

The Beloved and his Love: A Play in Two Acts

Sermon delivered by Paul Biedler at Sovereign Christ Bible Fellowship, November 4th, 2012

Nothing in scripture is without its purpose. The full counsel of scripture is intended to illuminate truths about humanity, the nature and character of God, the person of Jesus Christ, and to challenging our present spiritual state to a more fulfilling and honoring relationship with Him.

While we understand that individual passages are often sufficient to illustrate a particular point, occasionally it is important to set at odds two passages of scripture to fully recognize a contrasting element.

For instance, in Hebrews, Paul the apostle uses scripture from Psalms 2:7, II Sam 7:14 and Ps 45:6 to support the deity of Jesus Christ, but his argument is most powerful when he contrasts Christ's position with that of the angels from Ps 104:4 and from Ps 97:7.

Jesus himself used this in Matthew 21:13 when he contrasts Isaiah 56:7 with Jeremiah 7:11 in saying: "My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."

This morning, we will see a story of "The Beloved and His Love: A play told in two acts". Our main text this morning will be from Song of Solomon chapter 2. First, we will gaze upon a scene of intimate love. We will contemplate the wondrous favors that have been bestowed upon us, and the tender fellowship that a marked one of his special choice receives.

From this, we will turn, and we will also look upon a scene of a baser sort. We will meditate on the tendency of our heart to wander, with a view toward recognizing our sinful ways, and returning to our true heart-satisfier.

I begin this morning with a text from **Revelation 2:4**:

Nevertheless I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

It does not matter where we are in our spiritual walk with Christ: there remains the root of Christ's desire for us. It matters not the extent of our labor, the firmness of our patience, the vehemence of our eschewing of evil, the wisdom of our testing of doctrine, the longsuffering of our endurance, and even the magnificence of our testimony for Christ's name: these things are but secondary to Christ's heart.

For the past six weeks, we have feasted upon the doctrines of grace as delivered by Pastor Jim. We have heard, tasted, and, I believe been filled with the manifestations of God's sovereign grace in the working of the Holy Spirit not to salvation only, but to the justification, the redemption, the preserving, the election, and the calling of those of His eternal foreknowledge.

I have selected two main texts for this morning that form a sort of play in two acts. The play has always been a vehicle for eliciting not only the emotions of the audience, but to teach something as well. A moral truth frequently is best told in metaphor, and I hope that it works to cast its illuminating the recesses of our soul.

My intent is not to evoke merely an emotional response, but that in reminding ourselves of who we are, and who Christ is, we would call upon Almighty God to captivate our hearts once again, and that he might conquer more ground from our possession, remove the edifices of our own creation, and build upon it his kingdom.

I begin with:

Act I: A Scene of Intimate Love:

Beloved:

Sgs 2:2 As the lily among thorns, so [is] my love among the daughters.

My Love

Sgs 2:3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so [is] my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit [was] sweet to my taste.

Sgs 2:4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me [was] love.

Sgs 2:5 Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I [am] sick of love.

Sgs 2:6 His left hand [is] under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me.

Sgs 2:7 I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake [my] love, till he please.

The "Song of Solomon" or "Song of Songs" can be seen as a play in itself. The title "Song of Songs" is given to illustrate its superiority above all other songs, just as the phrases "King of kings" and "Lord of lords" illustrate the superiority of the title holder. This play was performed as an antiphonal (that is anti - phone, or contrasting voices), many believe during a Jewish wedding, and it features the beloved, and his love, with the voices of the daughters of Jerusalem as the chorus. However, Song of Songs is not only a song of love between a man and his bride, but it is a picture of God and Israel, and extension as well, Christ and his bride, the Church. This shall be the love sonnet sung by the bride on that glorious day when the bridegroom comes, presided by God himself, and witnessed by the chorus of angels.

