

Desiring the King

Hello, & welcome to *Voice of the Church*. A few months back, we did a few meditations on the Song of Songs; I hope to do a few more this month. Beginning at the start of the Song in chapters 1 & 2.

It starts with the words of the bride-to-be: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine; your anointing oils are fragrant; your name is oil poured out; therefore, virgins love you. Draw me away, & bring me into your chambers!” And the daughters of Jerusalem say they’ll run after them & *rejoice* in the king, whose love is better than wine!

In these opening verses, we see the bride-to-be’s *desire* for the king; & that desire is for 2 reasons: first of all, his *love*. She says that it’s better than wine; she wants his kisses; she loves his smell; she wants to be brought into his chambers & “know” him in the biblical sense... The first reason for the bride-to-be’s desire for the king is his *love*...

But that’s not the only she desires. Also his *name*, which is “like oil poured out.” A person’s name is their reputation... If your reputation is sunk, you might say your name has been “drug through the mud...” But not so with the one her heart desires. Rather, it’s like oil poured out. He has a *good* reputation: godly character. And because of his godliness & because of his love, she says, “Draw me away!” She longs to be brought into the king’s chambers!

And the daughters of Zion rejoice in her desire. “We’ll run after you! We’ll be glad & rejoice in him!” They agree: he’s a suitable choice; his love is desirable; it’s intoxicating like wine; his name is reputable; he’s a man of godly character. And, so, the bride says, “Rightly do they love you!”

What we have in these opening verses is an *exclamation of desire*. Where we see that “desire is not demonic; eros is not evil,” but is a God-given gift to be celebrated. Not endured for the sake of procreation, but celebrated.

And as we understand this desire in the context of Scripture – this sensual desire that anticipates marital-union – we learn of the sort of desire we’re to have for Christ. That’s why the church sings, “Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee,” where Bernard of Clairvaux takes the words of Song of Songs 1, & applies them to the greater-than-Solomon, the greater bridegroom, the king, whose face we long to see, & in his presence rest. Whose name there is none sweeter than...

It's why the church sings Newton's "How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds," where in the original, he refers to Christ in the 4th stanza as my "shepherd... *husband*, friend." These words from Song of Songs 1, throughout the history of the church, & history of her worship, have been understood in the context of *marriage as a gospel-mystery*; & so, the desire the bride speaks of is to be the bride-of-Christ's desire for him...

That's why the language of the daughters of Zion in v. 4, "We'll rejoice & be glad in him," picks up the language of Psalm 118 about the Lord raising up the rejected stone in whom we rejoice & are glad... Or Isaiah 25, at the Messianic feast, "This is our God: we'll rejoice & be *glad* in his salvation." The chorus of the daughters of Zion picks up this language.

The very fact they're rejoicing in the bridegroom & exclaiming his love as better than wine – & then the bride-to-be says "*rightly* do they love him," rather than jealously denouncing them – suggests this is no ordinary bridegroom. But one we're to *join* in praising: "Yes, we'll be glad & rejoice in him. His love is better than wine..." It's *intoxicating*.

This desire we see in vv. 2-4 is to be *ours*... And, yet, if we're *honest*, often it's not. But rather than finding ourselves lost in amazement at how *wonderful* Christ is, we live much of our lives as "functional-spiritual-singles..." But the song is calling us out of our functional-spiritual-singleness, to join the daughters of Zion, join the bride, join the people of God in celebrating the undying affection & godly character of the king... That's why it's written as a song, to speak to our *affections*. As one writer said, to get this song stuck in our head that we might *never* get it out... That's the goal of this song, to move us to say, "*Rightly* do they love him." To move us to say *his love is better than wine*...

