

The Rose of Sharon

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the Song of Solomon, the Song of Solomon, and if we read it from the beginning of chapter 2, Song of Solomon, chapter 2.

I am a rose of sherem, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women. As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.

He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. But particularly the declaration that's made at the beginning of the chapter, I am the rose of sherem. I am the rose of sherem.

The Song of Solomon is one of those books in the Bible that's rarely, or sometimes reluctantly, preached upon. In fact, I'd almost be tempted to compare it to Marmite, because like Marmite, you either have a real taste for it, or you can live without it. And some people are like that when it comes to this book, The Song of Solomon, because some people, they can't get enough of it. They love The Song of Solomon, and they love reading it, and they love hearing sermons on The Song of Solomon. But others, well, they rarely consider its contents, because they view it as quite graphic in some places. But you know, it was the 19th century prince of preachers, Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He loved The Song of Solomon, and he preached on it over 60 times, because he believed that The Song of Solomon, it speaks so clearly about the relationship between Jesus Christ and his bride, the church. And Spurgeon, he wasn't alone in his view, because the medieval church father, he was called Bernard of Clairvaux, he preached 86 sermons on chapters one and two alone. What's more is that the German reformer, Martin Luther, another one in this category, he preached on The Song of Solomon? He preached on the Song of Solomon many times. And even when he was teaching on how to preach, he was teaching preachers how to preach. And he said to the preachers, he said to them, your hearers, your hearers should leave church echoing the Song of Solomon, saying, he is altogether lovely. Now, boys, even my good friend and my colleague Hugh Ferrier, he loves preaching from The Song of Solomon, where you could say almost every second sermon that Hugh preaches is from The Song of Solomon. In fact, last Lord's Day, Hugh preached both ends of The Lord's Day on The Song of Solomon. I thought he would have calmed down a bit now that he's getting married and found a wife. But no, Ferrier is still going strong, and he's still preaching The Song of Solomon. And he falls into this category of loving The Song of Solomon.

But then there's John Calvin. John Calvin, as you know, he preached thousands of sermons. He preached through books of the Bible. He preached hundreds of sermons in Genesis and Exodus and Isaiah. And yet Calvin never preached on The Song of Solomon. I don't know why he didn't, but he didn't.

[3 : 5 9] And until this evening, I was in Calvin's category, because this is my first ever sermon on The Song of Solomon. It's not the first place I would come to, but I want us to look at it this evening.

And as we look at it this evening, as you can probably guess, I'd like us to consider The Song of Solomon under three headings. The Song, The Sinner, and The Saviour. The Song, The Sinner, and The Saviour.

So first of all, The Song. Look at chapter 1 and verse 1, where it says, The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. 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. And you know, from the outset of the book, we know immediately that this book is a song. It's a poetic song of Solomon, who was the king in Israel. But what's interesting is that we're told in 1 Kings 4, verse 32. 1 Kings 4, verse 32, we're told that Solomon wrote 1,005 songs.

And this song is just one of them. But as we're told in verse 1, this is the song of all of these songs. This is the song of Solomon's songs. This is the greatest hit. This is the song of songs.

[5 : 41] And you know, that phrase there, the song of songs, it was actually a Hebrew idiom that's used throughout the Bible. We have here the song of songs, but when you look into the book of Exodus, we're told about the holy of holies. And you look in other places of Scripture, we see that Jesus is the Lord of lords. He's the king of kings. He's the God of gods. So there's this Hebrew idiom that's used here. This is the song of songs. This is the best of the best. This is Solomon's greatest hit. It was the song for which Solomon would be remembered. It's the song of songs.

And it's the song of Solomon. But in recent years, many theologians, they have moved away from the historical position of viewing the song of Solomon as an allegory, an allegorical song about Christ and his bride, the church. And theologians, they've moved away to this more literal view.

They approach the song and look at it as a manual for marriage. But you know, I don't think that Solomon could have ever written a manual for marriage because, as you know, he had 700 wives and 300 concubines, which is why I would always take the traditional view, the view that's been held for so many hundreds of years, that this is an allegorical song with many metaphors and many images and illustrations about this, about the covenant love of Jesus Christ for his bride, the church.

But you know, in a sense, even as we consider the relationship between Christ and his church, the song of Solomon, it is a manual on marriage because marriage is to be mirrored on Christ and his church. Marriage is to be mirrored on the first marriage in the Garden of Eden between Adam and Eve.

