

The Marriage

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Date: 18 May 2025

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. Thank you, Fiona and Alistair, for really bringing that alive to us there. That was great. So, let me just pray as we begin before we get stuck into what God's Word has to say to us this morning.

God and Father, we pray for this time this morning. We thank you for your Word. We pray that you will speak to each one of us and that there'll be more of you and that there'll be less of me and that each one of us will have open hearts ready to receive your Word. Amen.

So, in the Song of Songs, the Song of Songs. Now, this is our third installment. We've had two weeks already. And whether or not you've been here, I'm going to do a bit of a recap because it's always good to remember where we've been, what the book's all about before we get stuck into this passage this morning.

So, this is the Song of Songs, sometimes called the Song of Solomon. That might be what your book says. And that takes it from chapter 1, verse 1, the Song of Songs, which is of Solomon. So, this is part of the wisdom literature part of the Bible. So, that includes Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and the Song of Songs. And the title, the Song of Songs, well, that's a sort of idiom, a phrase that would mean the best of songs.

[1 : 21] The best of the best. This is the song of all songs, might be a way to put it. And it is love poetry. That is how it is written. Now, love poetry was very common back in these days.

And the words used and all the phrases used, these would have been common things there. But this was the song of all songs. And love poetry, well, it was poems that explored desire, explored love, explored relationships.

That was what they were all about. And we'll see this morning, and we've seen already, that there's really three interpretations when it comes to this book. You have the Jewish tradition of seeing it as the relationship between Jehovah and then the people of Israel, that faithful people of Israel.

You have the Christian tradition of looking at it and seeing the Lord Jesus. And we really do see him, while not mentioned explicitly, and we'll see how we see him this morning in this passage.

And his relationship to believers, the church, who is described as his bride. And then the third interpretation or application that we get from the song of songs is about human relationships and about how God designed them.

[2 : 39] So the last two weeks, in chapter 1, 2, and the start of 3, we've seen this man and woman. We've seen her delight in her shepherd man.

They are engaged. And vice versa, he delights in her. They have that reciprocal love. And then today is the day. It's the wedding day.

You know, two of our church family got married on Friday, and they would have been building up to that for weeks and years and months or whatever. But today is the wedding day. So let's get stuck in and look at it.

First, we're going to see the glory of the king. The glory of the king. Then we're going to see the beauty of the bride. The beauty of the bride. And then we're going to look at the perfection of the marriage.

So let's first of all look at the glory of the king. Now, who, most people probably into a wedding. You've at least seen a film that involves a wedding. Now, who is the centerpiece of the wedding?

[3 : 40] There's a big clue in that picture. It's the bride, isn't it? There's a big procession comes. You know, the men, they're all at the front, the groom and the groomsmen, sort of laughing and joking with each other, trying to pretend they're not nervous.

And then you've got all the people come early and they're standing, waiting, sitting, waiting for the procession to come. And then suddenly it goes hush and it's quiet. Then the bridesmaids, they

come in and there's that kind of strange walk that they do that's not too fast, not too slow. And then eventually, the main event, the bride appears. Everyone looks back. Oh, doesn't she look beautiful? Well, this, in a sense, is the opposite.

And this was the tradition back then. We have this shepherd, this shepherd man, but he's returning here. He's coming in the glory of the king. And we have this mighty procession that we read about in chapter 3, verse 6 through to 11.

What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke? This procession, this would have been seen for miles. The dust was beginning kicked up with all this people coming. The king in all his glory.

[4 : 55] And we have this king language. Please do have the book in front of you. Please do have your head in it as we go through. That would be very helpful. But we have this king language.

We see the litter, the carriage or his chariot. We see the best of wood of Lebanon. We have silver and gold and purple and the crown. And we have king mentioned twice.

So we really do have this king language. This is a royal procession. It is rich. There is no expense spared. And you know, this would have actually been a culturally common thing.

That the groom would come in all his glory and splendor and all eyes would be on him. And it tended to be that the bride was there too getting brought to the wedding. She would potentially have been on that litter, that kind of bed that was carried as part of this procession.

But the groom has all the glory here. The groom has the glory. You know, we see in this initial section that there is real Israel language going on here.

