

**Poulner Baptist Chapel**

**July 5<sup>th</sup> 2009**

**Aspects on Covenantal Love**

**Dave G Roberts**

## Introduction

Back in January, we started this journey together at Song of Solomon 2v3-14 and Life under the Apple Tree. We saw together that Jesus, the tremendous lover, wants to hear the voice of His people and to be their king.

Then in May, we continued the journey, looking at Song of Solomon 5v9 – 6v9. There we saw together that Jesus is the best of the best and that Jesus is altogether lovely in every aspect – his birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension, exultation, holiness, glorification, grace, protection, tenderness, power, wisdom, vengeance, judgment, redemption and pardon! Altogether: lovely and glorious.

There are 3 main ways to interpret this book. Firstly as a story about the joys of biblical love between a man and woman. That bit even I can see. Some would say that it was erotic, but as a white Australian male, I just don't see it!

Secondly, the earliest commentators and readers saw it as an allegory about God's love for His people Israel, particularly with their coming Messiah in mind. The third way shows that this Song of Songs speaks not only on a physical level about the importance of human love and intimacy between a man and a woman, but also the intimacy that exists, blossoms and grows between a person and Jesus Christ. Martin Luther called it the "noblest of all songs". Historically this book has been interpreted in 3 ways

We move on tonight, to perhaps, what could be considered the key verses of this book. The couple have now entered a covenantal relationship – a relationship committed to one another. So please do open your bibles and turn to page XXX and let us read the Song of Solomon 8v5-7.

These three verses are the key verses of the Song of Solomon or the Song of Songs as other people call it. As the couple, the Lover and the Beloved, have now entered into a Covenant of love, we are, tonight, going to look at 4 Dimensions of Covenantal Love. A Covenant is a contract – a promise. Throughout Old Testament history, God had made covenants with people –

people such as Adam, Noah, Abraham and Moses. The original readers and commentators would have known that and understood that. With that insight, we are going to ask together 4 questions about Covenant Love – Who? When? Why? How?

## **1. Dependency 5a**

A similar question was asked back in 3v6. Three things are immediately noticeable about this verse!

They are together! They are leaving the desert behind them! She is leaning on him! This is a total picture of covenant love between a man and woman. The woman leaning on the man signifies a dependence upon him. At that time, the power of the female in a relationship was minimal and she depended on her husband for everything. I am not saying it should be that way now and I am not saying it shouldn't be that way – today its more equal and about a mutual dependence in most cases. Just as Israel was married to God in a covenant relationship, they too left the desert together in the grand exodus as they escaped from Egypt. They too endured hard times, mainly as the ancient nation of Israel was dependent upon God for all things.

So whom do we depend upon now, both as a Church and as individuals? What desert are you travelling through with our God as a companion? Are you leaning on Jesus Christ as you endure & persist? Or even lean on Jesus when it seems things are easy! In all manner of life, we are to trust fully in Jesus and not lean on our own wisdom. For sure, God has given us minds to rationalise and work things out, but we do so in submission to the Holy Spirit and His authority.

Why is Jesus so dependable and why can we be dependent upon Him? In these accounts we see that

### **Jesus cares and is concerned**

In the reading from John, we heard an account of Jesus walking on the water. Matthew's account goes into greater detail. The experience of the disciples in the storm can be an encouragement to us when we go through the storms of life. We all go through storms and troubles. When we find ourselves in these storms, we can rest on these 4 assurances about Jesus if we are Christians.

### **By faith - He is praying**

He saw the disciples and knew their troubles (Mk 6v48), just as He knows our troubles and needs now. This entire scene is a dramatic picture of the church and the Lord today. The Church is on the sea, in the midst of storms. Yet Jesus Christ is in heaven, making intercessions for us – (Romans 8v34). He feels the burdens and cares we have and knows what we are going through (Hebrews 4v14-16).

If you knew Jesus was physically in the next room, praying for you, would it not give you new courage to endure any troubles you have and follow Him? Of course you would. He is in heaven now, praying for you and me – in our needs, our fears and He is in control.

### **By faith - He will come**

Why did Jesus walk on water? To show the disciples that the very thing they feared was merely a walkway for him to come to them. They did not recognize him because they were not looking for Him.

Often we may feel that Jesus has deserted us, as we are going through hard times. Scripture is full of such experiences. Jesus always comes to us in the storms. He may not come in the time we think He should come, because He knows when we need Him most. Or He may have appeared and we haven't recognized Him!