Marriage is to be mirrored on the creation ordinance of marriage, that marriage was created by God. Marriage is a covenant relationship between one man and one woman. And you know, this is why when Paul taught the Ephesians about the importance and the integrity of marriage, he not only wrote about the creation ordinance of marriage and the covenant relationship of marriage, but he also emphasized what the perfect marriage is. The perfect marriage of Christ to his bride, the church. That is the perfect marriage. That's what we are to mirror our marriage on. As Paul said in Ephesians 5, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her. And you know, that's what's being realized and even revealed here in the Song of Solomon, that this is a love song. This is a messianic song about Jesus and his church. It's a messianic love song, just like the song we were singing in Psalm 45. Psalm 45 is a messianic love song. We're going to consider it, God willing, on Wednesday evening. It's a love song which depicts and describes the covenant relationship between Jesus and his bride, the church.

[9 : 07] And Psalm 45, like it is here, in Psalm 45, Jesus is portrayed as the King of Kings. He's the one who desires the beauty of his bride, where he calls her to come to him and to commit herself to him in covenant relationship. He calls her to come and so that he can claim her as the daughter of the King.

That's what we were singing in Psalm 45. Behold, you know, I love those words. Behold the daughter of the King, all glorious is within, and with embroideries of gold, her garments wrought have been. She shall be brought unto the King in robes with needle wrought. Her fellow virgins following shall unto thee be brought. And then there's this wonderful verse, they shall be brought with gladness great, and mirth on every side into the palace of the King, and there they shall abide. You know, that's the image. That's the illustration which is being used here in this song, the song of Solomon.

It's a song about Christ and his bride, the church. But you know, the song of Solomon, it isn't a song which is to be torn apart or taken apart and dissected. No, these eight chapters of the Song of Solomon, they are eight chapters of poetry, and you're to read them and enjoy them as a whole.

You're to read them in one sitting because they are depicting and they're describing to us the relationship between the sinner and the Savior. They're depicting and describing the relationship between the sinner and the Savior. So this is the Song of Solomon. That's the first point, the song.

But then we see secondly, the sinner. The sinner. Look at verse 5 of chapter 1. It says, I am very dark but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

[11 : 24] Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me. On the 14th of August, 1836, a young man who was later to have a remarkable ministry, he preached with a view to a call in a Scottish congregation. So boys, are you listening?

He preached with a view to a call in a Scottish congregation, and the passage he chose to preach on was from the Song of Solomon. But it was the opening words of his sermon that really startled this congregation he was preaching before. Because the preacher, he measured the reality and the relevance of someone's Christianity according to the Song of Solomon. He measured the reality and the relevance of someone's Christianity according to the Song of Solomon. He said that their Christianity was either in their head, it was hollow, or in their heart. Your Christianity is either in your head, it's hollow, or in your heart. This is what he said. He said, there is no book of the Bible which affords a better test of the depth of your Christianity than the Song of Solomon. If your Christianity is all in your head, then you worship God with your lips, but your heart is far from him.

He says, you have a heartless religion. But if your Christianity is hollow, it's just like the seed which fell upon the rocky ground, it quickly springs up, but then withers away and falls away, because it has no depth, no root, and no earth. But he says, if your Christianity is in your heart, you'll not only have doctrine in your heart, but you will also have love to Jesus in your heart. You'll have felt your need of Jesus, he says. You'll cling to Jesus, because he is the chiefest among 10,000 and altogether lovely.

And the preacher asked, where is your Christianity? Where is your Christianity? Is it in your head? Is it hollow? Is it in your heart? The young man, boys, the young man who was preaching with a view to a call was Robert Murray McShane. The congregation he was preaching to was St. Peter's Church in Dundee.

And what's remarkable is that although McShane's ministry was very short because he died at the age of only 29, and yet McShane, he preached on every single verse in the Song of Solomon.

[14 : 14] And that's because McShane's Christianity was in his heart. McShane's Christianity was in his heart. McShane not only had doctrine in his head, but he loved Jesus in his heart. And he knew his need of Jesus. He knew his need to cling to Jesus. He knew his need to claim Jesus as the chiefest among 10,000.

