

5th July 2020 10am Song of Songs

Transcript only of talks including copy of reading

Talk by Lindsey Attwood

Reading: Song of Songs 2

She

¹ I am a rose of Sharon,
a lily of the valleys.

He

² Like a lily among thorns
is my darling among the young women.

She

³ Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest
is my beloved among the young men.

I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.

⁴ Let him lead me to the banquet hall,
and let his banner over me be love.

⁵ Strengthen me with raisins,
refresh me with apples,
for I am faint with love.

⁶ His left arm is under my head,
and his right arm embraces me.

⁷ Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you
by the gazelles and by the does of the field:
do not arouse or awaken love
until it so desires.

⁸ Listen! My beloved!
Look! Here he comes,
leaping across 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 through the windows,
peering through the lattice.

¹⁰ My beloved spoke and said to me,
'Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, come with me.

¹¹ See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.

¹² Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves

is heard in our land.

¹³ The fig-tree forms its early fruit;
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.

Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me.'

He

¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the hiding-places on the mountainside,
show me your face,

let me hear your voice;
for your voice is sweet,
and your face is lovely.

¹⁵ Catch for us the foxes,
the little foxes
that ruin the vineyards,
our vineyards that are in bloom.

She

¹⁶ My beloved is mine and I am his;
he browses among the lilies.

¹⁷ Until the day breaks
and the shadows flee,
turn, my beloved,
and be like a gazelle
or like a young stag
on the rugged hills.

Talk

[Lindsey Attwood:]

Thank you, Kim and Jenny, thank you for reading that actually. It's really lovely to have both of your voices, because it is two voices in the Song of Songs.

Now, I don't know about you, but do any of you like to read love poems? It's not something you often talk to your friends about. I don't tend to read them but I have enjoyed work by people like John Donne and Shakespeare sonnets. I don't know if you have remembered the one that says – it's a very famous one – “Shall I compare thee to a summer's day? Thou art more lovely and more temperate.” And I can imagine many of you are in marriage relationships. I'm sure you say this all the time to your partner! I'm sure you speak in love language. Are you a romantic at heart? Or are you sort of a bit sort of shy or you do shy away from things like that? It's a very interesting thing to think about.

I wanted to start with this reading from Song of Songs. Andrew has asked me to do the talk today, and he just said to me, “Is it possible that you could talk a little bit about your own journey with God yourself?” So actually, earth things, it's not just about preaching words, it's actually about, you know, how do we live these things out. It's really important to know that this is something we live out, not just what we say from the front.

Now this book of poems is such an unusual addition to the Bible, as it's not a prophetic thing or about doctrine, it seems to be a really interesting sort of addition, nothing else quite like it. It expresses the human experience of love and desire. ‘Song of Songs’ is a bit like saying, ‘Holy of Holies’, or ‘King of kings’. It's like the song of all songs. It's about seeking and finding, and shows the human longing to be desired by another. It's about intense attraction. And there's a whole sermon in itself here about marriage that can be beautifully explored. However, my reason for including it is to share my own walk with Jesus, and its relevance to me and hopefully you. Now I've, as an artist and calligrapher, I've often written out part of this text, which hopefully Michelle will share on screen. And I've done it because, I don't know why, I think, as a calligrapher, you often do, Song of Songs have such beautiful words in it, you want to create and actually do something with so I thought I'd share this with you, something I did a long time ago. And I find it amazing how many people when they come to an exhibition or have a card really want this piece. So there is something about hope in this image, and hope in the Song of Songs. It's hope after a long winter, a lot of us often experience difficulty and things like that.

And actually, we just really need hope and I know at the minute with Coronavirus, and job losses and all those things, we really do need a sense of coming out of winter. So although Song of Songs is probably just a wonderful expression of human romantic love, it's important to know that Jesus is often referred to in the Bible as the bridegroom. And the Bible talks so much about the bride and the bridegroom, the wedding, the marriage feast, starting right back from Adam and Eve right back, going through into Revelation where we have this sort of idea of God eventually coming to get His bride. In the Old Testament, Israel is often



referred to as a woman, and Yahweh was God as rescuer and protector. And we see through some of the parables, the idea of God searching and finding us, like in the parable of the lost sheep or lost coin.

In the last few years, I have really sensed Jesus personally calling me as part of His bride. And I'm realising that he wants me to know that He's my provider, and that He's the one who truly loves me, sacrificially, to the point of going on to a cross, and He's the perfect husband. Ephesians 5, verse 25, says,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her

It's because of Jesus that the winter is now past, and He's prepared to give Himself up for His bride. It's important to know that you know, even if you are in a difficult relationship, that Jesus is that literally is the perfect husband.

