

A Parable of Love Song of Solomon

by Michael Durham

This sermon delves into the deep parable of love depicted in the Song of Solomon, highlighting the intense love of the Lord Jesus Christ for His church. It explores the unconventional, unrelenting, and unshakable nature of God's love, urging listeners to respond to His love and seek restoration if they have grown cold. The sermon emphasizes the importance of boldly approaching God's throne to claim the crown of His love through Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Luke 24:27, Romans 8:38, Luke 15:20

Topics: "God's Unconditional Love", "Restoration through Christ"

Description

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Transcript

The text we pray the Lord be pleased to speak to us from is the Song of Solomon, chapter four, verses nine and ten. Song of Solomon, chapter four, verses nine and ten. I want to speak on the theme, A Parable of Love.

Although I've selected this as our main text, you will forgive me for my poor homiletical structure if I preach a more thematic message reflecting the theme of the entire eight chapters. Song of Solomon, chapter four, beginning with verse nine. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse.

You have ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse. How much better than wine is your love and the scent of your perfumes than all spices.

What else can be said about the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for His church? Over the centuries, men have filled libraries trying to explain His love, but there is one book that declares His great love for us. The book of books, the Bible, God's word of love about His heart towards us. And what more could be said than has already been said to you about His heart for you? And I would add to that that all of our attempts to expound on His love needs one thing.

The Holy Spirit's caress. We need the Holy Spirit of God this hour to not only explain His love to us in a way that we can better grasp it, but we need to experience it. That's what's missing in so much of our preaching and teaching today, and it's missing in so much of our fellowship.

One with another. Oh, may God see it fit and pleasing to Himself to send the Holy Spirit and pour His love into our hearts afresh and anew. And what better can describe His heart and affection than this poem of love between a man and his wife? I'm convinced that's the reason the Lord included these eight chapters in His canon, to give us an incredible insight into His heart for His people.

The book is more than just the love between a man and his wife. It's much more than that. It's something even greater than that.

It's a picture of God's love for you. You, sitting here this morning, and I pray that you will see that this is God's song over you. The song of songs is God's song that He sings over you.

Isn't that what Zephaniah tells us? That God rejoices over us with singing? Now some say that's just metaphorical. God doesn't actually sing. Well, I don't have any reason to believe that it's not literal.

I choose to believe that He does rejoice over me with singing. And so I wonder, what song does He sing over you? I pray it's not, I'm so lonesome I could cry, but rather He sings these very words written in this poem over you. These are His words to your heart this very day.

And yet, this small book is neglected, if not ignored, in our preaching and teaching. Perhaps it's because of the maturity of the content. I don't know if you know this, but a Jewish young man was not allowed to read from the Song of Solomon until after his Bar Mitzvah.

But I think it's probably perhaps more because of the controversy that surrounds this book. I don't want to have to deal with it, but I'm hard pressed to do so. There is a controversy surrounding these eight chapters.

The great debate has been, how do you approach the book? What is the proper hermeneutic? How do you tell what Solomon's purpose really was in writing this book? For centuries, this Jewish love poem was considered an allegory of God's love for Israel. That's why Jewish scholars of the latter Old Testament period included it in the Old Testament canon. And even though God's name is never once mentioned like that in the book of Esther, it didn't bother them because they saw it as an allegory, an allegory of God's true affection for His chosen people.

What is an allegory, you ask? Well, an allegory is simply a story, chock full of symbolism. Every detail has its own message and meaning. That's what an allegory is.

Pilgrim's progress is classical allegorical literature. And as the centuries passed and we came into the New Testament era, early church fathers like Origen, Athanasius, and Augustine viewed the book also as an allegory, but not an allegory between God and Israel, but rather Christ and His beloved people, His church. Many of the Reformers, except for Luther, also saw it as an allegory of Christ and His bride as did many of the Puritans.

And so you can read from that era, the 16th and 17th centuries, expositions, and they are busy about trying to analyze every detail and give the meaning describing God's love for us, the Savior and the ransom. But since the 19th century, a new hermeneutical approach has taken the majority view, and that

is a literal historical view that this book is nothing more than a secular love poem written by a husband talking about the love he has for his wife. And so they see nothing of spiritual or theological significance and therefore no theological application whatsoever.

It's simply a book giving divine sanction to sexuality, human sexuality, and holy matrimony. No more, no less. And so if a preacher today does preach from the Song of Solomon, it's usually nothing more than teaching on the subjects of human sexuality and marriage.

