

The Banner of Christ

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Well, good morning, Champion Forest. It's so good to be with you. Go ahead and take your Bibles and just turn to the middle. Just flop open right to the middle of your Bible, and then I'll tell you where we're going to be here in a second.

As you're doing that, I just want to say what a great privilege it is to be here with you and to be a member here at Champion Forest. Our family loves this church. We have felt so welcomed, so loved, served, and cared for. I love the Christ-centered vision of this church, the exalting of Christ, the planting of churches, and the international missions. It is a wonderful thing to be a part of Champion Forest and to open God's Word with you this morning in this Life Lessons series.

I'm thrilled to preach on one of the life lessons that God has shown me, which came from one of the most neglected books of the Bible when I was in seminary. So go ahead and turn to the Song of Solomon.

While doing my PhD work in seminary, I learned a lesson I'll never forget: the spiritual message of this book is about the mighty love of Jesus.

As you're turning there, you might be thinking, "I've heard rumors about this book. I've heard that this book may be all about romance and marriage." Here's what we can say right now: Yes, there are insights and truths from this book on romance and marriage. However, that is not the greatest, ultimate, or even singular concern of this book.

The great concern of every book of the Bible is almost like this magnetic pull, this gravitational, singular focus that is gravitating everything in Scripture down to this central point: Jesus Christ himself.

Jesus says so in John 5:39. If you remember, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees, and he tells them:

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.

— John 5:39

That's a good thing, to search the Scriptures. But look at what our Lord says: "It is they that bear witness about me." All of Scripture, Jesus says, points to me, including the Song of Solomon. If it's in the Bible, it's about Jesus.

So our question now as New Testament believers is, well, how?

I hope this blows your mind as it did mine. In the first 1,500 to 1,800 years of church history, the most popular

book of the Bible, with the most commentaries written on it, the most sermons given on it, and the most writings about it, was not Genesis, was not Romans, but was, in fact, the Song of Solomon.

Why? How did we go from it being one of the most popular books to one of the least-preached-on books? I think some of it is that we have lost what this book is ultimately about.

Let me share a couple of quotes with you, just so you know I'm not a crazy man up here.

Richard Sibbes, one of the great Puritans who dropped diamonds after diamonds in his sermons and his books, said about the Song of Solomon, "This book is nothing else but a plain demonstration and the setting forth of the love of Christ to his church and the love of the church to Christ."

Jonathan Edwards, one of the greatest theologians who has ever been produced on this side of the world, said, "The book of Solomon's Song is no common love song, but a divine song respecting the union between the Messiah and the church."

Now, maybe a name I hope you know and love: my dead mentor, Charles Spurgeon. I think everyone should have a dead mentor because it's somebody you can't argue with. They just speak to you. You just have to listen to them.

Charles Spurgeon said, "The Song of Solomon is the central book of the Bible. It is the innermost shrine of divine revelation, the holy of holies of Scripture. And if you are living in communion with God, you will love that book."

Wow. How many of us, I wonder, walked in here today thinking like Sibbes, thinking like Jonathan Edwards, thinking like Charles Spurgeon? This book changed me over the last five years, and I hope today this book will change you as well.

The Song of Songs Points to Jesus

Why have we drifted? I think some of it is that we have forgotten what this book is. We come with assumptions: "Oh, this book is already about romance and marriage. It's about this and that." But we also forget what kind of book it is - what genre.

It's not history, like Acts or 2 Chronicles. It's not a letter, an epistle, like Romans or Philemon. It's poetry. It's a song.

Just like all kinds of songs, when you listen to songs, they are filled with metaphors, similes, symbolism, and word pictures that are speaking to something else. We do this intuitively when we listen to songs. We can hear the metaphor and go, "Oh, this is about this."