He knew his need to confess Jesus as the one who is altogether lovely. And, you know, McShane knew his need because McShane knew that he was a sinner, a sinner saved by grace. McShane knew that he was a sinner saved by grace. In fact, when preaching from the Song of Solomon, McShane said, he said, you will never find Jesus so precious. That's when the world is one vast howling wilderness. Then he is like a rose, he says, blooming in the midst of the desolation, or a rock rising above the storm. And McShane, he goes on to say, do not set your hearts on any flower of this world. They will all fade. They will all die. But set your heart. Prize the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley, because Jesus never changes. Live nearer to Christ than any person on this earth, he says, so that when they are taken away, you may have him to love and him to lean upon, because he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, says McShane, and this is my friend. You're my friend. McShane, he was someone who clung to Jesus in his heart. He was a sinner saved by grace, which is why he loved the Song of Solomon. He loved the Song of Solomon, because that's the image and the illustration that's been presented and portrayed in this love song of a sinner being saved by grace. Because as you read through this song, this poetic song, you see that there's this conversation, this covenant conversation between a man and a woman. And it's a covenant conversation because it's all love language. We see that even in the opening chapter. It's all love language. It's a love song. But the man in the song, he's a prince. And he's in love with this woman. But the woman is a peasant. She's a peasant in love with a prince. But as a peasant, this woman, she doesn't consider herself worthy to be looked upon, let alone loved by the prince, because she sees herself as unworthy.

She sees herself as unclean. And as Solomon opens his Song of Songs, this peasant woman, he describes the peasant woman as someone who is daydreaming about her prince. She's looking for her prince. She's longing to be loved by her prince. She's longing to have a relationship with her prince. She's seeking and searching for her prince because she says, she says, this is what she's dreaming, let me kiss him.

Let me kiss him. Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your love is better than wine. You know, it's a real Cinderella song because she's looking and she's longing for this prince charming to sweep her off her feet. She's looking and longing for him to call her and to claim her as his own.

She's looking and longing for her prince to make her his. But she knows what she is. She knows what she is. She knows that she's not regal or royal in any way, shape or form.

[18:17] She knows that she's not a princess. She doesn't have any ownership of the throne. And you know, she wonders why the prince would ever look upon her.

She wonders why the prince would ever love her as a peasant. And that's what she confesses in verse 5. She says, I am very dark, but lovely. O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon, do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has looked upon me.

The sun has looked upon me. This peasant woman, she sees herself as someone who is so unworthy and so unclean because she's dark. It's not for any racial reason that she sees herself as unworthy and unclean. She calls herself dark because she's tanned. I am dark, very dark.

She has tanned skin. And she has tanned skin because she's working out in the field as a peasant under the hot sun of the day. And you know, nowadays, you know, most, well, a lot of women, they like to look tanned, whether it's a real tan or a fake tan. But you know, in the past, in the olden days, as Finlay would call it, peasants were tanned. Peasants were tanned because they were lowly workers who worked all day out in the field under the hot sun. But the nobility and the royalty, they were always pale-skinned. They were never tanned because they never worked under the hot sun. They never even sat in the sun. They always sat in the shade. So if you had tanned skin, you were of working class. But if you had pale skin, you were known as the rich upper class.

In fact, in the 18th century, you see it in all these paintings and pictures. In the 18th century, women would even powder their faces to make them even whiter. And they would have red, rosy cheeks.

[20 : 29] And I'm sure you've seen the paintings and the portraits. Because the whiter you were, the more regal and royal your family was. And sadly, that was the problem of the 18th century.

Slavery was a problem in these centuries because there was this racial divide between the white and those who were dark. But you know, Solomon's song, and this is the beautiful thing about the Bible, Solomon's song beautifully breaks that barrier and that boundary. Because as you read through Solomon's song, you see that the peasant woman's dream comes through because she's invited to the banqueting house.

She's invited to meet the prince. She's invited to experience and to enjoy the fragrance and the food and the fellowship at the feast of the prince. And you know, you read the song, and you can easily relate to this character in Solomon's song. Because like this peasant woman, we see ourselves as completely unworthy and unclean to come to Christ for salvation.

And you know, my unconverted friend, whether here or at home this evening, you might think that you're too unworthy and too unclean to come to Christ for salvation. You might think that you're too unworthy and too unclean to claim Christ as your Savior. You might think that you're too unworthy and too unclean to confess Jesus as your Lord and your Savior. But my friend, let me tell you, that doesn't change when you become a Christian. That doesn't change. Every Christian here will tell you, you still feel unworthy. You still feel unclean. In fact, the longer you're a Christian, you feel more unworthy and you feel more unclean. You don't feel better about yourself. You actually feel worse. But this is the beauty of the gospel. That's why we must come to Christ. Not because there's anything good in us, but it's all good in Him. That's why we must come to Him because He is worthy.