But it seems to me that both views are flawed. The symbolism and its approach has many problems, namely one, there are as many interpretations as there are interpreters. And who determines who has the right interpretation? How do you know that you have found Solomon's intended purpose for writing? Which interpretation is correct? If you've studied this book any, it's amusing some of the meanings given to explain the details of this book.

For example, Solomon talks about the cooing of the turtle dove. Some expositors said that that's the voice of the Holy Spirit to us. Another said about the bundle of myrrh between her breasts, that's Christ between the Old and New Covenants.

But my favorite is from Song of Solomon chapter 7 verse 2. Your navel is a rounded goblet, it lacks no blended beverage. And that is explained to represent the pool of baptism and the cup of the Lord's Supper. Well, that's the problem with allegories.

That's not to say that there aren't some allegorical sections of Scripture, there are. However, allegory must be interpreted by plain Scripture, not by fanciful imagination. But the literal and historical view also has problems.

Those who hold this position see the book as no more than a romantic relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite maiden. But if you strip it of any theological significance, my question is, why was it included in the Old Testament canon? Why is it a part of divine Scripture? Is it merely a book giving sanction to holy matrimony? Don't we have enough of that throughout the rest of the book? And cannot Scripture have double purpose, double functions? Can it not speak aptly to the time in which it is written for and yet have a future age? In mind as well, I'm confident that the book is really a poem, true, written by Solomon or about Solomon and his love between him and this mysterious beautiful woman known as the Shulamite maiden. And so I would say the first rule of interpretation, we should see it in its historical and literal context.

But oh, how sad it would be if we stopped there. We would cheat ourselves greatly if we stopped there. There's so much more.

There's something far greater than the love between a man and his wife here. No, the real love between the king of Israel and the shepherdess is a parable of the genuine love between the king of kings and the fair lady of the new Jerusalem, the church, the bride of Christ. It's a parable.

Now parables are often mistakenly categorized as allegories, but that's a mistake. They are not. A parable is a simple illustration of a central theme.

Don't strain at the details of a parable trying to make every detail symbolize something. It doesn't work that way. That's not what parables are for.

Parables are just classic sermon illustrations. They have one major purpose, one theme to express, rarely, but sometimes a secondary theme. Don't try to read parables by attaching figurative language to each of the details.

You'll miss the point of the Spirit as He's speaking through those parables. You must see that the major lesson of the parable is that it illustrates a great truth. While this book is about real love between two people who lived and loved during the period of Old Testament history, it is about Jesus Christ and His bride.

Let me prove that to you, if I may. Marriage is an illustration of Christ and His love for the church. That's why He created marriage.

It wasn't just to procreate the earth. He could have done that any other way He chose to do so, no. He created the institution of marriage as the grand sermon of His great love for you.

In fact, God has done that all through creation. Everywhere we look there are sermon illustrations. When Jesus wants to teach on regeneration, what does He do? He summons a natural occurrence, physical birth as an illustration of that great and glory spiritual birth.

This happens everywhere we look. Creation has His signature on everything. It preaches to us if we will only listen.

Marriage is simply that. And although the Song of Solomon is about the love of a man and His beloved bride, it goes far beyond that to tell us of the redemptive love of Jesus for us. For example, when Paul deals with how to relate to differing authorities within the church, he deals with a wife's submission to her husband.

And yet in the end the Apostle says that he's really not talking about the love between a man and a woman, but he's really talking about Christ and His wife. Listen to what he says. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The union between a man and a woman illustrates this eternal marriage bond between the Son of God and His bride. Many of you, I pray, are a part of that body of Christ. And I look upon you as something that belongs to Him that He cherishes.

Something attractive. Something altogether lovely. And I'm to deal with you gently with great respect and honor as I stand here before you.

I'm addressing the wife of the King of kings. All human relationships teach us something about our relationship with Him. The parental relationship is another illustration.

Father and child. God is our Father. Masters and employers and employees in Ephesians 6 tell us a grand illustration that God is our employer, our master.

My friend, He is that friend that sticks closer than a brother. He is that good neighbor that finds us and binds up our wounds and cares for us. He is our King, our government, our authority.

All of these things called human relationships tell us something about God's relationship with us. So I don't think I'm doing any injustice to the text today to see how Solomon and the Shulamite maiden speak something blessed of this fellowship we have with Christ. But let me point to greater evidence than that,

and that is the Lord Jesus Himself.

On the road to Emmaus, our Lord said that all the Old Testament pointed to Him, all of it including the Song of Solomon. It says, and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself, Luke chapter 24 verse 27. Again, later that evening to the apostles, He rebuked them for not believing their Bibles.