[6 : 02] So the initial readers of this book would have been the people of Israel. And they would have quite easily seen this and thought of their God, Jehovah. We have, it mentioned, we have the mighty men of Israel, the daughters of Jerusalem, the daughters of Zion.

And you know, this language used of silver, gold, purple, all these descriptions, these are in Isaiah 60, which Al read for us already, or he read part of it. And this is where the people of Israel, their minds would have gone to Isaiah 60, where it talks about the faithful remnant of Israel being glorified in a day to come.

And they would have been thinking about that future time, where the faithful remnant of Israel will be glorified. Verse 19 of Isaiah 60 says, But you know, when we read this, in this day and age, we really see the Lord Jesus.

Verse 6, it's mentioned myrrh and frankincense. Now, myrrh is mentioned four times in this short passage that we have read. Frankincense, well, it's mentioned three times.

Myrrh, the most obvious one we think of with myrrh, was one of the gifts that the wise men brought. Same with frankincense. Myrrh was present at the Lord Jesus' birth. It was also present at his death.

[7 : 32] He was offered myrrh as a kind of sedative for his pain on the cross, which he refused. He did not dull his pain. And myrrh is also mentioned at his burial.

It was used as an embalming agent for the smell of a dead body. So when we think of myrrh, we think of the Lord Jesus. Our minds go there. And also frankincense.

Well, it was what the priests used to offer sacrifices, which is what the Lord Jesus was. You know, in more literal terms, this here is King Solomon.

He is the literal son of David. Now, Jesus describes himself as such and is described by others in Matthew's gospel as the son of David. So our minds go to the Lord Jesus when we read here and his relationship to his church.

You might be sitting there thinking, well, hold on. This doesn't sound like the stories you read of the Lord Jesus. This doesn't sound like what I've heard about him. Wasn't he the meek one? Wasn't he the one who didn't have a place to lay his head, never mind all these possessions?

[8 : 43] He suffered. He died. Well, this is the future that we see. Christ will return in glory, taking his bride, the church, to be with himself.

This afternoon, please go and read Revelation 21. It's brilliant. All about that relationship with Christ and his bride. As we sit here today, we have the joy of this age that we look back, seeing that the Lord Jesus has come once.

We can read all about that in the gospels, the stories of the Lord Jesus. He completed that salvation work when he came. But with the joy of this age is that we get to look forward and we get to see that he will come again, returning in the glory of the king, bringing us to himself.

And then there will be eternal perfection. So the object of the glory in this passage is the groom, the Lord Jesus. Jesus has done it all.

Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. It's all for his glory. The bride here, the bride is brought along, protected, kept safe with the groom.

[9 : 57] That takes us to the beauty that we see of the bride. The phrase goes, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

That's true to a degree, isn't it? We all see things differently. But we get to see here what he says about his love. The bride is shown to be perfect, to be perfect, to be completely captivating to the groom.

And just a note here that the language used here, this wasn't for the time that it was written, it wasn't inappropriate, it wasn't immoral, it wasn't unusual. This would have been common language used in this love poetry, in the culture that it was written.

For us, it's a bit strange, but that's just the way that it is. You know, we see a few things in here, but first we see that the bride is absolutely flawless in his eyes.

And this is bookended. So this is chapter 4, verse 1 through to verse 7. And it's bookended with that phrase, beautiful, my love. And as it goes through, it mentions seven parts of the body.

[11 : 10] Eyes, hair, teeth, lips, cheeks, neck, breasts. It works from top to bottom. You know, the phrasings are strange, the imagery used is a bit odd, but basically what it is saying is that each of these things is the best of the best.

The best of the best. In the Bible, the number 7, it's often used to represent perfection. That is a common thing in the Bible, the number 7.

And these seven things are basically saying that she is perfect in his eyes. And it's summed up at the end of verse 7 where it says, there is no flaw in you.

And this is lovely on its own if we just take it at face value. Words of affirmation. It's one of the love languages, isn't it? It's great to tell people how we feel about them. It's great to tell people and encourage them in that way.

Not sure I would recommend quoting directly from this passage. I'm not sure how that would go. But words of affirmation are good. But the truth that we see from this passage is that we are seen as perfect in God's eyes.

[12 : 25] How wonderful is that? Well, how is that possible? And is it universal? Where in verse 6, again, we have these markers.