### **By faith - He will help growth**

This was the whole purpose of the storm, to help the disciples grow in their faith. After all, Jesus would one day leave them, and they would face many storms in their ministry. They had to learn to trust Him even though he would not be there with them, and even though it looked like He didn't care.

We must give Peter credit for asking Jesus to save him and perhaps this is what he was thinking of when he later wrote in one of his letters: "for the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers". This all helped Peter to grow in the knowledge of the Lord

### **By faith, He will see me through**

Jesus said "Come", Peter went with him and together they walked to the ship. This must have encouraged the other disciples as well as Peter. When they saw the power of Jesus, they worshipped him. So whatever temporal troubles we have, Jesus will see us through to the end, for His praise and glory.

Our dependence upon God, upon Jesus, reflects our independence away from the world. By the world, I mean those outside the church – all those who are not following God. The world outside the Church, at its worst hates God and His people, the church. The world outside the Church, at its best, is ambivalent to God and ignorant of His people, the church.

I have learnt, and am still learning, that total dependence upon God takes an incredible amount of effort. So how can we do it? In our own strength we would fail, but God has sent us a helper, the Holy Spirit! We also have each other! We are mutually dependent upon each other as we seek to be dependent upon God!

We progress now to see **when** we can have that total dependence on Jesus Christ, that tremendous lover.

## 2. Data 5b

Here the woman is speaking and looking back to SoS 2, where she met him and called him an Apple Tree. Here she is looking back fondly to the time she first encountered him. It was, as all newly weds will remember, the time when she first felt truly alive.

The ability to remember is a wonderful gift of God to all people! Memories can bring about the full gamut of emotions -sadness, bitterness, anger, joy, ecstasy and love! I wonder what your ability to remember is like! Perhaps you are like me, and your memory sometimes fails. Sometimes I will think I have remembered something, but it turns out to be a false memory of an event that never occurred. Or other times I will forget to remember something, and then miss out on something important! Are you like that I wonder? In the last few months, as I do not have very little long term memory, I started to get doubting voices "Did you really give your life to Jesus back in 1981?" So I prayed about it. Then shortly after, on Facebook I encountered the woman who had led me to faith back in 1981. I had not seen her in any way since the mid-80s, but she was able to verify and remember the night I gave myself to Jesus. I haven't seen her since, apart from briefly. That was, at least for me, a God-incident.

As a Christian, sin still tries to entangle us, but by remembering certain things you will be able to live an obedient Christian life. One of the reasons why we still sin after becoming Christians is because we forget who we are! By remembering who you are as a Christian, not only will you behave as a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, but you will have the assurance, only a living and dynamic relationship brings.

As a help if you remember the following five things in order to be assured of your relationship with Jesus, in the battle to overcome sin:

Jesus not only died for you, but you also died with Him; and through baptism, you symbolize death with Christ.

You are also raised with Christ in baptism, and you rule with him, seated at the right hand of the Father.

As a Christian, your life, is to be Jesus and Jesus is to be your life. You are dead to sin, yet alive to Christ.

You now belong to Jesus Christ and are hidden with Him in heaven. This means that your motives and strengths are to come from Him.

You will be glorified with Jesus Christ, when Jesus Christ returns and you will see Him face to face, He will take you home to eternal glory and to be fully revealed in glory.

Lastly, we are told to remember Jesus Christ in the sacrament of communion. You participate in it, doing it regularly as a reminder of Jesus Christ death and resurrection, until He comes again (1 Corinthians 11v26)!

Having this assurance and remembering these things helps overcome the problems we all have with overcoming doubt of our assurance of salvation and acceptance. Remembering who you are in Jesus Christ helps you to be assured that you are His. Next time you recognize you are being tempted to sin, remember who you are and call out to Jesus for help in avoiding temptation! He will remember you and help you!

Not all memories, however, are to be cherished. Paul in Philippians 3 and the writer to Hebrews commands us to remember not the past and go forward! Quite often do the reverse! We remember the bad things and forget the things that God wants us to remember!

The life of Jesus is evidential historical fact. But for us Christians it is not just history, it is also our story! The difference between history and memory is that history is somebody else's story and memory is your own story.

We now progress to see **why** we can have that total Covenant Love with Jesus Christ.