He says the Bible was all about Him. He said to them, these are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms concerning me. And He opened their understanding that they might comprehend the scriptures, Luke 24, 44 and 45.

Well, I pray that I have convinced most of you. You doubters, just hang on. Maybe God will be gracious to open your eyes also.

But let me direct your attention now to the text, and I want us to discuss first the love of the king for the Shulamite, the love of the king, King Solomon for the Shulamite. This is the chief concern of this parable. Not so much the Shulamite's love for the king, but the king's love for the Shulamite.

And I say it's the great concern of the parable because, once again, it is a parable and it pictures the great love of Christ for you. Has this king loved the shepherd girl, displaying his love with romantic gestures and words? Much more, much more. Oh, how much more.

Does our king love the one he's chosen? You. Oh, how the human heart can be overwhelmed by love. I don't know how many of you are in love with someone, but if you've ever experienced it, the affections can run wild.

They can move two people towards each other. So, listen, the affections and the passions of God have moved him towards us. Now the highly intellectual theologian among us would have exception to that.

He would say, no, no, no. There is this impassibility of God. He cannot change.

He's immutable. God doesn't have emotions like you and I. Well, my dear friend, I think there's more to God than you and my minds can comprehend. I believe he has infinite capacities to feel and to know and to know perfectly.

At the same time, feel deeply, more, more and far deeper than you and I. If God is love, which he is, who can match his great love for us? Whom he has pledged himself to. I've been married to my wife, privileged, for 41 years. My heart still beats and yearns for my darling.

She is my soul's twin and whom I delight. But as much as I love her, my love for her is puny and paltry compared to the love of our great God for you and me. There's no comparison in the light of his love for us.

My love for Karen looks cheap and crude. And even though my heart can at times feel such joy over her, I think it will burst. What is there but a little thing compared to his heart for us? It's a little thing.

God does feel and he feels deeply about you. Listen to what the text says. Song of Solomon, chapter 4, verse 9. You have ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse.

You've ravished my heart with one look of your eyes, with one link of your necklace. How fair is your love, my sister, my spouse. How much better than wine is your love and the scent of your perfume than all spices.

What does it mean? It's very simple. Christ is captivated and enamored by us. Are you offended by that? You shouldn't be.

You are the object of his affection. His love is not cold, calculated and mechanical as we would try to make it, as theologians would dissect it. No, no, no, no.

It's more heartfelt than your love. He's captivated. And what's he captivated by here? One glance of her look towards him.

Again, he says, you've ravished my heart with one look of your eyes. As the Shulmite beholds her beloved, he's moved by her loving glance. I'm here to tell you today, all the more your blessed Jesus is moved when you lift up your head and countenance from these mundane and earthly things and behold Him and look at Him with affection.

It moves Him. It arouses Him. It pleases Him.

It does. Christ is captivated. And He sees her as beautiful.

Look at Song of Solomon, chapter 1, verse 15. Listen to the king's words. Behold, you are fair, my love.

Behold, you are fair. You have dove's eyes. She's beautiful to Him.

Now this is amazing, isn't it? The king of kings would look upon his bride and be caught by her beauty. For what beauty is there in any of us? There's no comeliness. No beauty.

No attraction in and of ourselves. What did He see in us that would move His heart? It's not us or our great love for Him. No, no.

It is His beating heart of love. It was His love that drew us to Him. So much so that He found us attractive.

And not only that, but He desires our fellowship. God longs for you and He to hang out. To be alone together.

Just like I desire to be alone with Karen. I desire that. I love just to be with her.

Oh, so much more. Your Jesus wants to be with you. Listen to what He says in chapter 2, verse 10.

Song of Songs, chapter 2, verse 10. My beloved spoke and said to me. This is the Shulamite maiden.

She's speaking and she now quotes the king. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

The flowers appear on the earth. The time of singing has come. The voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth her green figs. And the vines with their tender grapes give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Come away with me. Let's be alone. Let's be together.

Let's be intimate. Let's share our hearts one with another. Do you realize this morning that the Lord desires communion with you far more than you will ever desire it with Him? That's how big His heart.

That's how large and magnanimous His love is towards us. Now, you struggle with this. We in our reformed circles rightly should we believe.

Rightly, rightly, rightly. Hear me. Rightly we should believe in the God-centeredness of God.

But He does all things for the glory and the renown of His name. Absolutely. But that does not eliminate all the texts that say that He does things for our sake as well.