For instance, if I were to tell you about an artist whom a lot of young folks love today, and he sings about Jesus making lemonade, no one hears that song by Mr. Forrest Frank and thinks Jesus opened a lemonade stand in Nazareth. We can hear music, whether it's "Amazing Grace" or "Lemonade" or whatever it may be, and we have the ability to go, "I know what this is actually singing about."

This is what we must do with the Song of Solomon. I want to prove it to you real quick. Look at Song of Solomon 1:1. This is one of my favorite verses in the whole book:

The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

— Song of Solomon 1:1

Don't ever skip the introductions to books of the Bible. Ever. When you read the beginning of a book of Scripture, you're getting all kinds of great truth. Even when Paul says, "Grace to you," that's teaching us Christianity is grace coming to us, not us going to grace. There's so much truth in the beginnings of the books of the Bible. Don't skip them, especially here.

"The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." Right away, we're learning this is a song, a poem. But look at this construction: the Song of Songs, the blank of blanks. You've seen this before. Israel's tabernacle and temple had the Holy of Holies. Jesus is called the King of kings and Lord of lords. Solomon talks about vanity of vanities.

This Hebrew construction of the "this of that" is communicating that this is the highest. This is the greatest. This is the most supreme. This is number one - the number one King, the number one Lord, triumphing over all others.

So what is going on here with the Song of Songs? Solomon is saying this is the greatest song in the Bible. Greater than Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." Greater than Exodus 15, the song they sang on the edge of the Red Sea after they were delivered from Egypt. Greater than Revelation 19. This song is the greatest song, the Song of Songs.

Is that because it's about love between a man and a woman? No. It's because greater love has no one than this, that one would lay down his life for his friends. This book is opening in its very introduction by telling us this book is about the greatest love that could ever be told in the history of mankind.

It's packed with symbolism to show us this. Look at Song of Solomon 1:7. The bride is singing, and she says:

*Tell me, you whom my soul loves,
where you pasture your flock,
where you make it lie down at noon.*

— Song of Solomon 1:7

We're learning a bunch of stuff already about this book and who's writing it. Who's the main figure? We know the Song of Solomon, which is the Song of Songs, which is Solomon's.

One, this is written by Solomon. Two, he's a son of David. Three, he's a king in Israel. Now we've learned his other job. Four, he's a shepherd.

Now look at Song of Solomon 5:1. Look at how incredible this is. The Solomon figure writes in this book:

I came to my garden, my sister, my bride;

*I gathered my myrrh with my spice,
I ate my honeycomb with my honey,
I drank my wine with my milk.*

— Song of Solomon 5:1

It's an odd pairing. What is he saying? If you're familiar with the Old Testament, it's meant to jog your memory of a Promised Land flowing with milk and honey.

Here you have Solomon, a son of David, who's a king and a shepherd, in a garden, in Jerusalem, with his bride, enjoying milk and honey. This book is packed with symbolism to point us to the one who is the true Son of David, the one who is the true Shepherd of Israel and God's people, and the one who is the true King who will bring God's people into the Promised Land, where we can enjoy milk and honey together forever in union with him.

Friends, this book is pointing us to Jesus Christ.

I like to call this book messianic music, prophetic poetry. Solomon is realizing, "I am not the one. I'm not the ultimate, the true King. It's got to be somebody else."

Solomon writes this book to point us to the one, the true Son of David, who will love God's people in an unfailing way, who will bring God's people into the Promised Land, where they can enjoy milk and honey forever. His name is Jesus Christ.

This is why Jesus says in the Gospels, "Someone greater than Solomon is here." He's a greater King. He's a greater sage. He's a greater lover of our souls.

Why preach on the Song of Solomon? Why give you this kind of introduction to the book? For this reason: I want you to believe, receive, and enjoy the mighty love of Jesus this morning. I want you to receive, believe, and enjoy the mighty love of Jesus this morning. You are loved by almighty Jesus.

I want us to enjoy him and enjoy his love, and let our love boomerang back to him in song, praise, and adoration.

