

Song of Solomon/Songs 2:8-13

Passionate faith from passionate love

⁸ The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills. **⁹ My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag.** Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice. **¹⁰ My beloved speaks and says to me:**

“Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; ¹¹ for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. ¹² The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

You might wonder why we have this odd reading from the ancient book called Song of Songs/Solomon today. And apparently, the reason it falls into our lectionary today, is because of the connection with King Solomon. Last week in 1 Kings ch8, the Temple was finally completed with King Solomon offering his prayer of dedication. We now have four Sundays of wisdom readings, including this one from Song of Songs, and then three from the book of Proverbs. So, the common connection is King Solomon with the completion of the Temple; then we hear from some of the wisdom that God gave to Solomon. Rabbinic traditions would even say that King Solomon wrote Song of Songs (the book of love) in his younger years; then he wrote Proverbs as an adult (with all his wisdom); then he wrote Ecclesiastes (with its negativity) as a bitter old man. Maybe that's a bit idealistic. But either way, all three of these ancient books are books of wisdom worth reading at any age.

So, we have this romantic reading of love here in Song of Songs. And we read of this passionate love being shared between a man & a woman. Song of Songs is very much the love book of the Bible, and there are some great wedding texts selected from this ancient book. Chapter 2:8-13 is a great passage for any wedding. And it's especially a good text for a second wedding, where someone has been through stormy rain previously though the death of a spouse or a breakup of marriage.

But today we can look more broadly at this passage – beyond a marriage focus. The romantic language also has a final goal which Song of Songs points to. Song of Songs ultimately points to the wholehearted, passionate love which God desires to share with his people. Some would even say this is God's fanatical love, with God being fixated on being close to his people.

Have you ever thought of God the Father being completely pre-occupied with you as one of his people? And I don't mean God being pre-occupied with the judging all the bad things, because it's too easy for people to think that God is looking at all the bad things we think or say or do. But do you see God as being preoccupied with you as a person who needs God's care & attention in your own unique setting?

We all experience some rough consequences of life in a broken world. It is so easy for us to become pre-occupied with the brokenness – with our brokenness. It is so easy for to become pre-occupied with the consequences that we have to endure. Justice & fairness can seem out of reach far too often.

But while we become pre-occupied with the problems that surround us, God is pre-occupied with winning us back to a healthy trust in his faithfulness toward us. We have a very passionate picture of God's faithfulness in Song of Songs. In this picture, God is the beloved; and we, his people, are described as God's "fair one" or "beautiful one". God is excited to be close to his people. In this springtime picture, God's excitement is likened to that of a young gazelle – full of life, bouncing around with anticipation about sharing good things with his people.

How excited do you think God is about spending time with you? How excited do you think God is about your life? This is a picture of God being pre-occupied with his people, because he loves them so much.

We can't overlook this as a picture of premarital courtship, where the bride and her beloved are madly seeking each other for the best relationship they can have. Courtship language has a prominent place in scripture. It speaks of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The bride is the church (God's people... us), and the beloved is Christ Jesus. Think of the old hymns like, *"The Church's one foundation, is Jesus Christ her Lord"*, or the Advent hymn, *"O bride of Christ rejoice"*. These hymns pick up the recurring theme of God being deeply in love with his people, whom he calls the church.

Through the Old Testament prophets, God called himself the 'husband' of his people. The prophets frequently spoke in this marriage language – that God is married to his collective people.

The book of Revelation describes God's people in Christ Jesus as the New Jerusalem coming out of heaven, dressed as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:2, 19:7).

The Bible gives us marriage images when speaking of God's passionate love for his people – people who are made in God's own image and saved by the cross of Christ. We even call the sufferings & death of Jesus, "*The Passion of Christ*", because there we have the full love of God expressed toward us. There is no more passionate love than to give up one's life for another. And that is what Jesus did for the bride called 'The Church'. He passionately gave up gave his life up for 'his people'.

"Arise my love, my fair one and come away", says the ancient song-book. Perhaps this sounds all too romantic, yet God desires a genuine living relationship with each one of his people.

God is interested in you. God never gives up on you.

This springtime picture speaks of the fresh new love we experience with our Lord Jesus, day after day. You are God's fully redeemed, baptised people - so embrace the freshness of new life with God. While we are here on earth, we will never fully understand how excited God is about having us as his own people for eternity. It is a mystery that God would be so in love with us.

Song of Songs reminds us of the high & lows in the different seasons of life. Sometimes the seasons are dark & gloomy; sometimes they are bright & clear. The Christian life can be pre-occupied with trying to work out the right way through problems. Christians get worn out & tired, from trying to work out what's right & best.

It's nice to take some time out with a passage of scripture that tells of God's excitement about us, even while we are pre-occupied with our own bad seasons.

Today we are invited to embrace this seasonal picture of God's wholehearted love for his most precious people – and that means you. Amen.