We are completely unworthy. He is clean. We are unclean. That's why we must come to Him and keep coming to Him and keep confessing Him as our Lord and our Savior. That's why we must keep claiming Him and clinging to Him as the lover of our soul. Because He is, as He says Himself, He is the rose of Sharon.

[23 : 21] He is the lily of the valleys. He is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. And you know, if you feel unworthy and if you feel unclean, you come. Oh, you come to this Christ. And even as a Christian, when we feel unworthy, when we feel unclean, where else do we go but to Him? And to keep going to Him and keep confessing our sin before Him and committing our lives anew to Him, because He is the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. He's the Savior. He's the Savior.

That's what I want us to see lastly. The Savior. So the song, the sinner, and the Savior. The Savior. Look at chapter 2 and verse 1.

My father had an auntie who passed away just a few years ago, and she was a godly Christian woman.

She lived in tongue most of her married life, but laterally, when she began to suffer with dementia, she moved to Aberdeen to live with her daughter. And you know, what always amazes me about many Christians, not all Christians, but many Christians who suffer with dementia or Alzheimer's, is that they can forget who their family is. They can even forget who they are, but they don't forget their Savior.

They don't forget their Savior. And you know, it was on my first year placement in college. I was doing a placement in Bon Accord Free Church in Aberdeen. And while I was there, I went out to visit the family, and I was visiting this great auntie. And she was asking all the usual questions, as you would, who are you? Where are you from? What are you doing here? But because she had dementia, and her memory was quite bad, as you know from your own experience, she asked me the same questions a number of times.

[25 : 51] But then her daughter said to me, and this is what always reminds me of verse 1, her daughter said to me, say to her, I am the rose of Sharon. Say to her, I am the rose of Sharon.

And as soon as I said it, I am the rose of Sharon, she finished the verse, and the lily of the valleys. But not only that, she went on to quote the entire chapter of Solomon, Song of Solomon, chapter 2.

She went on, I am the rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys. As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the women. And she went on right through the whole chapter, word for word.

And it was amazing, amazing listening to her just reel the whole chapter off. But you know what astonished me was that when she finished, she turned to me again, and she said, and who are you? And where are you from? And what are you doing here?

She had forgotten who I was, but she hadn't forgotten her savior. And as you know, dementia and Alzheimer's, they're awful diseases that affect the mind and the memory. But what's amazing is that it doesn't affect the soul. It doesn't affect the soul. Because as Solomon reminds us in his song, Jesus is the lover of our soul. Jesus is the lover of our soul. He loves your soul.

[27 : 30] And as Jesus declares to his bride, the church, he says, I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. And you know, we're familiar with these I am sayings, are we not? Throughout Scripture, Jesus reveals himself using all these I am sayings. He reveals himself to Moses at the burning bush. He says, I am who I am. Jesus reveals himself in the Gospels.

He says, I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the door. I am the good shepherd. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the true vine.

And even as the canon of Scripture comes to a close, Jesus is saying once again, I am the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. We're familiar with all these I am sayings, but here, boys, Jesus is saying, I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys. I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys. Now, Sharon was a fruitful plain in Israel. It was right on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. And it was described as a peaceful plain and a peaceful place. It was a place of beauty. There was lots of flowers there. There was an array of beautiful flowers in this plain.

Lots of flowers grew there. But we're told that the rose of Sharon, it was considered and it's been called the fairest and the most beautiful flower in the field. It's the fairest and the most beautiful flower in the field. And you know, Solomon here, he's using this image and illustration in order to picture Christ in heaven. It's a picture of heaven because heaven, as we know or will know, one day, heaven is a place of beauty. And yet Jesus, this is the wonder of the gospel, Jesus, our rose in heaven.

He humbled himself into the bramble bush, the thorn bush, this valley, the valley of this world. The rose of heaven humbled himself into the valley of this world. He humbled himself, as we often say, from the crown to the cradle, all the way down, down to the cross. And he did it. Why? Out of love.

[30 : 15] In order to rescue us, to redeem us, to reconcile us, to restore us. And that's why our Savior says, that's why Jesus says, as the rose of Sharon, he says, I am the rose of Sharon. I am the lily in your valley. I am the rose of Sharon. I am the lily in your valley. And you know, as we read there in verse 4, the sinner responds, verse 4, and says, he brought me. He brought me to his banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. He brought me to the gospel table.

And didn't he bring us? He brought me to the gospel table. And what we discovered at the gospel table was the fullest of fear, the finest of food, and the freest of fellowship. He brought me to the banqueting house. He brought me to the gospel table, and he told me, come. Everyone who thirsts, come. Come to the water. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price. He brought me to the banqueting house. And you know, as we were saying to the children this morning, when he brought me into the banqueting house, he raised his banner over me.

