

*Sexuality Redeemed: Introduction to Song of Solomon*  
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This morning we start a sermon series on the Song of Solomon. This is a book about love, about romance, about marital intimacy. Did you know that there's a whole book in the Bible that talks about sex? Pretty cool, huh! Maybe you've assumed that it's only the world that has something to say about sex. The world *does* have quite a bit to say about sex. It's everywhere in our culture. What I hope you'll see in these weeks as we study the Song of Solomon is that the Bible has something to say about sex. This church has something to say about sex. And the message you're going to hear from God's Word is way better than the messages you'll get in the culture, from a fallen world. After all, God created sex. It was His design. It was His marvelous plan. I don't know about you, but I'm most interested in knowing what He has to say about it.

The magazines may have sex advice. Locker-room conversations may presume to have a certain level of authority on the subject. Obscene emails offer sex help. On TV, on the radio, on the internet, in the bookstores, on the magazine racks, on billboards, in conversations at school and in the workplace, this is a subject that gets a lot of attention.

For many people (maybe you included), the assumption is that the church is basically silent on this topic. The Bible may be the last place people would think of to go to for advice concerning sexuality. Your experiences in various churches may confirm this. Maybe you grew up in a religious home, going to church, and you never heard any talk about sex. Your experience may be that the church's only message about sex is, "Just say no."

Well, I'm hoping that our study of Song of Solomon will blow those assumptions out of the water. I hope those stereotypes will be destroyed. The church needs to reclaim this important area of our lives, for the glory of God. We can't be silent about this. We can't ignore it, just because it's personal and private, and often shameful. Of all the issues in our lives, this is one that affects each one of us very deeply—whether you're married or single, no matter what your age, this is something that is very central to who we are as human beings.

In the area of sexuality we see that God has made something very beautiful and very powerful. We also see in the area of sexuality how messed up we are as sinful human beings. We have taken something beautiful and have turned it into a game to be played, a commodity to be consumed. We have perverted it and putrefied it in ways that bring about unspeakable misery. It is

tragic to think of how women are degraded in the pornography industry and in prostitution. It breaks our hearts to think of rape and molestation and all kinds of sex crimes that we hear of endlessly. We are sick and twisted, and the whole realm of sexuality attests to our depravity in a most striking way.

So we see God's good creation. We see how sin has messed up that good design. We also see, in God's Word, that there is redemption through Jesus Christ which cleanses and sanctifies our sexuality.

This, then, is what I want us to consider together this morning. The title of this morning's sermon is *Sexuality Redeemed*, and I want this to serve as an introduction to the Song of Solomon. We're not actually going to get into an exposition of the Song this morning (that's what we'll start next week). But I want to put this in the context of a biblical theology of sex. What does the Bible have to say about this, and how does the Song of Solomon make a very important contribution to the overall biblical portrait?

To do this, let's look at creation, Fall, redemption. We'll start in Genesis and end in Revelation (and believe it or not, we'll still be done before lunch!).

### **Creation**

Genesis 2:18-25

Look at the words in verse 24, "hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." What does that mean? It means there is a new union. A new family is formed. You come from your father and mother, and there is a blood kinship there. But now the man distances himself from his family of origin and unites himself with his wife, establishing a new blood kinship, a new family.

The one flesh relationship is expressed in the new husband and wife coming together in sexual union. In 1:28 they receive the instruction to "be fruitful and multiply," and that happens through this amazing thing God created called sex. He created it for marriage, not to be used and abused and marketed and experimented with. God created it to be an expression of and symbolic of the overall bond between a husband and his wife. The two become one, in a very real and profound sense.

My relationship with my wife, Stacy, is unlike any other relationship I have on this earth. I love my parents and siblings, I love Stacy's parents and siblings and their families, I love our own children very much, I love all of you in this church and I cherish the many encouraging relationships I have here, I have friends around the country and around the world whom I love very much. But there is something utterly unique and absolutely wonderful

about my relationship with Stacy. We were married 12 years ago, and we've certainly had our ups and downs in marriage. But I just have to pinch myself sometimes and say, Did God really bless me this much to have the privilege of being married to this woman. And it gets better all the time. Year after year we grow in our oneness, we grow in our relational intimacy with one another. We're best friends, lovers, companions, parents, partners in ministry. We love being together. We were on a date Friday night and had a great time sharing a meal together (without needing to cut up anyone's food or wiping off anyone's face or clean up anyone's mess). And we just sat across from each other and talked about all kinds of random topics, and laughed together, and talked about the joys and struggles of this season of our lives. And we just enjoyed being together. We're one—for life. God has joined us together in the most intimate of human relationships, and we'll be together until Jesus comes back or until we die.

So I just stand in awe of what God has created in the institution of marriage. And I hope that every married person here, and every person who may ever get married, and even those who are called to singleness, will marvel at what God has done in creating marriage.

In 2:23 Adam says of Eve, she is “flesh of my flesh.” Now we read in the very next verse (v. 24) that the man and his wife become “one flesh.” This is a powerful union, a powerful bond that is created. This is why sex is for marriage, and why sex shouldn't be fooled around with outside of marriage. Because the one-flesh union is meant to be permanent. It's for life. It's for one man and one woman to enjoy within marriage for life. I remember this point being illustrated in a memorable way by someone who was speaking at a marriage conference that Stacy and I attended years ago. At the beginning of the talk he took two pieces of construction paper and glued them together using a very generous amount of Elmer's glue. At the end of the talk he picked up the two pieces of paper and tried to separate them. You can imagine what happened. It was a mess. Only shreds of the original pieces of paper survived.