I realised that before I can truly love others and serve Jesus, I really do need to know He loves me truly. Otherwise I might follow out of fear or duty rather than love. 1 John 4 verse 19 says,

We love because he first loved us.

I love [Song of Songs chapter 2] verses 3 and 4 which say

I delight to sit in his shade,
and his fruit is sweet to my taste.
Let him lead me to the banquet hall,
and let his banner over me be love.

There is a sense of play in the poem, and also being invited out from the drudgery of winter:

'Arise, my darling,
my beautiful one, come with me.

Now I know this might feel very strange: as a woman, you might think, well, this might seem appropriate to you, because Jesus is like male or into young people. Men might be thinking, "How do I actually, how do I enter into this? It doesn't seem very relevant." But I want to invite you and say this is an invitation to all of us to join in and leave the familiar. And if I'm quite honest, I know a lot of men who wouldn't admit to it, but they're quite romantic as well. And they need to be needed and loved. We all do. Young people need to be needed and loved, children need to be needed and loved. And it's a calling to adventure. It's not sentimental. I think with our modern day and age, we often think of, you know, songs, quite sentimental. This isn't sentimental. It's different and scary and exciting. Are you, am I willing to allow Him to love me like this and for me to respond? It's really important: we know that we often cite the verse, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself,"¹ as a way we want to live and I know this is a really honourable way to live, it's really important we get this commandment right. But we need to remember, that in order for us to love, we really need to understand the Source of love itself.

The Song of Songs poem is a two-way relationship: Jesus' desire is for me to seek Him back. I have taken a long time to understand Christ's love, even though I've been a Christian for a very long time. I know it in my head, but I'm learning to how to let go and trust Him. I have 'L' plates on, sometimes I'm willing and I do it, and sometimes I can hide. Trust is a huge part of following Jesus. I need to do it, as following Him sometimes takes - well, it takes me off

1 Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 19:19, Matthew 22:39, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, James 2:8 etc. etc.
<https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Love-Your-Neighbour>

anyway – it takes us off the beaten track, and you can wonder where you're going. Isaiah 55 verse 8 says,

‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,’
declares the LORD.

This is quite a scary verse in a way, because by nature, I'm quite cautious, and I quite like handrails and everything. I've always been one of those people who hates going on fairground rides and all that sort of thing, and roller coasters. I'm a bit of a wuss, and my children are much more adventurous than I am, so is Andrew. I struggle with anxiety and fear. However, where I wander off sometimes to avoid in my head where I feel a bit safe and familiar, you know, you can do that sometimes when you're feeling a little bit cautious, you go to the place where I'll do what I know is familiar, I sometimes get a voice, Jesus in my head, just a very small voice saying, "You've gone astray – come back!" I get the distinct impression that Jesus does come to find me. And He invites me to join in with the work of His Kingdom. But He reminds me that as a bridegroom, it's Him who gets to lead if I let Him. I don't know about you, but sometimes I find myself following God and following Jesus sometimes and then occasionally with a little bit of fear I'll grapple with the steering wheel or I'll try to lead again. And I can hear His voice asking me for the steering wheel back. Now the amazing thing is that Jesus doesn't grab control off us, He doesn't control us like a puppet on a string. We're not dangling off Him. And it's, you know, if you're becoming a Christian, it's not like suddenly you're being taken over. It's with permission. And He sort of waits until we give the control back, He sort of stays still. I think Jesus treats us as adults and with respect. He doesn't force us to follow Him. But He invites us to.

Sometimes during prayer, I've sensed Jesus saying, "You do have a heart condition." And initially I was a bit worried, thinking, well, maybe I've got a problem with my heart – I need go to the doctor. And I think He's sort of tongue-in-cheek and "No, you haven't understood it!" I'm a bit slow on the uptake and realise that I need to have my heart changed, you know, gradually bit by bit so that I can follow Him more and more. He wants the real me with all my faults and reminds me that all my debt is cancelled. No matter how hard I try, I can't really save myself. I might try – I like to try everything actually, I have always been a bit like that, I've always tried hard, tried hard at school, wanted to do well, and don't like it when I fail. However, the good news is, if I allow Him and follow His way, it's actually more achievable than mine. But I sometimes make it harder than it is, because I'm used to that: we're meant to try hard, jump through this hoop, pass this test. But Jesus says this, in Matthew 11, verse 29: He says,

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

I mean, that's quite refreshing, that we go, "Hang on a minute. I thought it's meant to be really, really hard!" And Jesus says 'no'. You know, His yoke is easier often than what we have we put on ourselves. But we sometimes struggle – we almost want to do it our way.

