

Sermon #234
Song of Songs 4:12-5:1
February 25, 2018

The Garden Fountain

A small, white package filled my college postal box! Oh, what a joy! College students always enjoy receiving mail, especially a package. I pulled it out quickly and tore it open. The contents inside were even better than the wrapping, as I pulled out a zip-lock bag full of freshly baked, butterscotch cookies. Now I was a happy camper for sure. But wait, the note inside made my heart skip a double beat. The warm fuzzy note was from Rachel Wachtel, the girl I had been thinking about often during Christmas break. I had to pinch myself to see if this could really be happening? Yes, cupid's arrow had flown directly to my heart.

You've all heard the adage, "The way to a man's heart is through his stomach," right? Well, that was the case with me. She later said that she sent several people butterscotch cookies in the mail that day, but I know that mine had more than anyone else. Mine had a special sentiment attached that no one else got. I'm sure of that. For my package lead to a very special, unique relationship that would continue to this day. And Rachel, I love you more today than way back then! Hey, how about some more butterscotch cookies? For old time sake?

During this season of Lent, we are focusing on a series of sermons on The Gardens of Scripture. Last week we began with the Garden of Eden and noted that even in judgement for our sins, God still offers grace. Today, we journey to another garden. This one is more metaphorical however, not an actual place. We now travel to the book of the Song of Songs. I'm guessing that not many of you have ready this book recently in your devotions, right? And you've probably not heard too many sermons on it either. In this book, we travel to the garden with a fountain. But first, we need to get a sense of what this book is all about. Why was it written and what's it all about?

First, there are many things about his book that we don't know. We don't know the identity of the author. Some think that perhaps it was Solomon, because his name is mentioned in the title and elsewhere in the book. But why would he write a book about himself in third person? It's more likely that it was written by someone in or near his life time. And the intended audience looks to be Jewish, because of all the Jewish terms and locations.

What we do know is that the story line has three main characters: 1.) a young man, the lover or the bridegroom, 2.) a young woman, the beloved or the bride, and 3.) the friends or the daughters of Jerusalem, who make up the chorus. Each has a major part to play. So, it also reads like a drama in six parts covering eight chapters. From the OT to the times of Jesus, this book was understood in its literal sense, as a love song between a young woman and a young man. But from the second century to the twentieth, it was interpreted more as an allegory, with Christ as the lover, and his

church, as the bride. It is possible to see it that way, but since the twentieth century, most scholars now interpret it again as a special love song, indicating the joy and delight of human love, particularly that of a husband and wife, or a young couple coming to be married. In fact, it has many similarities to ancient near eastern poetic love songs, especially Egyptian love songs.

Yes, this love song focuses on marriage, but it does teach us about all types of friendships, and ultimately our relationship with God. The message today is for everyone, all our relationships, but let's begin right at the focal point of this love Song.

I. This song describes a marriage relationship between a man and a woman

Now let's travel to this garden fountain, which begins with the delight of the young man. Before he calls her his garden fountain, he begins chapter 4, by explicitly describing the beauty of his young bride (vv. 1-11).

A. This is a joyous, delightful relationship.

All the senses and all descriptions of beauty and delight are used here. The young lover focuses on her beauty. "*How beautiful you are my darling! Oh, how beautiful.*" He joyfully declares that repeats it again in verse 7: "*All beautiful you are my darling; there is no flaw in you.*" Indeed, his descriptions of her beauty include:

- Her hair, which is like "*a flock of goats,*"
- Her teeth that are like "*a flock of sheep... with each having its twin*"
- Her lips that are like "*a scarlet ribbon*"
- Her temples that are like "*the halves of a pomegranate.*"
- Her neck that is like "*the tower of David.*"

Some of the descriptions are quite humorous to us in the twenty first century, and yet they are so poetic and sensual, capturing his love and joy for her. He also uses other descriptive words such as "*delightful*" (4:10); "*milk and honey*" (4:11; 5:1); "*drink your fill of love*" (5:1), and much more. This is here in scripture to show us the joy and delight that God has intended for a man and woman to experience, which is a beautiful picture of his love for us. We'll come back to that later.