Initiating Love

I begin with verse two and we see the initiating love that he expresses to his love. There is merit in God's loving favor that he bestows on His love, but it is nothing that we can boast of. Indeed, there is nothing which human eye can discern as to why he will choose one over another, for more often than not he chooses the weak, the poor, the mean, the lowly to be inheritors of his blessing.

Hebrews 6 says:

But that which beareth thorns and briers [is] rejected, and [is] nigh unto cursing; whose end [is] to be burned.

But beloved, we have received the blessing of the Lord. We are his flower, and rather than thorns,

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of Love, hearts unfold like flowers before Thee, op'ning to the Son of Love.

And while his election of love to us is nothing to boast in, for we cannot even fathom his reasons, it is nonetheless something that we can be fully confident in, and know, that in his eye, though the rest of mankind be as thorns, we are his rare lily.

Secondly, we see

His life giving breath and His alluring fragrance.

The voice of the song is now that of the Beloved's Love – to us, to carry the love sonnet back to the one who found us to be his chosen lily, and she declares

“As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so [is] my beloved among the sons.”

An apple tree. Much has been written about the apple tree and exactly what type of tree it would be. I would like to focus however on the word itself that is translated “apple”. The language of the old testament tries to paint a picture in its description. Why is the comparison of an apple tree being made, among other trees? She could have chosen a “bay” or native tree. She could have chosen a cedar tree to illustrate his strength and firmness, or, as in the very temple, the picture of the almond tree buds and blossoms on the candlestick as a picture of God's alertness and ever abiding presence, but no – she chooses the apple to capture a two-fold uniqueness of her beloved.

First, the image of the apple is the action of breathing. We remarked above about the initiating love which Christ has for us. Here further, we have a continuation of this idea, now sung by His love. The root of this word “apple” is the Hebrew word to breathe, or to blow, and this root is the same word that we find in Genesis 2:7:

And the LORD [3068](#) God [430](#) formed [3335](#) man [120](#) [of] the dust [6083](#) of [4480](#) the ground [127](#), and breathed [5301](#) into his nostrils [639](#) the breath [5397](#) of life [2416](#); and man [120](#) became a living [2416](#) soul [5315](#)

This same word is translated in the Septuagint to the Greek word which in John 20:22 it says:

[Jesus] breathed on [1720](#) [them], and [2532](#) saith [3004](#) unto them [846](#), Receive ye [2983](#) the Holy [40](#) Ghost [4151](#)

So we find here in Song of Songs in the apple tree a picture of life-giving breath initiated by God, through the work of the holy spirit. Christ said “Live!” and he awoke in us salvation, but he also awoke our love in our hearts toward him. His life-giving breath has stirred our hearts, and turned us away from wrath, and has begun

a work that he promises to complete. My Beloved is as an apple tree – the source of life, the source of true love! None of the sons of men give revive my dead soul to life, but his most simple word quickened my very being.

Moreover, this word has the other hand the image of the apple tree contains the idea of an alluring “fragrance”, and it is a fitting word for a lover because it is his captivating and alluring fragrance that is unique among the sons, that no other can compare and one that is discovered by close fellowship.

What is this fragrance that our beloved has that is unique among the sons? While there is nothing explicit in the text itself, to further the metaphor of Christ, we look at Eph 5:2, which says:

Christ ⁵⁵⁴⁷ also ²⁵³² hath loved ²⁵ us ²²⁴⁸, and ²⁵³² hath given ³⁸⁶⁰ himself ¹⁴³⁸
for ⁵²²⁸ us ²²⁵⁷ an offering ⁴³⁷⁶ and ²⁵³² a sacrifice ²³⁷⁸ to God ²³¹⁶ for ¹⁵¹⁹ a
sweetsmelling ²¹⁷⁵ savour ³⁷⁴⁴.