We have the myrrh and frankincense mentioned. We've already talked about what they mean, but the myrrh, well, it takes us to the cross. That smell, the sweet bitterness, the sweet bitterness of Christ's suffering because it was so horrific and yet it did so much for us.

And frankincense, well, that speaks as well. You know, that was actually a white substance and it speaks of the moral glory of Christ.

His perfection. Christ Jesus' work, it allows us to be viewed in this way. We read about that in the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

And what the Lord Jesus did during his ministry, it allowed us to be seen that we have no flaw, that there is no flaw to be found if we are in him.

[13 : 36] Well, what does that mean? Well, we thought the Lord Jesus came and he was born. He lived his life. Unlike us, he never sinned. He was perfect. There was no blemish found in him.

There was no flaw. The devil even tried to tempt him, but he refused. He had his ministry on earth where he did the miracles.

We were thinking about some of them in the kids' talk. These miracles, they showed that who he said he was, God, was true. That's what his miracles proved.

And he went all the way to the cross. Suffering and death, the weight of sin, the punishment that we deserve put upon him at that moment. Even though he did not deserve it, he took that for us in that moment on the cross.

And he died. But that wasn't the end of the story, no. Christ rose again. And he witnessed to many different people, these people who were terrified, thinking that they had lost the one that they were following for many years.

[14 : 45] But you know, these people were so convinced by his resurrection that they went on to tell others, to tell anyone who would listen. And most of them were killed doing so.

This is the gospel. This is the good news of Jesus. And if we accept these things, if we accept his offer, we accept the free gift of salvation, then he has made us perfect.

When God looks upon us, he sees the perfect sacrifice of Christ. There is no blemish anymore. Let me read this from Ephesians 5.

It's Paul. He's using the imagery of the husband and wife like we see here. I think this is worth reading. It's up on the screen. It's quite small, but I'll read it anyway. Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

And to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In the same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies.

[16:04] He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church, for we are members of his body.

Christ presents the church, his bride, to himself made perfect without stain, wrinkle or blemish. It's beautiful that, isn't it?

But you know, just as an aside, there's a real challenge there for any husbands out there. Love your wives. Love your wives as Christ loved the church.

And we just think about what Christ has done for us. So what a challenge is in there for husbands to love their wives as much as that. And that takes us to the perfection of this marriage.

The perfection of this marriage. So what's the main part of a wedding day? You've got a lot of stuff going along, you know, before, after, during.

[17:11] There's a lot of dancing, there's a lot of food when the bacon rolls come out about half nine, ten o'clock. That's always a highlight for me. But you know, the main part of the wedding day is the marriage. Because without it, it's just a party or it's just a feast or it's just a gathering of people.

It should be the main part of the wedding day. So here we have it. The marriage. And we see in here that the bride is cared for.

We're going to see various things about the bride in this section. Now, my bride is in 4 verse, in chapter 4, verse 9, it is repeated, sorry, from verse 8.

From 4 verse 8 down to 5 verse 1, my bride is repeated six times. We have that real sense of belonging there. You know, the Shulamite, this is the Shulamite woman it's mentioned earlier.

You know, that is actually the female form of the word Solomon. She already has his name. And we have the tradition nowadays of the bride tends to take the groom's second name.

[18:21] That is common. You know, she already had his name already. But there's a real sense of belonging here, this my bride, my bride, my sister, my heart.

There's the my language going on there. And this isn't a sort of possessive thing, but it is a sense of belonging. And with that belonging, it brings protection. In verse 8, we have these desolate, high up, dangerous places.

We have the wild animals. And what it is saying is that there is safety with the groom. We also saw that in the procession in chapter 3, verse 7, where we had these mighty men of Israel protecting the bride.

If we are in Christ, then we have that protection in him. Now, it is not a physical protection. It doesn't mean that life's going to be rosy and sunshine and rainbows, but it means that our salvation is secure.

If we have accepted him, then no one, nothing can take us from his hand. We are cared for. We will never be lost because he is mighty.

[19:31] Secondly, in this perfection of the marriage, we see that the bride is captivating. The groom is absolutely smitten and he says, how much better is your love than wine?

Now, this is repeated from chapter 1, verse 2, where she says this about him. So, this is a reciprocal love. This is a shared sentiment and they are rejoicing in the fact that they love one another.