### **3. Desire v6**

Here we have a picture of love, laden with desire! Desire is sure! Desire is strong! Desire is intense! Desire is passionate! But we have to make sure it is a right desire. A right desire, such as a husband's desire for his wife and a wife's desire for her husband. The Covenant relationship is sealed! Seals in ancient times were used to symbolise ownership and authorship. Their marriage was sealed, just as the High Priest also was sealed with God's ownership when he wore his priestly robes and breastplate! For us, its our wedding rings and in my case also my watch, which if I remember correctly, was part of the covenant between Youngmi's father and me.

As Christians, we are to desire Jesus and have him rule over every aspect of our life – in that way we gain true independence and freedom! But did you know that God also desires you? He desires to be in a relationship with you so much that He even sent His Son Jesus Christ to die on a dirty Roman cross. This Jesus gave sacrificial love, in order to break the barrier between God and man. That is how much God desires you – Jesus' desire is that everybody of all time enters into a living desirous relationship with him.

Why? Because there is a New Covenant!

Why? You are Sealed with the Holy Spirit

Why? You are to be transformed!

Remember also:

He lives inside you: God the Holy Spirit lives inside you and you are to be controlled by Him (Romans 8v9; Gal 2v20; Colossians 1v25-27)

He has sealed you: The Holy Spirit indwells you, and is assured proof of you being God's possession (2 Corinthians 1v22; Ephesians 1v3)

He is your security: The Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing your redemption, salvation and inheritance (Ephesians 1v13; 2 Corinthians 1v22).

## **New Covenant**

As a member of Jesus' church today, we live under the New Covenant, which both Jeremiah and Ezekiel speak about.

Four features of this covenant are: God transforming you; God being your God and you being His; God living inside you and leading you; your sins are forgiven and removed

This new covenant is sealed only through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. His blood ensures the truth of this New Covenant. There is no other way for this New Covenant to be sealed except through Jesus' blood alone. This New Covenant finalizes what the Mosaic Covenant could only point to: the follower of God living in a righteous life conforming to God's holy character.

And just as the bride here is sealed, we too are sealed. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit who comes to live inside each person who has decided to follow Jesus. He is God's mark of ownership upon you, if you are following Jesus! I don't have time to fully expound about this New Covenant, but will just try to explain this one aspect – God indwelling and living inside. Maybe next time, if I get invited back!!

How can all this come about? It can only be through the work of God Himself. The Holy Spirit is God, and a member of the Trinitarian Godhead. The Holy Spirit is a Person. Some people refer to the Holy Spirit as "It", but they are clearly wrong and in error! The Holy Spirit is always referred to as 'He' in the New Testament (John 16v14). He relates to us as a person for He is a comforter, guide and teacher (John 14). He can be blasphemed against and be grieved (Ephesians 4v30), and wherever the Holy Spirit is, the Father and Son are also present because they are one. (John 14v18-23).

The Holy Spirit is your seal of salvation if you are a Christian! He is the mark of ownership and all who bow the knee to Jesus, the tremendous lover, have the Holy Spirit inside them, and working within to transform. In some people the Holy Spirit is exuberant and in others is quiet. The Holy Spirit works in each individual, individually. He does not work in people the exact same way all the time! The Holy Spirit is a deposit, guaranteeing our future redemption, salvation and inheritance! He guarantees us life everlasting! Without the Holy Spirit living

inside them, a person cannot be a Christian Disciple (Romans 8v9; Gal 2v20; Colossians 1v25-27).

The greatest proof, if you need one, that the Holy Spirit is living inside you, is your transformation into the image of Jesus Christ. You may not recognize this change, but those around you will! All this will give you a desire to live for God!

We move now from this third Dimension to our fourth and final dimension – Devotion. Who leads to when, which naturally leads to why; which in turn leads to how. At least to my mind, I don't know about you!!

## **4 – Devotion v7**

### **Devotion**

Here is a portrait of their devotion. Devotion here is tough, intense, passionate, enduring and priceless. She is besotted with her husband, just as Old Testament Israel was to be with God. From our reading in Ruth, we heard about her devotion to God. Read the whole book for the full story – its only short and well worth it!

But what kind of love is this devotion? Is it a friendly love or perhaps a romantic love? By all means, no! Devotional love is also an agape love – a love that is sacrificial and self-less. That is the love this beloved is talking about her lover! This devotional love is to be Strong! It is Intense! It is a Passionate love! It is utter devotion – mind and body. It was to be the devotion that ancient Israel should have had for God! It was certainly a picture of God's love for them, just as it is a picture of God's love for us.