That does not remove His grand loving cause of being good to His children because He loves them for their own sake as well. Let us get back to the Bible and be more balanced in our theology. If your system is not biblical, then do away with it and get back to the Bible.

The Bible says His love is just like this. It's unbelievable. Let's talk about the unbelievability of God's love.

This is why we struggle with it. That's why there's people here this morning who would say, if pressed and they would be honest, I'm not sure that I'm a Christian. And you very well may be, but you struggle because you find it hard to believe that God would love, yes, even you.

There's an unbelievability about God's love for several reasons. I can't name them all, but let me give you just three. It's unconventional.

The love of God is unconventional. The Shulamite maiden was not an aristocrat. She was not of the aristocracy of Jerusalem.

She's a poor shepherd girl out in the Judean hills. She doesn't roam the sacred halls of government. She doesn't visit the balls and the teas of the important people.

In fact, she's just a poor girl out tending sheep and vineyards. And yet He falls in love with her, of all the women of Israel. He chooses her.

And although she says she's beautiful, she's not vogue. And I mean by that, her beauty was not the standard by which beauty was measured in that day. In Song of Solomon 1, verse 6, she says, Do not look upon me, because I am dark, because the sun has tanned me.

My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me the keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept. She's a very dark-skinned, tanned woman.

And you say, well, that's wonderful. But in the day of Solomon, it wasn't. Tanned skin was not the vogue, the fashion, the beauty trend of the hour.

No, no, it was just the opposite. The pale, the fair-skinned were the objects of beauty and the standard thereof. And yet Solomon loves her.

Oh my friend, it's true. There is nothing of beauty or attraction in you or me. There's no reason for God to love us.

There's no reason for He to send His Son on our behalf. And yet He's done it. And therefore His love is unconventional.

You can't measure His love by our standards. You can't put it up against the pattern of a man's love, even for his wife. No, it exceeds those boundaries.

It goes beyond man's understanding of what love is and how we define it. It is unconventional. He loves the unlovable.

And so, if you are unlovable today, be encouraged. For when we were without strength in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. He died for the unattractive, the unbeautiful.

He died for the ugly, the vile, the wretched. It's unconventional, I know, but it's the way He loves. But it's also unrelenting.

It's unrelenting. No matter how you behave, He continues to love you to the same degree. That's not the way we love.

That's not the way even husbands and wives sometimes love. Let her say a disrespectful word and see how you respond. Often you respond unlovingly.

Why? You've got to set the book straight. You've got to reconcile and bring balance. You've been sinned against and justice has occurred.

You've got to set it right. You believe in righteousness, don't you? And so you justified in trying to bring her back by your unlovable-ness. But God doesn't do that.

Thank you, Brother Kevin, wherever you are now, for reading that Psalm 103. I about fell out of my chair when you announced it. It's the very psalm that God used when He saved me.

And it was exactly the psalm that needed to be read in conjunction with this message. He doesn't love the way you and I love. His love is unrelenting.

In Chapter 6, we'll get to it in just a few moments. His wife does dishonor Him. She does show Him despite.

And yet when they are reunited, it is as if nothing ever had occurred. His love is unrelenting. And then thirdly, His love is unshakable.

Unconventional, unrelenting, unshakable. Not even your sin can shake His love for you. Not even your sin.

Song of Solomon, Chapter 4, Verse 7. You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. That's an amazing thing when you think about Jesus saying something like that about you or me. Oh, but Lord, look.

Even this very morning I have sinned. My prayers were so weak and half-hearted. Surely that was an affront to your goodness to me.

Oh God, my words have not always been seasoned with grace. And on and on and on and on and on and on. Our list can go of all of our sins.

And yet, the whole cannot shake His love for you. His love covers a multitude of sins. And a multitude they are, amen.

But He covers them, every one. Yes. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? No, no.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come. Nor height nor depth nor any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Now some have said that our Lord's love is just too good to be true.

Have you ever heard that? How many of you have said that? It's just too good to be true. To which you should always reply, Yes, it's too good to be true. But it is true and that's what makes it so good.

That's what makes it so good. It is unbelievably good. Let me direct your attention now to how the relationship progresses throughout the eight chapters.

There are three responses to the king's love. Three reactions of the Shulamite maid. Three chapters in their relationship.

First, she's raptured up in the love of her husband. Second, she's somewhat satisfied and becomes selfish. And finally, she's restored again and desirous of her husband's love.

Let's look at the first one. She's raptured up in the love of the king. The king's love for her captures her heart.