The fragrance of Christ is that of sacrifice. So too does Psalm 45:8 allude by saying:

All thy garments ⁸⁹⁹ [smell] of myrrh ⁴⁷⁵³, and aloes ¹⁷⁴, [and] cassia ⁷¹⁰²,

Signifying his death on our behalf. So we see in the apple tree fitting comparisons to our Savior and Beloved, Christ himself. However, there are more treasures to be found than his life giving breath, and his sacrificial savor, we see also:

His comforting and protecting shadow

“I sat down under his shadow with great delight”

Christ’s Love finds delight in His abiding awning, His ministering mantle, His comforting covering, and His saving shroud.

It is this shadow that depicts his protection, which demonstrates an aspect of his sovereignty.

His abiding awning protects us from external threats.

Psalm 36:7

How excellent ³³⁶⁸ [is] thy lovingkindness ²⁶¹⁷, O God ⁴³⁰! therefore the
children ¹¹²¹ of men ¹²⁰ put their trust ²⁶²⁰ under the shadow ⁶⁷³⁸ of thy wings
³⁶⁷¹.

His saving shroud shields us from the righteousness of God’s burning wrath.

Jesus Christ interposes the shadow of His cross between the blazing rays of justice and us sinners. (J-F-B)

His comforting covering

Not only does he interpose his cross, but he gives us his very righteousness itself as a covering wedding garment for us:

Isaiah 61:10

I will greatly [7797](#) rejoice [7797](#) in the LORD [3068](#), my soul [5315](#) shall be joyful [1523](#) in my God [430](#); for he hath clothed [3847](#) me with the garments [899](#) of salvation [3468](#), he hath covered [3271](#) me with the robe [4598](#) of righteousness [6666](#), as a bridegroom [2860](#) decketh [3547](#) [himself] with ornaments [6287](#), and as a bride [3618](#) adorneth [5710](#) [herself] with her jewels [3627](#).

The sustenance he provides to our soul

“His fruit [was] sweet to my taste.”

Christ’s Love experiences the essence of who Christ is. Oh beloved, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Jesus says my words are spirit, and they are life. How sweet are thy words unto my taste! [yea, sweeter] than honey to my mouth! To the hungry man, even the bitterest thing is sweet, but in Christ we have the very sweetest of delights to our taste. The fullest of satisfaction is found from the fruits of his word. We have tasted the heavenly gift, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come.

There is something so powerful in the act of taking, and eating because, in fundamental ways, what we eat affects what we are. It is hardly a revelation that what we eat physically alters our bodies. If we eat strong smelling foods, others around us will know about it, in a very powerful way. What we eat changes the way that we feel, it affects our overall health and vitality. Christ’s love takes of the fruit that he offers, the fruit that he is. Today, we will partake of the Lord’s Supper. He said, take, eat, this is my body. Similarly, And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Have you tasted Christ and found him sweet? In this act of communion, by that I don’t mean the physical act of bread and juice, but the act of delighting in your beloved, do you delight in his nature, his sacrifice, his love? When you take that in to you, does has it changed you?

Later, in Sngs 7:2 the Beloved says to her:

I say I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit. Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the scent of your breath like apples,

He finds that his Love has partaken of his fruit, and the smell on her breath is the smell of the fruit that she has eaten – in other words, she has become the very scent of himself.

2Cr 2:15-16 says:

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one [we are] the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.

Oh that in eating of the fruit of Christ we would become like Christ! Oh that delighting in the taste of him we would ourselves produce the fruits of the spirit in turn.

We continue in this outpouring of feeling by Christ’s Love:

The House of Wine

"He brought me to the banqueting house,"

Literally, it is "the house of wine". In the Jewish culture the banqueting house was associated with the marriage feast. In this we are reminded of Christ's first miracle – at the marriage in Cana, he performs that of turning water into wine. Christ gladdens the heart of his people.

