security in their relationship inwardly. She also wants to be owned by him publicly. She wants him to wear her as a seal upon his arm, so that everyone knows about their love.

I'd say the closest equivalent we have to portraying that symbolically is the wedding ring. That is the sign upon the hand as a public expression of love. I am owned. Someone belongs to me, and I am exclusively that person's. Inwardly and outwardly she wants him to declare his absolute loyalty to her. He is always owning her—always true to her in his inner and in his outer world. She then compares love to death and fire. Maybe we wouldn't think of that analogy. But death does not release its claim. Death has the ability to hold on to its prey. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15, we are identified as being captives to the law of death. Death does not let go. And she says,

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“Love is as strong as death,” in other words, it never gives up either. We see us as being victims to death. But love has no victims. Love has victors. Love is as strong as death. It cannot give up its person. And it’s as strong as fire. It burns like the blazing fire—like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love. She sees the fire as being bathed in flowing waters. All the flowing waters of the world can run over the flame of love, but it cannot be doused. No amount of water in the world could douse it. I think water would stand for troubles. She says, “Our relationship can survive.” I think that’s an important word to say to marriages today. It seems like so many marriages, even Christian marriages, are being very much shaken. Here is an awakening to what true love really is—it can go through waters. It can go through difficulties, and it is not doused. If it’s true love, it will abide. It will keep its flame. She looks at love as a permanent flame. It’s not the latest flame. If it’s only the latest flame, it’s not a very solid flame. It needs to be the only flame.

She also says that love cannot be bought. This is especially appropriate having come from Solomon’s experience. He would have given her all the wealth of his house. But she says, “If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.” She has done that in her relationship with Solomon. Love is a gift that cannot be bought—should not be bought. Then in verses 8–9, we have the family coming into the situation again. The family recollects her adolescence. Again, words that are not familiar to us. Their meaning does not initially show itself. They said, “We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar” (NIV). They are remembering the time when their sister, the Shunammite, was a very young lady in her adolescence. They compare her to two things—a wall and a door. Having lived in a walled town, it’s not hard to gain the

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imagery of what is meant by a wall. A wall is to keep out intruders. It is a system of defense—the Great Wall of China, for example, was built by Eastern people who wanted to keep out invaders. So they say to her, “If you will be a wall—if you will let your own person be a barrier against the intrusion of strangers—then, at the right time, we will reward you with silver. But if you are a door—a place of access—we will restrict you.” They would enclose her with panels of cedar. If she will not practice the defenses in her own life, her family will practice the defenses for her. That explains things like curfews and restrictions and all sorts of things. That’s simply an Eastern way of saying, “We will trust you, but if we ever have occasion to doubt our trust in you, we will help you protect yourself. You will either determine to be a wall, or you will be a door. The choice is yours.”

Now she is grown up. She then responds, “I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment” (verse 10, NIV). Here again she celebrates the theme that she has kept herself, and now she is exclusively the privilege of her husband. Her defenses have been strong. She has stood like a wall against Solomon’s advances. The Shunammite then states her self-worth. See verses 10–12. Solomon had a vineyard in northern Israel where she had originally been taken. He let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for their fruit a thousand shekels of silver. “But my own vineyard is mine to give” (verse 12, NIV). She’s saying, “Solomon had vineyards which were his, and he could rent them, lease them out, and he deserved to be paid. The people who harvested the vineyards had two hundred shekels to keep for themselves, but the thousand belonged to Solomon.” But she owed no one anything. She owed Solomon nothing. Her own vineyard was hers to give. She chose to give it to the shepherd.

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The shepherd then calls to her in verse 13, “You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!” (NIV). This is the final call of love by him to her in the song. He is asking her for the last time, “Do you want me to come to you? Will you speak so that I can come to you?” And she says to him in reply, “Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains” (verse 14, NIV). He had once asked her to come to him, and she could not in 2:7–17. Now, she closes with issuing the invitation for him to come. “Come away, my lover.” From that, we would assume this couple lives a joyful life together from then on. And by the way, people do live joyful lives for long times.

Let’s close with some applications. What are some applications to romance and to marriage? Why have we fallen in love with the shepherd and the Shunammite?

A. In their relationship, they overcome great obstacles and dangers. Every relationship that’s going to be solid—every marriage relationship—is going to have to work through difficulties. There is no such thing as a trouble-free relationship. There is no such thing as a difficulty-free relationship. Every relationship has pain. Every relationship has things to be worked out. We can either choose to flee the problems and run away from responsibilities, or we can choose to stick with the problems and work them out—to see ourselves through very dark nights. The Shunammite and the shepherd both had very dark times. Their problem was not so much the relationship between them, but the problem was in the dire circumstance the Shunammite was in. They had to overcome great obstacles and dangers for their relationship to triumph.