Again, I cite Song of Solomon chapter 1 verse 2. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is better than wine. His love is better than wine.

Oh, this is true of Christ. Amen. No pleasure can compare.

In Him is the fullness of joy. At His right hand are pleasures forevermore. I can testify and so can every believer in this room.

That of all the pleasures that this wicked world offered. None delights nor satisfies like His love. Like Himself.

Oh, He is the great reward. He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him. And if you're seeking Him, what then must be the reward? Him.

Him. It's His love that draws out our hearts. And causes our hearts to pour forth love for Him.

This is the epistle of John chapter 4 verse 19. We love Him because He first loved us. It's the great love of God that captured us.

We didn't love Him and woo Him. We didn't convince Him of our worthiness. We did not argue and persuade Him.

And overcome any reluctance for He to love us. No, no. It's just quite the opposite, isn't it? He overcame our reluctance.

He withstood our resistance. And by His love, He melted our hearts. So that our hearts in reflex to His love.

Loved Him in return. This is the Shulamite maid. This is what Solomon has done.

He's wooed her. He has courted her. He has brought her in to His heart.

And He, our God, has brought us into His heart. And we know the King loves us because He has acted on that love and demonstrated it. Oh, how He has demonstrated it.

How can you watch the drops of blood fall from His stressed brow to the ground in the garden and not know that He loves you? Every crimson drop cries out, I love you. I love you. How can you hear the lash of the Roman whip rip flesh from His back and not know His great love? Each lash is a message, a poem, a communique of His love.

And don't the spikes riven through flesh, nerves, and bones preach to you of His great love for you? Look at Calvary. Look at Him there writhing under the agony of men and far greater the agony of God. And He's there not just for the glory of the Father, but also for you and for me that He might ransom us and call us His beloved.

This is the love of God that captures us, enamors us, brings us in so that we can say as she, He who has forgiven much loveth much. Oh, have you not experienced the forgiveness of your sins? Have you not tasted mercy? A mercy that has no shore or boundary? Have you tasted the love of God that takes your sins and casts them as far as the east is from the west? Oh, my dear friend, this is the kind of love we're talking about. And this is the way He loves.

So that even though your sins be many, far more than you can number or count, be it known He that is forgiven much loveth much. Secondly, we see that the King's love changes her life. Here she is just a shepherd girl.

A poor girl. And here comes the regal King and all of His splendor. He comes to court her.

To look through her lattice and through the window and call her name. To see if He can get just a glimpse of her. And now she's taken from the sheepfolds of the Judean hills and she's brought into the city, the royal streets of Jerusalem, into the imperial palace.

And she's clad with royal garments and she's seated beside the King on the throne of Israel, the Queen of the nation. Her life is forever changed by this King. And today we testify gladly, joyfully, how we've been transformed by the love of God.

I am not the same. I've been transformed by this great love. I can never be the same.

I don't want to be the same. There's been something cataclysmic happen. Something supernatural has taken place.

I am not that Michael Durham even though I was a religious man. Even a preacher. I was as lost as any Zacchaeus or prostitute that fell at His feet.

And He forgave me. He changed me. He did a work that I cannot even to this day theologically explain its depth or its height.

And yet, yet, He loves me. I've been changed by it. But something happens in all relationships.

A change takes place. I tell every married, prospective married couple that as soon as you say, I do, the dynamics of the relationship change. They have to.

This is a completely different scenario now than courtship. And eventually, no matter how tender the affections, no matter how warm the fire burns in the heart for her or for him, there becomes a change. Something happens.

The routine of marriage sets in and we soon forget the tenderness of courtship days. And something is said. Something is done.

We see it here in this relationship. Song of Solomon, chapter 5, verse 2. I, Shulamite maiden queen, says, I sleep, but my heart is awake. It's the voice of my beloved.

He knocks, saying, Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one. For my heart is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. This is what Solomon says to her.

Open the door. I want to come in. I've been out in the cold.

My hair is wet with the dew. Please let me in. I want to be with you.

I want you to warm my bones. I want to lie next to you. Listen to what she says in verse 3. I've taken off my robe.

How can I put it on again? I've washed my feet. How can I defile them? She says, I will not get up. I will not answer the door.

I will not answer your call for love. I'm in bed now. She was not watchful for her husband's return.

She did not stay alert and awake for him that she might greet him when she returned. No, she fell asleep. But he knocks and he awakes her and his voice arouse her.

She says, verse 2, I sleep, but my heart is awake. It's the voice of my beloved. As in our case with the Lord, there comes a disruption in the relationship between two sinners.