Where we had been athirst before, he cries to us through the prophet:

Ho ¹⁹⁴⁵, every one that thirsteth ⁶⁷⁷¹, come ³²¹² ye to the waters ⁴³²⁵, and he that hath no money ³⁷⁰¹; come ³²¹² ye, buy ⁷⁶⁶⁶, and eat ³⁹⁸; yea, come ³²¹², buy ⁷⁶⁶⁶ wine ³¹⁹⁶ and milk ²⁴⁶¹ without money ³⁷⁰¹ and without price ⁴²⁴².

Isaiah 25:6

And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

His captivating claim

his banner over me [was] love

She owns herself obliged to Jesus Christ for all the benefit and comfort she had in communion with him

The love of Christ must constrain them to fight manfully. When a city was taken the conqueror set up his standard in it. "He has conquered me with his love, overcome me with kindness, and that is the banner over me." [MH]

The intoxicating mix

Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I [am] sick of love.

So complete, and so tender are the ministrations offered by Christ, that capacity of our senses are completely overwhelmed. We may ask for support merely to be able to begin to express what then follows.

I believe that this verse is in place to heighten the effect of the following verse – just as we often prelude a statement that we wish to place special emphasis with some phrase or statement that calls the attention of the listener to the following words. Such as "you won't believe what I'm about to say".

The bride addresses Christ mainly, though in her rapture she uses the plural, "Stay (ye) me," speaking generally. So far from asking the withdrawal of the manifestations which had overpowered her, she asks for more: so "fainteth for" (Psa 84:2): [J-S-F]

His fervent embrace

The sentiment here, "His left hand," &c., nowhere else fully; which accords with the intensity of joy (Sgs 2:5) found nowhere else; in Sgs 8:3 , it is only conditional, "should embrace," not "doth."

Here, is the peak of joy. This is the pinnacle of ecstasy in the passage. That his left hand is under his Love's head, and his right hand is embracing her. The very position speaks of the intimacy of his embrace. His face can only be inches away. Every slight whisper that he might speak to her will be heard by her, and her only.

This is the highest degree of sensible enjoyment that can be attained. It may be at an early or late stage of experience. Paul (2Cr 12:7). One great Christian, on his deathbed was overheard saying, "Lord, hold thine hand, it is enough; thy servant is a clay vessel, and can hold no more" [FLEMING, Fulfilling of the Scriptures]. [J-S-F]

A parting call

I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake [my] love, till he please.

As the curtains begin to close on this beautiful scene, Christ's Love admonishes the daughters of Jerusalem by the roes and the hinds. The rest that Christ provides his people is so wonderful, so fulfilling that it is beyond comprehension. Yet in this life, it is so fleeting. Just as the deer of the field are disturbed by the slightest noise, the most minute motion, so the perfect harmony we feel in Christ is but fleeting. It has not been so long ago that I remember before Rebecca & I were married how we desired just to be with each other. There didn't need to be anything else to satisfy us, but each other only. I'm sure that for you and your own beloved it was much the same - that there were, and I hope are times when you are so entranced and fulfilled in each other, and the moment is so perfect that you are afraid that even the slightest breath, perhaps even your heartbeat itself might shatter the peaceful and magnificent spell.

Psalm 17:15

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

We would linger at this most pleasant of interludes, but we would neglect what too often we are. We see now:

Act II – A Scene of A Baser Sort

For of old time [5769](#) I have broken [7665](#) thy yoke [5923](#), [and] burst [5423](#) thy bands [4147](#); and thou saidst [559](#), I will not transgress [5674](#) [5647](#); when upon [Jer 2:20](#) every high [1364](#) hill [1389](#) and under every green [7488](#) tree [6086](#) thou wanderest [6808](#), playing the harlot [2181](#).

Here we have a starkly different passage. Where before there was tender love, here we have gross unfaithfulness. Here we still have the call of her beloved calling to her, but it is with the cry of a broken heart. It is with breaking heart that we realize

his call is to us. Nor is it to ones who have yet to experience his love that we find in this wicked state, but rather ones to whom he has poured out his every blessing, for he says that he has broken their yoke, and burst the bands that bound them. Oh Church of God! How soon we wander from the exquisite blessings of God, and chase after shadows! How quickly do we commit the very acts with another that should be reserved for our only beloved. How often do use the very blessings of God as the means to commit faithless acts against him?