Now taking bread and wine in communion is a symbol of the fact that we need to feed on Jesus. I know it's been difficult to do this at the minute because of the whole thing, the church being closed, it's hard to do that. You could do that in your home, take bread and wine as part of an Agape meal. But it's a picture of the fact that He's the best nourishment, more than wine, chocolate, coffee, whatever you like. And He's drawing me into following more closely than ever before, and wants to train me. I think that training is an essential part of being a disciple. That includes reading and studying scripture, as well as prayer, and then hopefully living out what I'm learning. But I've also felt a

call to fast, and this is something I've never really been very good at. I really struggle with fasting: I'll be absolutely honest with you, I struggle with giving up things. I like my cups of tea; I like that sense, when I feel a bit stressed, have a glass of wine, but it's something that I really feel He's calling me into. And I get the impression sometimes, I don't know why, sometimes it's an act of spiritual warfare. I think that when we try and get close to Jesus or do what He says, I don't know if you found this yourselves, but the enemy will sometimes try and move in and distract or even accuse you or you know, or – I don't know – throw things at you and it knocks you off-course. And I can get a bit wobbly when this happens. So I sense Jesus often saying 'stand firm'. 1 Peter 5, verse 8 says,

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Now that sounds a bit scary, really, it's something that you don't really want to hear, I don't really want to hear that. I want to hear all the good stuff about Jesus being the bridegroom. Isn't that lovely? But then it's really hard when you're hearing some of the, "If you're going to do this with Me, there are going to be you know, you're going to have to actually know this, this is going to be tough as well, because you've got Me," but there is also principalities and powers that are working against Him as well. So it's just sometimes for myself, to be honest and say, I need to stop fighting sometimes with Him, when He asked me to, and I'm still learning to surrender and yield. I don't always get it right. I'm on a journey myself. And thankfully, God often says to me, this is a process. And it's a process by which you learn little bit by little bit, it's not all at one go. It's a slow learning to follow.

So following and yielding is what it means really to be a disciple and it is a response to the sacrificial love of Jesus. John 14:15 says,

'If you love me, keep my commands.'

And 14 verse 24:

'Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching.'

I can only follow someone if I actually trust them enough to know their intentions are good. I don't know if any of you have been Christians for a very long time, but there was an old song I used to sing many years ago.

Trust and obey,
for there's no other way
to be happy in Jesus,
but to trust and obey.

Don't know if you remember that song, it's a little bit, to say 'obey' is a very strange word now, it's almost quite controversial because it's almost against our own inclination or own culture.

But I don't know about you, but sometimes I think I'm cautious – it's that I know, I know it won't always be comfortable, smooth following. Jesus didn't promise an easy ride or that there would never be storms. But it's important to know that His motive is always love.

When I do doubt, I really sense the Spirit is saying, "Don't forget that I'm generous," and He is generous. And He encourages me to let go and trust. And He often says to me, when I'm sort of worrying about things, He says, "Don't overthink, don't worry."

So God has spent these past few years trying to in a way to woo me, so that I know He loves me, so that my heart hopefully will be softened, so that I can turn that outwards and share that Good News and joy with others. Can you imagine, Jesus wants to share with people that their deep desire and longing can be fulfilled in Him. His love is beautiful and life-giving. It is not tainted by selfishness and sin.

And He's also been talking to me again about 'harvest'. I may be praying earnestly about something else. But in my world, drops that into my head instead. And to be honest, sometimes I feel ashamed to say, I sort of ignore it. I can often see my own issues as more pressing. It's easy to see your, you know, just little things, things that come on: "I've got to pray for that, got to pray for this," but I know He keeps dropping it in my head. And I think this is His, what He sees, and He wants me to see what He's seeing. I think it's worth saying, you know, He loves people that much and wants to reach them through people like me, and hopefully you. Isaiah 61 says this, that "He was sent to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoner, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." That was His manifesto when He was on earth, and I think He's wants to say, using the words of the Song of Songs again, "Arise, come my darling, my beautiful one. Come with me." And am I and are you willing to yield His calling? And go where He is going?

Amen.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

[NIVUK] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#) of Hodder & Stoughton Publishing, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790