

# **Life Under the Apple Tree**

## **(Song of Solomon 2:3-14)**

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**Dave G Roberts**

Introduction

1. The Beloved's Portrait of the Lover (SoS 2:3-6)
2. The Beloved Encourages Others about the Lover (SoS 2:7-9)
3. Lover is like no other and wants to hear your voice (SoS 2:10-15)

Recapitulation

Conclusion

## Introduction

Tomorrow is Chinese New Year! Happy Chinese New year to you! Tomorrow is also Australia Day, when all Australians are supposed to celebrate the arrival to Botany Bay, of Captain Cook and the First Fleet in 1788, marking the start of British colonization of Australia. Of course since then, Australia has been repaying the so called mother country, by sending some of its citizens back over to here!

So with that said, please do open your bibles to the Song of Solomon! It can be found on page 679 in the Church Bibles. I of course don't know when you last read it, heard a talk about it or if you have ever read it or heard a talk about it! So, if you are in that category, it's a new thing for you! In my preparation, as I talked to other Christians about this book, I have found that some people are aghast at some of the very frank and provocative language used! But this should not stop us from reading it, studying it and learning from it. It is, after all, part of the Bible and therefore part of God's Written Word. Jesus Himself and the Disciples would have read this book at Passover time. It is a book that tells of the love of a woman (the Beloved) for a man, the man probably being Solomon. Different translations have different places where the beloved, the lover and others are actually speaking. But for ease of use tonight, we will use the guidelines of the church bibles, the New International Version.

The Jews called it the Greatest Song of All Songs. Martin Luther called it the noblest of all songs! It is poetry that is full of love, romance and some say eroticism. Greater than Shakespeare's sonnets if you can believe that! Tonight, we are delving only into Chapter 2.

Historically this book has been interpreted in 3 ways

Firstly as a treatise on the joys of biblical sexual love;

Secondly as an allegory for God's love for His people Israel;

These two interpretations have great merit! However, some of you may be sad to know and others very happy to know, that I am going to concentrate

principally on a third way that encompasses those two and that is seeing it as a picture of the immense love that exists between Jesus Christ for His church and its people, where the bridegroom is Jesus and His bride is the church. Paul highlights this relationship in his letter to the Ephesians.

Before I forget, I should say that I am also aware of another difficulty, and that is that British men and Australian men have one thing in common – we are not very good at saying or doing things to do with love! We find it embarrassing and cumbersome. I don't know about South Africans or other nationalities though! So, hopefully with the help of the Holy Spirit, this may also make us become better men as well as feeding our minds and hearts about the love that exists between Jesus and the church!

## **Part One - Song of Solomon 2:3-6**

### **The Beloved's Portrait of the Lover**

#### **Read Verses 3-6**

This is the beloved's portrait of her lover, the bridegroom. He is an apple tree! Wives, have you ever called your husband an apple tree! And of course He is an apple tree, because this lover, this bridegroom provides her with shelter, protection and food. And she enjoys it. Delighting in being strengthened, refreshed and being in love. As he embraces her, she feels his compassion, his warmth, his love for her and his strength. How does that talk of Jesus and his love for the church, His people, His bride?

#### **Firstly, Jesus is the Bread of life**

Three times in John 6, Jesus refers to Himself as the living bread. By this He meant that He was the only one who could satiate the appetite and yearning of every person's spirit. For those He was speaking to, bread was a basic staple food for living, just as it is for millions of people today. Jesus indicates when saying He is the bread of life, that He will supply all needs! Just as He said to the woman at the well in John 4v4, that whoever drinks His living water shall never again go spiritually thirsty. When Jesus referred to the manna in the desert (John 6v49) he talked of it being merely temporary, despite being a gift from God. He, however, as the true bread of life gives permanent satisfaction and life everlasting to all those who believe and follow Him (John 6v51)! But this bread He offers, has to be eaten; it has to be taken up by the person wanting spiritual life! If you are seeking spiritual nourishment, then ask! Have you eaten of this bread?