Here, and in other passages of scripture, we have much of the same imagery as the most beautiful of scenes above, but it is played instead in the most debased of forms.

For example:

Every Tree

Under every green tree thou wanderest, playing the harlot.

The passage shows us that it is under every green tree. Where she herself had described here beloved as unique among the sons, here instead she casts herself before everything that strikes her fancy and indeed, of her own making.

Nor is it that we are selective about our own unfaithfulness. And what is it that we receive for our unfaithfulness?

Eze 16:31b-32:

[Thou] hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; [But as] a wife that committeth adultery, [which] taketh strangers instead of her husband!

Shadow:

They sacrifice [2076](#) upon the tops [7218](#) of the mountains [2022](#), and burn incense [6999](#) upon the hills [1389](#), under oaks [437](#) and poplars [3839](#) and elms [424](#), because the shadow [6738](#) thereof [is] good [2896](#): therefore your daughters [1323](#) shall commit whoredom [2181](#), and your spouses [3618](#) shall commit adultery [5003](#).

We were covered by the shade of Christ, now we run after a different shadow – akin to the coverings which Adam and Eve made for themselves in comparison to those coverings which God made for them.

Thou hast also taken thy fair jewels of my gold and of my silver, which I had given thee, and madest to thyself images of men, and didst commit whoredom with them,

Wine

Hosea

Then said [559](#) the LORD [3068](#) unto me, Go [3212](#) yet, love [157](#) a woman [802](#) beloved [157](#) of [her] friend [7453](#), yet an adulteress [5003](#), according to the love [160](#) of the LORD [3068](#) toward the children [1121](#) of Israel [3478](#), who look [6437](#) to other [312](#) gods [430](#), and love [157](#) flagons [809](#) of wine [6025](#).

Before, we were taken to the house of wine in celebration, now instead we love the wine itself.

The Embrace

And why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a strange woman, and embrace the bosom of a stranger?

Yet notice the difference – where it was the initiating call of her Beloved that drew her in to the sweet fellowship that she had, here she wanderest, seeking her own desire and her own satisfaction.

Where before, she sat down with great delight, here she wanderest.

We bow to God's of our own making, and in the process, make ourselves our own God.

Where in Song of Songs Christ's love has been touched by the divine, here the rebelliousness of her heart would desire to BE the divine.

We also see that she manages to convince, herself at least, that she has not done the things which we clearly has done. Though she washes herself with soap, it is not with the water of the word, and her iniquity remains marked before God. Though she says that she is not polluted, yet has she gone after other pursuits.

What are some of the ways that we commit this adultery?

Self Examination

In religious books it is sometimes placed in the forefrong of religious duties, which constant attention should be given. It is, indeed, a most important one, to be performed thoroughly and satisfactorily. But the practice of introspection – watching our frames, studying our motives, and feelings, and experiences, attempting to take the measure of our love to Christ, and torturing ourselves because of shortcoming is not a very profitable one. It is beset by many and most subtle dangers. In many instances it leads, not to self knowledge, which is a good thing, but to self consciousness and self conceit, and where this is the issue, love must decay.

The keeping of a diary, in which one tabulates his spiritual moods as he might register the rising and falling of the mercury in his barometer, has not seldom proved a serious injury to the life of the soul for this very reason. The more simply and heartily we trust the Lord Jesus, the more loyally we serve Him, resting in the assurance of His love to us; and the less self conscious we are, so much the better for our love to Him.