Two sinners come together in holy matrimony. Sooner or later, there's going to be a disruption. Two people, both selfish, often moving in different directions with different agendas.

Two sinners married together. And the disruption comes. And it's so in our relationship with Christ as well.

Not because two sinners have joined. Oh no, the Lord. The Lord Jesus is holy, harmless, undefiled, separated from sinners.

There is no blemish of sin in Him. Not whatsoever. But all it takes is one sinner for there to be disruption.

And we disrupt the harmony that we have experienced since that day. We said yes to Christ. There is a sleep that a saint can suffer.

It's not the sleep of the dead, but a restlessness of the soul. Now how do you tell the difference? Well, it's quite easy. It's right here even in the text.

The Christian is aware of the sleep. I sleep, but my heart is awake. I know I'm asleep, but there's something in me that is awake.

I'm recognizing that this is not the ideal condition the sinner never knows his predicament. He's quite happy in his predicament because that is his norm. That is her normal routine.

But the Christian, he or she knows when the intimacy is not as intimate. When the fellowship is not as sweet. When the closet of prayer has become icy cold.

No exchange of love with he and you. We know it. We're aware of it.

Laziness has crept in and taken hold. We know something's different, but what it is we don't often know until the sin is exposed. But until then, what do we do? What do you do? We go on about the same routine and duty.

And we justify our cold hearts, our lukewarm spirits, saying to ourselves, well, this is just Christian maturity. I was warned. The old saints told me it wouldn't always be wonderful.

Now, can I address that for a moment? No, it shouldn't be as it once was. I agree. It should be better.

It should grow sweeter. Your fellowship with God ought to deepen, not become shallow. I agree it won't be the same.

It will be stronger. It will be deeper. It will be more fervent.

And that's the way it ought to be. I'm not talking about emotions now. Let me be very clear here.

I would not want anyone of you to be misled by what I'm trying to explain so poorly. We're not talking about feeling something. I remember those early days, early years, when I could feel God readily at any time and not just feel by just knowing.

There was a sensibility of His presence. I sensed it. I could feel it.

Bodily, my senses were alive to the presence of God. Not so much anymore. No, no, it's gotten better.

There is a place where faith doesn't need the emotions. Oh, they're there. I'm not saying they're stripped or removed.

No, no, no, no. But they go deeper. The intimacy's far deeper than that.

I don't need to feel God's love to know that God loves me. And when I believe He loves me, I always feel. How about you? Are you now doomed to live as an unprofitable servant? You do your duty, but your duty's stripped of joy? I have an old clock that belonged to my grandfather.

And it has a key. And you wind a spring inside that clock and the tension of the spring is what turns the gears, that turns the dials, the hands on the face of the dial. And many of us have settled in to such a routine.

That's how you, the sleepy soul, operates. Like a wound up clock, a mechanized monotony. You're going through the motions, but the heart is not in it.

I don't want you to feel all alone. How many times I've preached because it was my time to preach. My heart was cold.

Nevertheless, the meat of God's Word had to be served and I served it. But there was no passion or enthusiasm. I think every preacher here knows what I'm talking about.

Maybe there is one who doesn't. How I hate my cold and calculated service. How about you? Do you? I despise it.

Don't you hate a routine religion? A formal faith? A dead devotion? Don't you despise that? Aren't you tired of it? Don't you yearn for the streams of refreshment in the midst of your desert? Who's here that would say, yes, that's me? I've come that I might be revived, renewed, refreshed. That the seasons of refreshment might come by the presence of the Lord. And yet, you still read your Bible, but there's no voice of the Spirit speaking to your spirit.

You pray and knock on heaven's door, but it's missing the fervency you once experienced. You still teach your class, and the exposition is sound. But sound as may be your doctrine, it's unsound in devotion.

Your heart's not warmed at all by the truth that falls from your lips. Who's here like that today? Like the Shulamite. Sloth has caught you.

The call comes, but she resists. She was taking her ease upon her bed. She wouldn't bring herself up to get up and answer the door and let Him in.

Oh, how often self-indulgence lies at the bottom of the sin that drives away the conscious presence of Christ. Do you resist the knock? And do you tune out His voice? Oh, please don't do that now. Don't do that now.

If we believe that God has ordained these days, and that before the foundation of the world, He would have me standing here before you preaching this message, then we have to believe that no matter how marred and flawed I am, if it is the Word of the Lord, God is here to speak to you. Don't resist that. Don't resist.