And interestingly, in this section here, we are moving away from the physical. So, in the previous section, we had all these physical body parts that he just saw no flaw in her. but here we move to who she is.

We have the my heart language. This speaks of her inner being. We have the lips and tongue. That talks about her speech, what comes out of her mouth.

And we have her garments mentioned. Now, garments often represent someone's character, who they are. The bride is captivating to him.

[20 : 36] And if we are Christ's bride, then we are to have seasoned speech, good character, so that we are pleasing to him. Christ in his work has made us perfect.

The church, it is entirely for his pleasure. It's not for our pleasure that we have been saved. It is for his. So, the church is to bring Christ joy, and it does.

this is only possible because of verse 15, it talks about living water and streams flowing. Now, that's having hinting at the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit in the church allows us to please him.

In the day-to-day when we do things for Christ, he delights in us. And we should want to please him because of all that he has done for us. And you know, we're still imperfect.

We mess up, don't we? We are not how he would like us to be. But you know, he will return triumphantly in that day-to-come, and eternally we will please him.

[21 : 47] Revelation 19, 7-9 says this. Once again, it's pretty small, but I will read it. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory, for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. Then the angel said to me, write this, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And he added, these are the true words of God. So the righteous acts of God's holy people please him. thirdly, we see that the bride is celebrated.

Garden is mentioned from verse 12 to the end five times. Garden often spoke of sexuality in the ancient Near East. And our thoughts as we, certainly my thoughts when we see this language and we see garden mentioned again and again, we go to the Garden of Eden, don't we?

that famous garden. That garden where it was a perfect place. You had man and woman living in complete harmony as well as with the animals and creation itself.

[23 : 07] You know, what do we see in this section? Well, the garden is described as being locked twice and it is said it is sealed. What this is getting at is that she has kept herself for her husband.

She has been locked. The groom here is actually celebrating her virginity. These locked pleasures which it describes.

And this is counter cultural, isn't it? Graham, helpfully, over the last couple of weeks he's been highlighting some of the lies that culture might try to tell us. And we have one here. You know, in our world today people would say, well, you know, before marriage surely you want to live with them first.

Just check who does the dishes and does it work and all that kind of stuff. Surely you want to have sex first just to make sure that on that level everything's okay. We live in a sexualized culture, don't we?

I was speaking to Pete on Thursday and he was saying that he's in marketing and they try, you know, even in that world that people try to use sex to sell things. And we know that. Look at the adverts on TV.

[24 : 22] We live in a sexualized culture. People try to tell us, well, why would you wait? Surely you try it out before you buy. You know, God's design for relationships, for sex, and for marriage is completely different.

Graham, he helpfully phrased wisdom literature right at the start a couple weeks ago as how to live in God's way, in God's world, for our good.

We need to remember that this is God's world that we're living in. I think we sometimes, I sometimes forget that. We think this is our world to do what we want to do. But, you know, this is God's world, and he has designed things a certain way because he knows it is for our good.

Surely the one who made it all knows what is best about everything, especially when it comes to things like relationships, marriage, and sex.

God knows best, and I think that's sometimes a difficult concept for us to accept. I was thinking about this, and everyone loves Ikea, right? Ikea's great, isn't it?

[25 : 41] Now, if you've never bought something from Ikea before, or to be honest, even if you've bought many things from Ikea, they send you that, don't they, and it's flat-packed. That's the way that they go. Okay?

Now, I'm a generalized man who doesn't really like following instructions. You know, I'm sure I could do it myself. But, you know, you get something fairly complex from Ikea, or even one of the more simple things, and you try and do that yourself, well, good luck to you.

Tell you that for free. They send you an instruction manual, don't you? Don't they? The person who designed it, the person who built it, they send you this manual and go, look, this is how it works best.

This is how to do it. And thank goodness, well, you know, it is similar but different with God. It's an imperfect picture, but God has designed this world.

He's given us the gift of marriage, and it is a joy and a privilege. Sex, relationships, marriage, it is a gift, and it is good, but it is to be enjoyed in his way.

[26 : 50] So the bride is celebrated here. Lastly, we see that the bride is timely. You know, on a similar note, verse 16, the bride, she says, awake, O north wind, there's some interesting imagery there.