Books have been written with the wisdom of the Greeks: Man, know thyself. One suggests that these words should be written in letters of gold, and hung up in every Christian's chamber. The wisdom of this advice is very questionable. Without any undervaluing of self knowledge, a better motto for a Christian chamber would be: This is life eternal, that they might know The, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

Too often, we focus on the mechanics of our relationship with Christ, and not on the heart.

Absorbtion in worldly pursuits

Again, a Christian man becomes absorbed in worldly pursuits and enjoyments. ... The things that absorb him are not wrong in their own nature, nor is he conscious in choosing and serving an idol; but he insensibly forgets "Whose I am". It is business, business, business, from daylight on Monday morning till twelve o'clock on Saturday night, with scarce a pause or breathing space. He has no time for spiritual pursuits, for meditation, for making acquaintance with things unseen and eternal. Can anyone be surprised that he loses his first love? Would it not be a miracle if he kept it?

Worldly fellowships that produce worldly conformity

Once more, there are worldly fellowships followed in no long space by worldly conformity.

Work for the Lord – and it becomes for the work itself

With another, it is a different and yet like. He has been working, and in the outset has been working with the purest motives – for the Lord. In course of time, his mind gets occupied with the work itself. He attends meetings, he goes about visiting, he prays in public, he delivers addresses, and somehow, in the whirl and excitement of keeping the machinery going, Christ as a personal friend falls out of sight. The outward seeming zeal is kept up, but the inner experience ceases to justify it. The words that once came direct from the heart now come only from the lips.

Christ does not want our sacrifices. He does not need our gifts. He is not impoverished if we withhold our service. His will is not thwarted if we deny our obedience.

He desires our heart.

From whence cometh this adultery then?

It comes from the heart. If perhaps we could see our sin for what it is, then perhaps we would be repelled from it. If we behold wickedness and evil as Christ, then we would come to understand His heart a little bit more.

I do not suppose that we will fully expose the furthest recesses of our heart, or that the level of emotion that we feel in reading these passages is fully sustainable, but my intent is that we would ever nearer be conformed into Christ. Just as metal must be bent past the desired point to achieve its required form, so too must hard words be spoken to produce the yield of the soul that is necessary. Heat may be added and the change would occur more rapidly, but I do not have the blast furnace of God to make quickly the changes sought for. I only have a hammer, and a very small hammer, but I trust that if he would be ever more dear to us, then the world would be ever more revulsive to us as well.

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
All its joys are but a name;
But His love abideth ever,
Through eternal years the same. Refrain:

Oh, the height and depth of mercy!
Oh, the length and breadth of love!
Oh, the fullness of redemption,
Pledge of endless life above!

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
Sweetest comfort of my soul;
With my Savior watching o'er me,
I can sing though billows roll.

Take the world, but give me Jesus,
Let me view His constant smile;
Then throughout my pilgrim journey
Light will cheer me all the while.

Take the world, but give me Jesus;
In His cross my trust shall be,
Till, with clearer, brighter vision,
Face to face my Lord I see.

Jer
3:13

Only acknowledge [3045](#) thine iniquity [5771](#), that thou hast transgressed [6586](#) against the LORD [3068](#) thy God [430](#), and hast scattered [6340](#) thy ways [1870](#) to the strangers [2114](#) under every green [7488](#) tree [6086](#), and ye have not obeyed [8085](#) my voice [6963](#), saith [5002](#) the LORD [3068](#).

This morning we have seen the scene of intimate fellowship that we each have shared with Christ.

We have compared this to the stark contrast in a scene of gross unfaithfulness, and have recognized ourselves again.

I therefore end with the text that I began: **Revelation 2:4:**

Nevertheless I have against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember your first love. Consider him that bought you. Allow Christ to capture your heart. Stir up to remembrance the tender love and the marvelous graces that he has bestowed. Recall his kingly gifts and his captivating call. May our hearts be more inclined to abide in His presence and be satisfied with Christ alone.

May the Holy Spirit accomplish his work to the glory of God the Father, in Jesus' name.