Tune out His voice. Don't you argue against the small, still voice and plead your rightness right now. Will you tell yourself that you can shake yourself as you have done at other times, but like Samson when the Philistines came upon him, you shake yourself awake, but you have not known that the Spirit of the Lord has departed.

No, we get there. We've been there. Every one of us.

And we despise it. Those of us who are really Christians. You know why we despise it? Simple.

We have fared sumptuously at His table. You know what I mean by that? We've dined on the finest feast that God's table can spread. We've ate of the best.

And friend, when you've had the best and now you're like that old prodigal who would feed his belly with the husk that the swine would eat, you know something's different. And you don't like it. Oh, take courage today if you don't like it.

There's hope for you. You're one of His. And He's here to call you.

He's here to spread His robe around you and bring you into intimate fellowship. Don't resist. And finally, in this chapter, this last chapter of their romance and love, we see the dear maiden restored in the experience of the King's love.

She's finally aroused. Love is renewed. What awakened her? What stirred her senses? It was the knock and the voice of her beloved.

That's what awakened her. Out of her stupor, she heard Solomon's knock and she registered that that was her darling's voice. How familiar this scene is to us.

The bride of Christ our King, our betrothed, said to a sleeping church long ago, Behold, I stand at the door of your heart and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, what will he do? What will he do? I will come into him and dine with him. He stands here today.

He's knocking. Hear His voice? Does it stir you? Are you being aroused at this very moment by His Word? Well then, friend, get up. Run to the door.

Hear Him as He cries to you. Let the wicked forsake His way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord and He will have mercy upon him for He will abundantly pardon. And the Shulamite arises off of her bed and runs to the door.

But she's surprised. He's not there. She's done despite to His supplications.

She's spurned His love. And thus, as a gentleman, He leaves. He honors her request.

He does not leave despite her to exact revenge. To return evil for evil? No. But out of love He honors her wish and He withdraws.

We're grateful to know that our Lord Jesus will never withdraw Himself from us. Please get this correct. Don't misunderstand.

God never, ever withdraws Himself from His people. You're not alone today even though you feel it. And though your heart is cool towards God, He's still right there.

His promise is true. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. But if we ignore Him, if we reject His loving overtures, if we turn a deaf ear to His pleas for fellowship and His request for intimacy, well then, even though He is the King and has every right to uproot the locked doors of our hearts, He'll not do so.

He, the perfect gentleman, will simply fulfill our desire. Oh, He'll not leave us, but He will withdraw the manifestation of His presence and His smile will no longer warm your face. His kisses He will withhold and His tender embrace He will remove.

Why? He's simply answering your desires just as sure as He answers prayers. And the gracious compliance of the Lord will be your own chastisement. Christians' heads are going like this.

You know you've been there more than once, sad to say. Me too. Me too.

There's no greater discipline that I know than the removal of the conscious awareness of His presence. Nothing can grieve my soul more. How about you? Are you weary of it? Well then, run after Him.

Seek Him as the Shulamite seeks her Solomon. She runs out into the city streets of Jerusalem calling His name, asking any and everyone if they have seen her beloved. She even suffers abuse by the hands of the watchmen of Jerusalem.

But she's not deterred. She will not relent her seeking. No suffering is worse than the pain of her heart and the absence of His presence.

It wasn't until the sixth chapter the two are reunited. And how does she find Him? What's the state of His heart and mind? Would you look at Song of Solomon, chapter 6, verse 4. And I tell you this is the very way He will receive you today. No different.

She finds Him. They're finally together again. The details of their reunion is absent.

It's not suggested how she found Him. We just know that they are reunited. And the first words out of His mouth is verse 4. Oh my love, you are as beautiful as Tera, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners.

No rebuke. No shaming. No scolding.

No reprisal. No coming-uppance. No.

You're as beautiful as Tera, lovely as Jerusalem. He compliments her. He adorns her with affectionate words.

You remember John the Baptist stuck in Herod's prison? And there for whatever reasons, whatever's going on in the heart of that great prophet, he sends messengers with one question to Jesus. Are you the one or should we look to another? Are you the one or should we look to another? Jesus sends back word. Tell John what you've seen.

The deaf are here and the blind see and the lame walk, the dead are raised. And he who's not offended in me is blessed. And then what does He do as the messengers return back to Jerusalem or to Herod's palace? He begins to compliment and shower John the Baptist with great praise.

None greater born of woman than John. This is the love of God. When you come to Him having been selfish and satisfied, grown stale in your love for Him, He will not turn you away.