This is no soppy plastic Hollywood love! This devotion is tough love! It is a love that is devoting of one's very self, in order to be of service to other people, regardless of any relationship between them. This devotional love involves loving others sacrificially, echoing the very way that God loved and continues to love. WE are to be so filled and magnetized with God's love and grace, that it is a

magnetic attraction to others to the majestic goodness of the awesome God that we serve and obey. By loving others in this way, the Gospel of Jesus Christ becomes attractive and undeniable! The prime hallmark of your being a Christian is to love! Can we run out of this type of love? No, because it is always topped up by the grace of the God we love, adore and worship.

For us as Christians these verses are a description of devoted love! Paul writing in 1 Corinthians 13 gives a full picture of love and we know that from Romans 8v38-39, nothing can conquer God's love!

We live in a world that is in love with love. In the Bible, God's love is revealed. The Apostle John in 1 John 4 does not simply say that God loves, but rather that God **is** love. Remember that God is the Holy Trinity, three persons in one. The Trinity is a living, vibrant community of love, and every activity of the Trinity, is an expression of love. God loves because that is His very nature. God's love is described as an unfailing, everlasting, intimate, sacrificial, unbreakable, all-conquering, immeasurable and all-knowing love. It is a love of devotion and desire. How is God's love seen? It is seen in two ways.

Firstly, this devotional love is shown supremely in that He has given His Son, Jesus Christ, to be the Saviour of the world. This is so that if any person takes up the opportunity, they can know and enjoy God in an intimate personal relationship. God had only one Son, Jesus Christ, and He sent Him on a rescue mission to seek the lost and to reconcile people to God. This is love in action. The lover dying for the ones He loves and is devoted to saving.

Secondly, God's devotional love is shown when we ourselves show love. As a Christian, you are a child of God, so you should want to be like Jesus Christ, by showing the world your love for others and your transformed character. The Christian Church should be a community of love, devoted to one another, for this is how the world sees the invisible God

We know God loves us and is devoted to us! We know Jesus loves us! But how do we show our love for Him? By the extent of our devotion to Him. The love between Christians is to be as a visible showing of the invisible God. The very

character of the church should always be to reflect God in all aspects. That is how we show our devotion to God. The primary way is to love others, says the Apostle John in 1 John 4 verse 20. It is easiest to love your friends. It is easier to love those around you. It is even easy to love those you don't know! But Jesus commanded that we love our enemies! Now that is very difficult and very radical! It is only with the help of God and His abundant grace towards us, as we depend on the Holy Spirit to empower us. To love only those who love us, is what those outside the church expect as normal behaviour. But as a Christian Disciple, we are to do more and to be seen to love more than any other people! Our love is to be "extra-ordinary", compelled by devotion, to reflecting our love for God by loving others. We don't have to like others as friends, but we do have to love them as fellow human beings! Then we will be exhibiting our devotional love of God, and making the invisible God, to be visible in Poulner, Ringwood and all places where we encounter people.

## **So what can we say after all that?**

We have seen from this passage, that Covenant love includes dependence, data, desire and devotion.

So what can we do as we leave here? For to leave here without anything to do, would not be giving honour or glory to Jesus Christ, nor would it be submitting ourselves to the authority of Scripture in applying it to our life.

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you have answered his call on your life. You know who he is. You have experienced liberating true independence by being dependent on Jesus – You lean on Him through both good and bad times.. You recall the past when you first encountered Jesus Christ as the tremendous lover that He is! Remembering what he has done for you and who you are in Him. You recognize that you are desired by God, and are to desire Him in every aspect of life. Knowing who this Jesus is, recalling past encounters and recognizing your desire for him, you are to live a life of total devotion to Him by loving all other people – even enemies! So go out with joy, devotion and desire!

But I am also aware there may be some people here who are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ. If that is you, He desires to be known by you. He is calling you by name, just as He does to everybody. You may not get another chance. He gives each of us, innumerable opportunities to enter into relationship with Him. This Jesus desires to connect with you in an intimate, spiritual relationship. If that is you, then please do see Pastor Adam, one of the leaders or the person that brought you here tonight, to find out how you can start this relationship with the Living God, Jesus Christ. He calls you by name for an independent life of dependent devotion to Him.