## **Secondly, Jesus is the Good Shepherd.**

Jesus is the great protector, the great Shepherd. It is through Jesus and Jesus Christ alone, that salvation and spiritual protection and is found and through Him alone as the door or the gate, that people are led safely and soundly into spiritual freedom, spiritual light and spiritual sustenance. Unlike others who come only to steal, kill and destroy, Jesus offers spiritual safety & nourishment. Jesus protects those whom He loves and who loves Him! Jesus does not just offer a way out, but also a way in! The security offered by Jesus is because He is always in close proximity to those who follow Him. Jesus calls all those who follow Him by name (John 10v3) and they know each other.

Jesus is the great shepherd only through the sacrifice he must make for His sheep. Here Jesus is looking ahead to the sacrifice He makes on the Cross. The cross is referred to in the New Testament as the tree on which Jesus hung. His protective and nourishing love for all of humanity compels Him to make the ultimate sacrifice of His death on the tree. Just as all shepherds will endanger themselves for the protection and safety of their sheep, so too did Jesus endure the pain and suffering of the Cross, so that people can be led into the eternal safety of God's kingdom. It is in this role of shepherd, that Jesus exhibits true leadership, which is self-less and sacrificial.

I saw this week an example of a shepherd protecting his flock. It was up near Crowe and I was driving back from Burley, and there were a flock of sheep on one side of the road and the shepherd on the other. He was on a bicycle and the sheep were looking at him for directions! His sheep knew him and were looking to him and he was protecting them from being run over by a maniac in a green Fiesta! Are you looking to the great shepherd, Jesus Christ for safety, protection and guidance?

These are just two examples of Jesus himself saying He protects, nourishes, gives shelter and loves. Many more examples can be found in the Gospels. Just as there is only one lover for this woman, there is only one Saviour for the world. Jesus does not say I am a true vine; a way, a truth and a life. He does not say I am a door to life, just as He does not say I am a shepherd, a door, a

light or a bread of life. No – Jesus is the only way, the only truth and the only life. Jesus is the one great shepherd and the only door to life. Jesus is the only light of the world and the only true bread of life. Jesus is the apple tree, and calls everyone to partake of the nourishment and shelter only He can provide.

## **Part Two - Song of Solomon 2:7-9**

### **The Beloved Encourages Others about the Lover**

Read verses 7-9

Here now, the beloved addresses her friends and other people, not be impatient! These women were being persuaded by the beloved not to engage in sexual love until their marriage! Who were they? We don't know! But we do know from the rest of Scripture that sexual love is only for those in a committed monogamous marriage between a man and a woman. Sexual union, between a man and a woman in a committed married relationship, is a picture of the union of God and His people - that's why adultery and sexual immorality is also idolatry.

Then the Beloved calls out "Listen! Look" Here he comes! She is expecting him to arrive at any time! The Beloved is waiting for her lover! She has a glimpse of Him but is waiting for His bodily presence with her.

Is this not a picture of us, as the church awaiting Jesus Christ to come again? Before Jesus ascended into the clouds, He said He would be coming again! Not as a little baby next time, but coming from the clouds in great glory, honour, jubilation and exaltation! Nobody knows when that will be! There are hints in the Bible, but they are only hints! We are to wait expectantly and to live lives that are worthy of Him now, as we partake of righteousness and wait for Jesus to come again.

#### **Tell the story of John.**

Last weekend we were in London to meet up with old friends. It was a blast, we had a banquet, and there were 9 adults and 6 kids in our favourite Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown. We have all known each other for over 14 years now. One person wasn't there though. When we were walking and talking later on, two of my friends, individually of each other, told me about John. John has recently remarried and he and his new wife have been trying for the last few years for a baby. They showed me the messages they have received from him. It transpires he is giving up God, as he calls it, over this issue of not having the

baby. My friends asked my advice. I said, to keep on encouraging, letting John know that while he may have let go of Jesus, Jesus has not let go of him or his wife. I also suggested that there are probably deeper issues as well, that John is not talking about. So my friends are going to continue encouraging John and uplifting him in prayer to the One who won't let go.

So be encouraged! Don't give up! Encourage others who may be struggling. See and remember what the Lover is like! Be encouraged! Keep going! As Christians, if you are one here tonight, you are to bear fruit by remaining close to Jesus, as He is the vine and we are the branches. And why are we as Christians to bear fruit? As a means of bringing glory to God the Father (John 15v8). Be encouraged and be encouragers of others.