No, no, no. He's here today with open arms, with an open heart, willing to pick up where you and He left off with no words about the disruption. That's the kind of God we serve.

Is it not true what you read earlier in Psalm 103? If He marked iniquities, who then could stand? If He marked my departure, if He measured the temperature of my heart, who could be in His presence? None of us. No, no. We have a King who doesn't measure.

Your heart He measures His. And it's infinite in degree in His affections for you. A complete and full restoration.

And my friend, He will restore you as well this day. His love is even as the father of the prodigal. Oh, the young man had to rehearse his speech, but he can't finish it.

He dare not finish it. How dare he say the last sentence, make me as one of your hired servants, when the Father has just showered him with this kind of amazing love, this unbelievable kind of love, a love that he never dared to even expect. No, no.

He just humbles Himself and receives the love of the Father. And He is fully restored. This is the love of our King, greater than Solomon.

Amazing love. How can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me? And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died He for me who caused His pain? For me who Him to death pursued? And there's only one thing Wesley can say. Amazing love.

How can it be that Thou, my God, should die for me? But oh, listen to the last stanza. No condemnation now I dread. Jesus and all in Him is mine.

Alive in Him my living head enclosed in righteousness divine. Bold I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ. My dear friend, you're outside of His love today.

You've never experienced it. I had a young man call me yesterday. Funny thing happened.

I don't think it's funny. I think it's God. At about 10.30 yesterday morning I was wrestling with a heaviness in my heart.

Should I continue the ministry of the podcast? It seems like responsibilities are being added to my plate and the podcast takes so much work. Lord, should I continue it or not? An hour and a half later, a young man calls me and says, I've just listened to the last two and I believe God has saved me. And we talked and we prayed.

I believe God saved him too. What a wonderful answer so quickly to my question. But you're outside of that.

You're like that young man. You heard something. Something awakened you.

You see, you're not in the kind of sleep that we Christians can fall into. No, no, no, no. You're in the sleep of sin's death.

You're as valuable to God as a rotting corpse. You bring nothing to Him. You can add nothing to Him.

The only value you are is food for the worm that does not die and fodder for the fire that will not be quenched. That's all you're good for. And rightly so.

You deserve it. You've rejected this King of mercy and great love. You're very Creator.

Think of it, the person who made you and you have despised Him and rejected Him. But oh, something happened today. Something's happened.

A knock has occurred. A voice has been heard. You don't understand it.

You've never experienced it. But something is drawing you. You want this kind of love.

You want to know this kind of God and King. And I tell you, get up from where you are and run. He will receive you.

For if you can come to Him and run to Him and believe upon Him, I tell you with all the authority of Scripture, I fear no contradiction, you will be saved. You will be! He cannot lie. His love cannot deceive.

It's a pure love. A holy love. And if He says you come and you come, He will.

And after He does, you will find out that His love, like eternal cords, wrapped around your heart and pulled you in. And that's what you're experiencing right now. The pull, the tug, the voice of the Spirit of God.

Don't do despite to Him. Don't quench Him. Don't ignore Him.

Respond to the love that God wants to pour out upon you. And dear Christian, if you have found yourself on the bed of ease and self-centeredness and your heart has grown cold towards the Lord, hear what Wesley said. Boldly approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Jesus Christ His own.

What does that mean? Here's what it means. Take the crown! You do Him and His great love honor by boldly receiving it. Do not come sheepishly.

Do not come tentatively. No, no, no. Come! Come! Take the crown! Take the prize! And you honor Him by doing so.

This is the way we honor great love by receiving it. In Jesus' name, Amen and Amen. Let's pray.

Our gracious Father, we have little understanding of even that phrase, gracious Father. We're so limited in our viewing of it and our sight thereof that we speak like little children playing with the most expensive jewelry there is. Treating it, Lord, as something small.

It's not. We recognize it's greater than our comprehension this morning. Your great love with which You have poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit has been given to us is worth everything.

Your loving kindness is better. And there are some, Lord, of Your own children, Your own bride, that can't say that and mean it. But You are doing something.

I pray You will continue to do that even here now and in the days to come. Oh, Lord, revive, refresh us all. Lord, I want more.

I want more. More intimacy. Deeper fellowship.

I want to dine. You have spread a table before us in the presence of our enemies. You called us to come and fare sumptuously.

You tell us to get up off the floor and quit eating crumbs that belonged to the children's dog but to sit at the father's table. So here we come. We come.

We come. Help us, Lord. In Jesus' name.

Amen.

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