His banner of love he raised over me. He declared his love for me. He demonstrated his love towards me. He displayed his love for me through the cross of Calvary, because his banner over me is love.

His banner over me is love. Greater love, said Jesus, greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.

And you know, you consider these words in the Song of Solomon, and you think, well, it's no wonder. It's no wonder McShane said, do not set your heart on any other flower of this world, because they will all fade. They will all die. He says, prize the rose of Sharon, prize the lily of the valley, because he is my beloved. He is my friend. He's the fairest among 10,000. He is altogether lovely. And my friend, that's what we should do. Even as we go into a new week, that's what we should do. Do not set our heart on any other flower of the field, but claim and confess Jesus as our rose of Sharon, our lily in our valley. He is the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. But you know, as we conclude this evening, I want to quote you some lyrics of a song, a song which beautifully captures the sentiments of Solomon's song. It's a hymn that

[33 : 24] Marion Graham, she often would sing it at fellowships. I've heard her singing it a number of times. I think she sang it at the woman for mission night. Maybe she didn't. I don't know. I'm not sure. But you know, I love the words of it. And maybe you've heard the hymn before.

It goes, Sing me a song of Sharon's rose, fairest and sweetest flower that grows. In that fair land across the sea, emblem of Christ who died for me. Oft had I wondered o'er life's rough way, like a lost sheep that had gone astray. Till one glad day I found repose. Now in my heart bloom Sharon's rose. Bloom on sweet flower and point the way to that fair land of perfect day, where I shall lift my longing gaze on Sharon's rose through endless days. And the chorus is sweet rose of Sharon, blooming for me. Jesus, it is the emblem of thee. Beautiful flower, fairest that grows. I'm glad that I found thee, sweet Sharon's rose. I'm glad that I found thee, sweet Sharon's rose. And you know, can you say that tonight? That's what we all need to say.

I'm glad that I found thee, sweet Sharon's rose. Because Jesus says to us tonight, I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.

O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy love towards us. And we pray that we would remember the love of God, that we would not forget it or lose sight of it. And that even as it's expressed and explained here and in images and illustrations of a song, help us Lord to understand understand of what it speaks of. It speaks of our beautiful Saviour, the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. And Lord, help us to know him and to follow him and to love him. To love him because he first loved us. To follow him day by day, to keep looking to him, claiming him and confessing him as our wonderful Saviour. Watch over us, Lord, in the week that lies ahead, a week that is unknown to any of us.

The Lord we commit and we commend ourselves into thy care and keeping, knowing that thou art the God who promises to keep our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

[36 : 21] Take away then our iniquity, receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. And we're going to sing, in conclusion, we're going to sing the words of Psalm 116.

Psalm 116, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 395. Maybe we'll do the questions before we sing, will we?

You got your answers? Yeah? Okay. Question one, who always preaches on the Song of Solomon? You're going to kill me for saying this.

Hugh Ferriot, yeah, he always preaches on the Song of Solomon. It doesn't stop. Who was the young man who preached on the Song of Solomon? Who was the other young man? Hugh's, sorry?

Robert, Murray, Mac, Mac Shane. Yeah, well done. Very interesting man. He died at the age of 29, but he preached on every verse in the Song of Solomon.

[37 : 30] So Hugh has a bit to catch up on, to catch up with Mac Shane. And lastly, important question, who is the Rose of Sharon? Jesus, yeah.

If in doubt, always say Jesus. He is the answer. So Jesus is the Rose of Sharon, the lily of the valley. So we're going to sing, in conclusion, Psalm 116, page 395.

We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked 6. And as we said many times before, this psalm is the confession of the Christian. It's the testimony of everyone who has come to know and love the Lord.

I love the Lord because my voice and prayers heeded here. I, while I live, will call on him who bowed to me his ear. We'll sing down to the verse marked 6 of Psalm 116 to God's praise.

Psalm 116, ch schreiben, singing, ■ Because my voice some prayer treated here, I, while I am with all men, Who bow to me is here.

[38 : 55] Up there the hearts and sorrows In the bounty come last month, The pins of heaven to hold on me, I keep the troubled fire.

Upon the name of all the Lord, Blended I call and stay.

Deliver of my soul, O Lord, Thine duty only pray.

God merciful and righteous, Be gracious, our Lord, The sins of me I once brought to, O Eden, Eden, our Lord.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, The fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.