Look with me at Song of Solomon 2:4. This is where we're going to hang out for the rest of this morning and just meditate phrase by phrase. Our brother Solomon wrote by the power of the Spirit. This is now the bride figure. She is singing, and these are her lyrics:

*He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me was love.*

— Song of Solomon 2:4

There are three elements I want us to savor from this verse this morning: Christ's initiative, Christ's celebration, and Christ's lasting word.

Christ's Initiative

Look at Song of Solomon 2:4 again. Here's the first part, Christ's initiative: "He brought me to the banqueting house."

Here's the bride. She's been a worker in the fields. She's been neglected. She's been forgotten. She's been mistreated. She's not royalty. She has nothing to her name. She's just out and forgotten.

Now she's in this royal palace at a banquet, enjoying great food, great delicacies, and great riches. She's dressed in wonderful garments, and she's sitting there at this wedding feast, this enjoyment, and she says this beautiful phrase: "He brought me."

Friends, isn't that our testimony?

How did you become a Christian? He brought me.

How did you go from dead in your sins to alive in Christ? He brought me.

How did you go from having no spiritual background, not growing up with anyone in your family who knows Christ, and yet one evening in college you're reading your Bible for some reason, which some random person gave you, and now you're sitting here on Sunday morning? How did it happen? He brought me.

Friends, this is every Christian's testimony: He brought me. The explanation for our salvation is, "He brought me." Jesus did it.

Think about how improbable it is that you would be sitting in a church on a Sunday morning, singing songs to someone you haven't seen, listening to a very old book taught by a half-Mexican, half-Irish guy, when you could very well be at brunch. Have you ever had brunch? It's fantastic.

Why are you at Champion Forest's North Klein Campus on a Sunday morning at the 9:30 service, not even 11:00? Why are you here? He brought you.

Notice how secure it is. Let's nerd out for a second. Notice the tense. "He is bringing me"? No. "He might bring me"? No. "I hope he brings me"? No. "He brought me." Settled. Done.

Your salvation is secure because of the "he" who brought you. You did not bring yourself. He brought you. There is no way - I just want to come for you - there is no way you can lose your salvation. Your reservation at the supper of the Lamb is secure because Jesus made it.

But I can tell you there is only one way you could lose it. I have scoured the Scriptures. There is only one way you could lose your salvation. The only way it could happen is if Jesus Christ, who's sitting at the Father's right hand, had to be vacuumed down from heaven. His body would have to be de-glorified. He would have to be thrown back into that empty tomb borrowed from Joseph of Arimathea, and he would have to be left there to rot, decompose, and become a pile of bone fragments in Jerusalem.

Since that's not going to happen, your salvation is secure. You are as secure as Christ is.

Now, I know what you're thinking: "But Jeff, I'm so weak. I struggle. I stumble." That's why we should preach these words to ourselves: "He brought me."

"But I sin. I don't read my Bible enough. I'm not spiritual enough. I don't even really know how to pray." He brought me.

"But my past is so shameful. I can't believe the things I've done." He brought me.

I love this quote from Charles Spurgeon. He says, "He knew what I was when he chose me. He cannot therefore find any fresh reason for turning me aside."

Jesus did the Carfax on you. Jesus did the 23andMe. Jesus did your DNA, your resume, your Enneagram, and your personality profile. He looked at all of our souls and said, "I'll bring them."

Look at where he brings us.

Christ's Celebration

Point number two: the banqueting house. This is Christ's celebration. "He brought me to the banqueting house."

Oh, this is so great. In Hebrew, this is "house of wine." He brought me to the house of wine. Hebrew scholars go round and round, saying, "What is this? Is it a structure that Solomon built that was just for drinking wine? Is it a place just for banquets? Or is it a wine cellar?"

We're not sure what it is, but I can tell you that whether it's "house of wine" or "banqueting house," here's what we do know about this rare Hebrew phrase.