And honestly, if you go and spend some time looking at the Song of Songs and all the different meanings you can find in it, you'd be there for hours, but it's been really enjoyable studying it these last few weeks. But he invites the groom to consummate their marriage, and he, in chapter 5, verse 1, he samples all that she has to offer.

There's that my language, he says, my garden, my sister, he says, my, eight times in that verse. You know, throughout this book so far, in chapter 2, verse 7, and chapter 3, verse 5, which is the verse just before we started reading, the bride, she's been warning these others who are in this book, not to stir up love until it pleases.

Now, what she's basically saying is be patient. Don't be hasty when it comes to these things. The right thing at the right time. this year, this is a celebration of God's good timing.

Sex is worth waiting for. Now, if you're in that stage, maybe you're dating or you're waiting to be married or something like that, let me encourage you that it is God's good plan that these things are within the safety of marriage.

[28 : 18] There's no shame between the couple here, and then we once again see that Eden where there was no shame between Adam and Eve in God's good design.

Now, as we close, I'd just like to address because, you know, maybe this dreamlike, perfect, Eden-type relationship, marriage and sex, well, that's not your experience. You know what? It's not anyone's experience. You know, maybe you've not waited for marriage. Maybe just talking about relationships, marriage and sex, just brings pain and regret.

Maybe it's something difficult for you to hear about. You know, I don't want you to be sitting there feeling shame, guilt, embarrassment, or whatever it is that this subject brings up for you.

Going back to the previous section, the bride, well, she is seen as flawless in his eyes, but let me tell you something, there is no way that she was flawless. No way. She was a person just like any other, so she was flawed.

[29 : 26] We are the same in Christ Jesus. We are not perfect, are we? We mess up. I mess up. But if we have accepted Christ, then we are made the same as she is here, where she is seen as flawless.

We will never be good enough in life, but he is. all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Please don't feel alone in these things.

When Christ looks on us, he sees not what we have done, but what he has done. We are seen as perfect. The hope of the gospel, it sets us free from that sin, that guilt, that shame that we feel. we are offered forgiveness. You know, in the world today, people might define themselves by their sexual identity or even their sexual activity.

Our identity is in Christ. You know, maybe you're not on a different note, maybe you're not married at all. Maybe that's something you desire, but it hasn't happened yet.

[30 : 39] Maybe it's not happened at all for you. Or maybe your marriage is broken down, or it's ended for whatever reason. Well, marriage isn't our identity either. It's not a requirement.

Paul, in his letters, he actually celebrates those who are single. He celebrates singleness and the opportunities it allows for the work of being able to do work for the Lord.

You know, nowhere is it said that there will be marriage in heaven. And I'm sure there won't be.

There will not be marriage in the same way that there is here. Now, why?

Why will there not be marriage in heaven? Well, marriage on earth is just an imperfect picture of that marriage in the day to come between the Lord Jesus and his bride.

So there will be no need for physical marriage because we will be in that perfect marriage with Christ as his believers. Marriage, relationships, relationships, or you know what, anything else in life.

[31 : 45] They do not complete us. Christ completes us and in Christ we lack nothing. And this isn't to say that we don't question things and that we find things painful, that we find things difficult, that things go wrong.

That certainly is true. but our hope is in Christ. I'm very aware that these things are real, these things can be raw, they can be painful.

So please come and chat to me after. I'd love to pray with you about these things or grab AI or grab someone in the church that you know and love and trust. It's great to be able to support and love one another in these things, in our difficulties, in our innermost turmoils, whether it's about this subject or anything else.

So please do that. Let me just pray as the band comes up and we'll end our time. God and Father, I just thank you for your word.

We thank you that we are in that blessed position of being able to read and know about the Lord Jesus and that he came. The suffering servant died for us.

[33 : 02] He took our sin upon himself. He took what we deserved. We thank you that that wasn't the end, that he died, but that he rose again and that we can have salvation in him, that we can be seen as flawless in your eyes because of the work of the Lord Jesus.

Thank you so much for the truth of these things. God, we pray that you will help us in our lives to be witnesses of your things.

Help us as well in the pain and when things go wrong. Pray that you will comfort us, that we will be there for one another and you will help us in this life.

Help us to keep that mindset of looking on the life to come where we will eternally spend salvation with you and we will be in that place where there will be no more tears, where there will be no more suffering and things will be truly perfect.

So we thank you for your word and ask your blessing on it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.