## **Part Three - Song of Solomon 2:10-15**

### **Lover is like no other and wants to hear your voice.**

The beloved speaks of the lover's voice. (Read v10-13)

Then finally we hear the voice of the lover! (Read v14-15)

Ever felt like God is far away? Well you aren't alone! It is an experience that is common to all Christians, at some point or another. I know I have experienced that in the past. But I also know from personal experience, that Jesus always comes through in difficult times. Although He may not come in the time I think He should come, because He knows when I need Him most. This woman, the beloved, is so expectant of the Lover's arrival she can hear his voice, his tender words! He is calling her to Himself!

Jesus Christ is also calling you, to Himself! He wants you to be a partaker of the good news about Him. He wants you to be part of His family, the church. He is ever calling, ever beckoning people to enter into relationship with Him. His love for the church is indicative of verse 13, where he calls the beloved His beautiful bride. That is the church – warts and all – is His bride!

**By faith, He will see you through** – Remember in the Gospels, when the disciples were in the storm and Jesus came to them walking on the water. Remember Jesus saying "Come" and Peter went to Him. This must have encouraged the other disciples, for upon seeing Jesus' power they worshipped him. Whatever troubles you are undergoing are temporary, and Jesus will see you through.

Jesus is praying for you, will come to you, grow you and help you through troubles. By being obedient to God, you are encouraging others by showing your salvation and showing that faith is not blind, but active!

Jesus wants to hear your voice talking to him... Not just for half hour in the morning but all day long. We are to yearn to talk to Him and for Him to talk to us. Prayer is a 24 hour communication exercise. Prayer, according to the Church Father Augustine, is a constant yearning for assistance and strengthening of desire towards the ultimate goal - eternal happiness and worship and knowledge of God. God Himself assists as we pray: by correcting and strengthening the yearnings. Prayers express desires and thoughts in a contributory way to the journey we are on.

That means tell Jesus how you are feeling, both in the good and the hard times. Tell Him of your wants, your needs and all your cares.. Let His arms surround you! To him your voice is sweet and dulcet. Your face to Him is a delight. Seek him! Ask him! Talk to him! This is how you are spiritually energized! When you talk to God, you strengthen your relationship with Him! When you and I ask others to pray for us, Church unity is strengthened!

## **Recap!**

So, how do we recapitulate. In this chapter, we firstly saw together the Beloved's portrait of the lover and how He feeds, nourishes protects and shelters her. We see this as an encompassing picture of Jesus and His love for His people, the Church.

Then we saw how the Beloved lady encouraged others to wait and see this tremendous Lover. That is why we encourage one another and spur one another on as we see the day approaching when our bridegroom, Jesus Christ comes again in glory!

Then lastly we saw how the bridegroom loves to hear the voice of the Beloved and gaze into her face. Jesus Christ, the great lover and bridegroom, loves to hear our voices as we express our love, gratitude, cares, worries and feelings to Him.

## Conclusion

And what, in conclusion, do we do with all this?

Jesus is the only nourisher, protector and feeder. Jesus Christ, the apple tree, provides for all your needs, your nourishment, gives you strength, protects and comforts. I don't know what situation you are in at the moment. This credit crunch, this economic crisis is affecting everybody.

I guess there are probably three kinds of people here tonight.

Firstly, there will be those who do not know this Jesus Christ personally. Please, do not leave here tonight without asking one of the leaders or your friends here, about how you can get to know more about this Jesus. The time is short, the waiting for Jesus to come again grows ever shorter, and when He does come again, the time will be too late to change your mind.

Secondly, if you are in need of some love, some protection, some nourishment, then don't leave without having prayed with somebody or letting one of the leaders know of your needs. As Jesus Himself said, "Ask, Seek and Knock!" Jesus Christ is making intercessions for you, as He knows. He feels your cares and your worries, and knows what you are going through.

Finally, if you are not in either of those situations yourself, you will know somebody who is. Therefore go and encourage those you know who are struggling and are in need of protection and comfort. This week, go and tell the good news of Jesus Christ to somebody who doesn't know Jesus personally.