Let's just think about a banqueting house. This is not a place where you just look at food. This is not a place where you just talk about food. This is not a place where you just study food. It's not a place where you collect it or review it.

What do you do in a banqueting house? You experience it. You eat it. You enjoy it. It's an actual place of feasting, happiness, and joy.

Brothers and sisters, your Christian life, our Sunday gatherings, our groups, and our personal devotions in Scripture are not just places to casually observe. They're places to experience and delight, and to taste and see that the Lord is good.

Are you enjoying Christ? Are you experiencing him?

For far too long in my Christian life, it was just like me looking at a steak and smelling it, going, "Ooh, that smells good," and never actually digging in and enjoying Christ, enjoying the grace of forgiveness, enjoying new life.

Is this celebration, this wedding feast, how you would describe your Christian life? Is that the scene you would use?

Sadly, I think there are two other scenes that most of us live in. The first scene would be like a museum. You know what museums are for. Honestly, they're very quiet, kind of dull, and if we're honest, a lot of times when we go to a museum, we're kind of bored. It's a lot of old stuff you can't really interact with, stuff you just look at. You leave and go, "Oh, okay. I'm glad parking was free," and you're done.

That's how some of you view the Christian life. You're around a bunch of old stuff, around an old book, hearing ancient things, and talking about old things. You come to church, you're hearing old songs and old words. You leave and go, "Man, at least parking was free."

Or is your Christian life more like a courtroom, where there are a lot of verdicts, a lot of scowls, and a lot of judgments? You sit there day after day, and even though you do believe in Christ, you feel like you're constantly being judged by him. He's constantly wagging his finger at you. You're not even sure what your final verdict is going to be.

I hope both of those images, whether you are predominantly living in a museum or predominantly living in a courtroom, would be vaporized by the joy of the wedding feast - the joy of knowing Christ, the joy of him knowing you, and the joy of him rejoicing over you.

Look at Isaiah 62:5. This verse alone can change your life. The prophet says:

*As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.*

— Isaiah 62:5

Wow. We know this image. You've been to a wedding. What happens at a wedding? The groom stands at the front. He's waiting for his bride to walk in. The music begins: "Da, da, da, da." We all stand, and boom, we all look to the bride.

Then what do most of us do? Where do we look next? To the groom. We want to see his face, and we see him melting down.

Why is he emotionally responding? Is he thinking in that moment, "Finally, someone to help me get a mortgage"? Is he thinking, "Oh, I've made a huge mistake"?

No. In that moment, he's responding out of sheer joy and delight. "She is mine. I am hers. We are doing something new together. I can't believe she is my gift."

Isaiah 62:5 says, "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride," that scene, so does your God rejoice over you.

You are loved by almighty Jesus. We know we rejoice over him. We've been rejoicing over him this morning. But believe this morning that he rejoices over you.

Do you believe that? If you're not, if you're struggling, just like at a banqueting house, go over to that prime rib station. Go and cut yourself a big slice of gospel truth and savor forgiveness of sins.

Go over to the dessert table. Get that seven-layer chocolate cake, a big old slice, and taste no condemnation

for those who are in Christ Jesus. Taste justification by faith alone. Taste the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Taste being a co-heir with Christ. Keep eating gospel truth until you taste and see that the Lord is good.

Maybe, as you're enjoying, you also just need to look up.

Christ's Lasting Word

Look at the final phrase in Song of Solomon 2:4: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

There's the bride, taken from the fields, now brought in and sitting at this table. She's eating, and she looks up. There's a banner over her.

This is a very interesting phrase. I love this image. It's a Hebrew word that's really military language for the banners that the nation of Israel used in battle. If you were in the tribe of Benjamin, there's your banner. "Okay, tribe of Benjamin, we're going to be over here. We rally, sleep, and camp here. Okay, tribe of Naphtali, we're going to be over here. Tribe of Dan."

You would go find your identity marker. "There's my family. There's my tribe. We're going to rally there. That's what defines us. That's where we camp. That's where we sleep."