B. Secondly, they’re wonderful communicators. They are continually talking to one another. I’ve indicated this before, but one of the keys in good marriages is good communicators—persons who talk things out and share life together. The shepherd and Shunammite are exquisite at stating

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what is going on within them and putting things in a very poetic and dramatic way. Maybe one of the things that a marriage relationship sometimes loses is poetry.

C. I think the third application to romance and marriage is that these two people represent the good. That is something that's not easy to put your hands on in terms of words. They represent a love that cannot be bought—a love that is loyal at all costs, a love that is pure and without pretense. It's idealism that overcomes difficulties. There's innocence in their relationship. The same kind of innocence I see when two people who have been married sixty years are holding hands in public. They represent the good because they chose the good. The good just didn't happen to them—they chose the good. They embraced it and lived it.

As applied to our relationship with Christ, I would site these applications. And you will see far more than these.

D. One that I would note is Christ's love for us is possessive. He owns us. We're His. Not in a master-slave kind of relationship, but we are owned in the sense of husband and wife. The Shunammite found security in the shepherd's love. She wanted to be the seal upon his heart and upon his arm. The Lord embraces us in His heart, and He embraces us publicly. We, who confess Him before men now, are being confessed by Him before the Father. His love for us is a possessive love—strong as death. It will not let go of us, and it is unquenchable. We underestimate the love of Christ if we think it is somehow going to be put out.

Paul recognized the validity of this when he wrote to the Romans. He says, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's possessiveness of love. It's permanence.

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E. Another application to our relationship with the Lord is His love is priceless. You cannot put a price tag on it. Because it is a priceless love, it can never be bought with any sort of payment.

Love is a gift given. It is never a right earned. It is never something bought. It's not love if it can be bought. This is the theology of grace. But sometimes we get away from that. We have this tendency within us to say, "If we work hard enough and do enough good, we can somehow get God to love us." The Christian message is so shattering that often it gets into our brain first and is forever working into our heart. We intellectually know that God loves us, but on the emotional level, so often we are working for God's approval. And we are not quite sure He would approve of us.

This was the dilemma of my whole adolescence. I thought God was waiting for an occasion to send me to hell. He was hoping that I was going to be doing something wrong when He would return so He could leave me behind. His return was going to perversely come at the very moment I was not ready. But that is a false view of God. God deeply loves us, and there is nothing we can do to earn that love. The only way we can respond to love is by receiving love as a gift and embracing the relationship. That's what Jesus said: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone will open the door, I will come in" (see Revelation 3:20). So, don't somehow think that if you do better for God, He's going to love you more. Love cannot be bought. God loves you in Christ.

The first two things are in regard to Christ's love for us. His love is possessive, and His love is priceless.

F. In response to our love toward Christ, I think our love is going to be tested. If we put ourselves in the place of the Shunammite—she had a tested love. She was in Solomon's court. In Solomon's court, she had all the allures that go with the court life. But she chose to remain true

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to the shepherd. I see this culture and this era in which we live as a kind of a Solomon's court for the Christian. It is a place of rich, extravagant tendencies. In this context, our love for the Lord is tested and worked out.

G. The next application to our relationship with Christ—our love openly desires the presence of the Good Shepherd. She closes by openly desiring his presence, “Come away, my lover” (Song of Songs 8:14, NIV). It's interesting that the itself Bible closes with almost the same language. John closes the Book of Revelation and says, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). There is a desire, an uninhibited desire, on the part of the bride for the bridegroom. I think, as we open up our life to the Lord, we openly want to express that desire from our heart. *Come, Lord Jesus. We look forward to the day when we are no longer apart from one another—separated by distance. We are in the court of Solomon, and You are out there. But we look forward to the time when we are together. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.*

I really hope that your life has been enriched as we've looked at the Song of Songs together. I hope you have a different perspective of it—that you will now read the book and read it with understanding. And I hope you will greatly profit spiritually from it.

Closing Prayer

So often, Lord, we see the theme of love through the jaded eyes of persons who do not know its meaning. How refreshing it is to see love through Your eyes—the Creator. How beautiful to see what the relationship between a man and a woman—a husband and wife—can be. Help us to treasure that which is precious. Help us to see love as a precious alabaster box which we pour upon our beloved. Help us to see the richness of giving, of exclusive loyalty, of trust, and of fidelity. Bless every marriage and romance represented here this evening.

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For persons who are not married—not in a romantic relationship—we thank You that You give to us romance and marriage as an analogy for our walk with You. Let all of our relationships to You, Lord, be as lovers of Yours. May we say of You from our hearts, “I am my beloved’s, and He is mine. His banner over me is love.” Quicken our hearts, Lord Jesus, to love You more. Through Christ, Amen.