It is significant to note that despite the difficulties, many married couples today are satisfied with their relationship. Philip Keller, in his book, The Meaning of Marriage, indicates that about 61-62 percent of marriages, almost two-thirds, are "very happy" about their marriage. That figure has remained steady over the last decade. He also notes that two-thirds of unhappy marriages will become happy within five years if they stay married and do not get divorced. Thus, it is worthwhile to be married. And that's really what the Song of Songs is telling us. This joyous relationship in marriage is one of deep fulfillment. Everything in this book and this passage point to intimacy and fulfilling love. And that's also because this marriage relationship is an exclusive one.

B. This is an exclusive relationship

In verse 12, the young man now identifies his beloved as a garden. To him, she is a garden. Many of his descriptive words about her include garden imagery, such as trees, orchards, pomegranates, choice fruits, incense, myrrh and aloes. And he notes that she is a garden “*locked up*.” She is a “*spring enclosed, a sealed fountain*” (v. 12). This indicates an exclusive, committed relationship between the two. Rachel may have made cookies for many people, but I’m sure they were not given with the same sentiment that was in mine. It ultimately produced an exclusive relationship.

So, it is here that the garden “*locked up*” is only for the two of them. The padlock is on the door and it can only be opened from inside. It says, all others keep out and the key is thrown away. This is a wedding for only two, a man and a woman who come together as virgins and pledge themselves to each other and to God. The New Living Translation (NLT) puts it this way, “*You are like a spring that no one else can drink from, a fountain of my own*” (NLT). This is covenant language, which is used here and throughout the Song. In 2:16, and 6:3, the young woman says, “*I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine.*” They belong to no other. That’s a covenantal relationship, which leads us to a permanent bond relationship.

C. This is an ongoing, never ending love.

Now let’s focus on that garden fountain again. Walk with me right now into that garden and gaze on that fountain in your mind. The garden fountain never stops. It never ceases to flow. It continues to water a garden night and day. So is the love between husband and wife. There is no back-door termination point. The fountain never dries up. The young man senses that her fountain is a “*well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon*” (4:15). And it’s like they both have a garden that is being prepared for them to come together in a bigger garden that includes both.

Chapter 4 in the Song of Songs is that permanent coming together. A special wedding takes place right here with witnesses and all. The young man and the young woman declare their love and commitment to each other and the friends, the chorus, all affirm the depth of their love commitment to each other. They rejoice and say, “*Drink your fill of love.*” This is the essence of the wedding vows, “*To death do us part.*”

That’s often not the case today, however. Nancy and Rob, for example, prepared for marriage with the understanding that if it didn’t work out, they would just get out of it. Another young lady told a friend, “I’m getting married next year because I love my fiancée. However, if things change, I won’t hesitate to divorce him.” Or others still go into marriage declaring that there will be no back door, and yet when trials and difficulties arise, the divorce court seems more appealing. Marriage is a covenant that is not to be taken lightly. “The concept of covenant,” says Jeff VanGoethem, “must be regained in order to restore a proper understanding of holy matrimony.” That also excludes all other forms of living together outside of marriage or simply coming together

for a one-night tryst. Those aren't commitments and are not part of the wedding covenant as God has designed it for us and is evident throughout scripture.