The bride sits at the table, looks up, and says, "Oh, I don't see Benjamin. I don't see Dan. I see love." That banner is preaching to her, "You are my loved one."

If you were in the tribe of Dan, you'd look up: "Dan. I'm a Danite. That's where I belong." She sits there and says, "I'm loved. I'm a loved one. The King loves me."

Now the love of the King has defined her life forever because what is advertised at the top is reality at the bottom.

This may help. When you're on a road trip and you see that beautiful mammal wearing a red hat, with big old buck teeth - Buc-ee's - you know what's advertised at the top is reality at the bottom: lots of gas pumps, clean bathrooms, and overpriced snacks that you love.

McDonald's - you see those golden arches? You know what's advertised at the top is reality at the bottom: broken ice cream machine, dirty bathrooms, all kinds of things.

What's advertised and communicated at the top is reality at the bottom. So if the banner is love, then what's at the bottom? You.

He is preaching his love to you. He is preaching his cross to you. You are defined and known by the cross of Christ, his blood poured out for the forgiveness of your sins. This is his lasting message over you: You are loved by Jesus.

Why? Because he set his love on you. Not because we're so great, not because we're so impressive, but just because he set his love on us.

Friends, is the love of Jesus the loudest and most lasting message over your life? When you walked in here today, could you visualize, "I've got a little banner of love on top of me"? When you walk out of here today, do you visualize, "I have a little banner of love on top of me. I'm defined by his love"?

Listen, I know there are so many other banners the devil wants to thrust on top of us. He wants you to still have that banner of your past. He wants you to have the banner of your present struggles. He wants you to think, "Loser. Hypocrite. Bad mom. Bad dad. Pill popper. Drunkard. Addict."

No, friends. Whatever banner the devil can try to get you to think is over you, that's what he wants you to see. But what we must do is look up and see, "No, the banner of Christ is there."

His love and his banner don't fade. These colors don't run. This flag of gospel love has been waving for 2,000 years now, since Calvary, and it has not faded because Christ is still alive. Christ still reigns. Christ still loves.

Since Jesus is not a pile of bone dust somewhere in Jerusalem, he still loves you with that same nuclear intensity with which he loved you when he went to the cross. He still cares for you with that same ferocity he had when he rose again from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand.

Let the fog and the smoke clear, and see the mighty love of Jesus over you. He let the nails go through his hands for you. He was willing to take your sins, bring them down to the grave, leave them there, and rise again for you. Christ loves you with a love stronger than death.

As we're closing, notice this is personal: "He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love."

This can't be, "Oh, my parents are Christians, so I'm good. My grandparents are Christians. I'm good. I go to a Christian church."

No, you need a personal experience with the mighty love of Jesus. Has he brought you to the banqueting house? Is his banner over you love?

If you haven't experienced that today, here's what you do. Repentance is pulling down the other flag, saying, "No, I don't want that flag. I don't want this banner. I don't want that. What I want is Jesus. I want your love over my life. Jesus, save me from my sins. Jesus, let your love redefine me. Let your love change me. Let your love lift me to heaven."

You are loved by almighty Jesus. His banner over you is love.

If you know it, if you know it's there, you know what we should do now? Let's rejoice. Let's sing and respond to the mighty love of Christ from our guts like we never have before. Let's sing to Jesus now.

Pray with me, and we'll sing and have a time of invitation. I invite our prayer partners, pastors, and musicians to go ahead and make your way forward now.

Lord Jesus, we come to you knowing that we need your grace. We need you to bring us. So I ask, by the power of your Spirit, that you would move in hearts this morning that are cold and set them on fire. Move in

hearts that are dead this morning and make them alive. Bring them to you.

And those who are struggling, those who hear louder messages than your love, would you bring them forward to receive encouragement and prayer so they can meet you, Lord, and receive your grace?

Help us, King Jesus. It's in your name we pray, Lord. Amen.