This song is calling us to desire him. To have a marital-kind-of-affection for Christ, where we long for union, we meditate on his "name" (v. 3): his godly character, his attributes, the meaning of the name "Jesus" or "Christ...!" We meditate on the words of those hymns: "Jesus, the very thought of thee with sweetness fills my breast; but sweeter still thy face to see, & in thy presence rest..." Asking God to make our heart's desire the same as the bride-to-be... Who desires not only his godly character & love; but in vv. 5 & following, his words of re-assurance, as she's filled with doubt.

She desires the king, yet doubts his desire for her; & says, “I’m dark, but lovely. Do not look at me, for I am dark. The sun has tanned me, as I was made keeper-of-the-vineyards.” She’s had to work outside & has a dark complexion. Hasn’t had the luxury like those higher-class women of remaining inside, but has to work the fields. And, so, she says, “Don’t look at me. I’ve been keeper of the vineyards, but haven’t kept my *own*. I’ve not been able to keep up my appearance as I’d like.” And, so, she speaks of veiling her face, as she longs to see the shepherd-king in v.7 (a symbol of the Lord... Solomon is not a shepherd, but that’s an image for God, & the king who represents him. And a vineyard, throughout the OT is an image for God’s people... Who sometimes feel shame because of their sin or things that’ve done to them. But the shepherd-king speaks to them in v.8, “If you do not know, O fairest among women, I compare you, my love, to a mare among Pharaoh’s chariots: a perfectly built creature, filled with grace & beauty. You are beautiful, my love.” “Your cheeks are beautiful with ornaments, your neck with chains of gold.” “You’re perfect.”

He *listens* to her fears & insecurities; doesn’t dismiss them, but responds to them *tenderly* in the very ways she feels most unlovely... That’s what God does for his people in the midst of their insecurity. Assuring us in the blackness of our sin that he’s made us white as snow, he sees us as lovely because he’s made us so by uniting us to himself, & ornamented us not just with chains of gold but robes or righteousness... Again, the Song sings the gospel: the shepherd-king pursues his bride-to-be, makes her lovely, assures her of his love, & sings over her with delight... That’s what the Son of David, has done with us.

Leading us to delight in him even more, as those gracious words of assurance lead to vv. 12-14, “While the king was at his table, my spikenard gave forth its fragrance.” Like Mary of Bethany in John 12, a type of the bride of Christ who pours forth spikenard on Christ while he’s at his table, an act of devotion in gratitude for his grace. *That’s what we see in this song!* And she says he’s like a bundle of myrrh around her neck, lying close to her heart as a sweet-smelling aroma... This is a depiction of the love that the bride of Christ is to have for the heavenly bridegroom – the greater-than-Solomon, the shepherd-king, who John 12 shows us fulfills this passage... Who speaks those words to his church in v. 15, “Behold, you are beautiful, my love, behold you are beautiful! Your eyes are doves.” And then they go back-and-forth in vv. 16 & 17, leading, her in Ch. 2, vv. 1-7 to desire, not only in his love & words of assurance, but his sweetness, safety, & support.

He's like an apple tree whose shade she longs to sit in, his fruit sweet to the taste. She wants to be brought to his "banqueting house" – literally "house of wine," the place where she tastes that *love* of 1 v.2! She's longing to *be* with him. To enjoy that love that proceeds from the kisses of his mouth that's better than wine...

She desires his *safety*. We see that in v. 3 where she longs to sit in his shade & v. 4 where she envisions his banner over her. A banner of protection. A banner of love. A banner where he's the leader, under whose headship she'll gladly follow. As he gives her *support* in v. 6, laying his hand under her head... For all these reasons, the bride-to-be desires the king, & is calling us to see how all of these things are provided for us in Christ, the Son of David & greater-than-Solomon, & join her in this exclamation of desire...

Dear listener, as you hear this song, let it move you to *sing* – whether for the first time or the one-thousandth time – of the *beauty* of this king. Who takes away your sin, assures you of his grace, invites you to his house of wine, & his banner over those who look to him in faith is one of love. I pray you'll come under that banner... Thank you for listening; and may the Lord bless you.