Going back to the Garden of Eden, the covenant of marriage is expressed as a man is to *"leave his father and mother and be united with his wife."* That is a covenant, which is not a mere contract or agreement that can easily be broken. It involves a public commitment between a man and a woman and their God who is bringing them together to form one flesh (Gen. 2:24), which also occurs in our passage of chapter 4 in the Song of Song. For there are many similarities between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and this couple and in chapter 4. Then in Malachi chapter two, God rebukes the husbands in Israel for divorcing their wives and reminds them of their covenant with them. And in Matt. 19, Jesus himself spoke in favor of marriage and not divorce when he said, *"So they [the married couple] are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."*

Yes, the garden fountain in the Song of Songs portrays a beautiful, loving relationship between husband and wife – one that is to be joyful, exclusive, and permanent. The fountain never stops flowing. Does this have anything to say about all our relationships? Of course, it does.

II. This Song leads to love in all relationships

All relationships can be refreshed in love. This poetic book is a love Song that leads to the refreshing of all relationships. It teaches us the joy of giving to others and putting them first over us. There is no self-centeredness in this relationship. But in our society, we often put ourselves first and think more about our own interests and agenda than those of others. We live in a society that focuses on "me-first" and individual gratification. It's more about me, than the other person. But this Song of Songs, even though dedicated primarily to marital love, shows us that all relationships are to put the other person first – their interests over our own. The only way that the young man and the young woman can truly love is by putting the other first in the relationship. The joy that each one receives is in giving and in delighting in the other person. There is nothing selfish in this whole poetic Song. They do seem to have a lover's spat in chapter 5 and they become separated for a brief time, but then they learn to get back together again later on. Tough times come in any relationship. But the hard work of staying in there and having the tough conversations is worth it all. We then learn not to be self-centered but others centered. 1 John 4:11 exhorts us to truly *"love one another."*

Ed Shaw has three suggestions for making all friendship relationships intimate and healthy.

- First, make time for people. Simply lingering after a church service, talking with each other is not enough. Do activities together. Get to know each other.
- Second, begin to share intimacies with your friends. Trust them with your worries, doubts, fears and pain. Ask them about their own.

- Third, Persevere! Many friendships don't last because they don't take the time to overcome the initial arguments or misunderstandings. He affirms that his "best friendships are the ones that have imploded – but then been slowly rebuilt."

Yes, the Song of Songs points us to healthy relationships in all of life, but even more, it points us to God's love for us and Jesus' love for his church.

- III. This Song points ultimately to God's love for us and Christ's love for the church.

Dick read earlier from 1 John 4:16-19, which states that "*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.*" And it also says that "*God is love and we love because he first loved us.*" He is the young lover who pursued us, his bride, for a joyful, lasting relationship. Jesus himself talked about the type of fountain that never runs dry, the one with living water that is offered to all. In John 7:37, 38, he said to everyone at the Jewish Festival, "*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.*" The true garden fountain is Jesus. All of us are thirsty, so let's drink from his fountain today and then our fountain will never run dry. We, too, will be like that ever-flowing garden fountain. Then every marriage, every loving relationship can be a sign post for what it means for all to have a relationship with God.

Our relationship with God is to be joyful and intimate, permanent, and exclusive. We are to worship no other gods but him. Thus, we are in a time of preparation, learning more about how to love him and be prepared for his coming. The young woman in the Song had to prepare herself for her husband. She called for the winds to awaken from the north and the south to spread the incense around for her husband. So, we too, must be made ready for Christ, as his bride. Rev. 19:7 foretells the final moment, "*For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready.*" The final garden of paradise will be the rejoining of humans to God forever. Now is the time of preparation.

Conclusion

During this season of Lent, it is appropriate for us to focus on love.

- Married couples: renew the covenant of our marriage relationships. All you who are married today, take the time to build your relationships. Spend time with each other. Renew your vows to each other.
- Church, let us all renew our friendship relationships today, putting others first over ourselves. If there is anyone that you have had a falling out with recently, go to them and make attempts for reconciliation if possible. Take one of the hearts you see here in the sanctuary and give it to someone after the service. Tell them how much you love and appreciate them.
- Finally, let us renew our love relationship with God. Put him first. Have no other gods before him. Let him love you and renew your love for him. Let the garden fountain overflow with continuous love.