When married couples decide that they no longer love each other, and they would be happier if they got a divorce, their lives and their family are ripped to shreds. Don't ever think that divorce is the easy way out. It's tearing apart something that is meant to be permanent. Or when single people engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, that's the kind of disaster that will result. You leave something of yourself with that person whom you've joined together with in sex. And therefore it leaves you with all kinds of hurt and pain.

I read an interesting news story this past week about a guy who attempted an armed robbery. What he didn't realize was that the man he was trying to rob was a mixed martial arts fighter. Here's what the news report said, "A mugger in Chicago clearly didn't know his potential victim very well. Police say 24-year-old Anthony Miranda tried to mug a man in Chicago's Southwest Side neighborhood on Dec. 2 after asking the victim for a lighter. When the unidentified victim said he didn't have a lighter, Miranda produced a gun and ordered the victim out of the car. Once out of the car, the victim, later revealed to be a mixed-martial artist, began pummeling the surprised Miranda. While receiving his beating from the MMA fighter, Miranda accidentally shot his own leg, inflicting a serious wound to his own ankle. Once out of the hospital, Miranda will face charges of armed robbery and aggravated discharge of a firearm."<sup>1</sup>

As I thought about that incident I thought about all the ways that people nonchalantly dismiss God's design for sex. They think they can do what they want, when they want, without any consequences. But they don't know what they're messing with.

I say this to young people especially, if you think you're going to mess around with sex and not get hurt, you're fooling yourself. You'll end up shooting yourself in the foot, just like this guy did. Sex is more powerful than you can imagine. It has the potential for amazing pleasure and fulfillment and intimacy in its appropriate, God-given context. But violate God's plan and design, and you'll end up in a world of hurt.

Listen to what Jesus says in Mark 10:7-9. First, He quotes Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." Then Jesus adds, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." The leaving and cleaving and one flesh union of marriage is to be lifelong. That's God's design.

And what a beautiful thing it is. Genesis 2 concludes with a statement about the purity and innocence of this first marriage. Verse 25 says, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." There was nothing to hide, nothing to be ashamed of, no threat of being ridiculed or put down. They lived in perfect peace and harmony and openness.

## **Fall**

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<sup>1</sup> WORLD magazine, January 14, 2012, page 17.

We turn to the next chapter, though, and everything falls apart. Eve, and Adam with her, sinned. They rebelled against God and disobeyed His good command to them.

As a result their nakedness was a source of shame.

Division and competition and conflict and manipulation and blame all invaded the marriage relationship. A wall went up in their relationship with God, and a wall went up in their relationship with each other. The complementary roles God had designed for them were convoluted because of sin. Their happy union as a married couple, including their enjoyment of sex, all of it was now tainted by sin. And they got kicked out of the garden of Eden.

In the generations that followed them, we see the downward spiral of sin. In terms of marriage and sexuality, we see this downward spiral in the life of Lamech (in chapter 4:19) who took two wives. Sin has definitely entered the world and is already working its destruction, because here's a man who violates God's plan for one man and one woman. He selfishly and sinfully takes, not one, but two wives. And that sin is repeated by many of the Old Testament figures.

In Genesis 6 there is this bizarre statement about the depravity of man, in which "sons of God saw that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose." Whatever was going on there, it is evidence of depraved sexuality, and it's part of what prompted God to send the flood upon the earth.

After the flood (9:18ff), Noah gets drunk and falls asleep naked in his tent. His son, Ham, sees him naked, and the next day Noah curses him for it. Again, I'm not sure what all was going on there, but it's another indication of the shame of nakedness and the affects of the Fall.

And then we don't have to go too much further in Genesis before we come to the story of Sodom and Gomorrah (chapter 19), where the sin was homosexuality. And then right after that Lot and his daughters commit incest. And we're not even half way through the first book of the Bible yet!!

Some of you might be saying, I didn't know the Bible was so sick and twisted. (Should we even let our kids read this stuff?!) Well, it's about us, that's why. It's about sinners like us. Fortunately, it's not only about sinners. It's also about a Savior. And that's where we find hope. But you need to see that you're a sinner before you can find hope in this Savior.

There is sexual immorality all around us and in us. There are sexual sins that we, ourselves, have committed. Whether we would like to admit it or not, we are depraved sexually. We have sexual desires that are not in accord with God's holy design for sex. Many here have been sexually intimate with someone outside

of the commitment of marriage. Maybe you've repented of that and are fighting those temptations, or maybe you're living in sin even now. Many are in bondage to pornography and masturbation. Men, you may think it's OK to look at sensual images on the internet or in a magazine. You need to recognize that it's sin. Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "'You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'" (Matthew 5:27-28) So it goes deeper than actions. It's about your thoughts as well.

And women, you may think it's OK to dress immodestly to draw the attention of men. You may think it's OK to have romantic fantasies about a relationship with someone who is not your husband. You may think it's OK to be flirtatious at work or at church. You need to recognize that these things are sin.

Men and women may tend to have different kinds of issues, but all of us are messed up, in one way or another. And many of us have sexual baggage, whether it be sins we have committed or sins which have been committed against us. We see the fallenness of this world, and we should see our own sinfulness and need for a Savior.

As we talk about sex, as we look at God's ideal for marital intimacy, I want this to be an opportunity for us to look at our own lives and realize our need for redemption. Maybe God would be pleased to us this discussion, for you to look at this particular area of your life, to show you that you are in desperate need of Him. Can you see that, friend?—that you have done wicked things, thought wicked things, done selfish and foolish things that have hurt others and hurt yourself. I exhort you this morning to repent of your sins and look to Jesus. He can cleanse you, forgive you, make you new and whole and holy. There is hope in Him for something far better than what you've experienced so far in life. Look to Him. Trust in Him. Follow His good commands. And you'll find a peace that you never thought was possible.

Before we move on to a discussion of God's redemption in the area of sexuality, I want to mention one other way that sinful humanity has treated sex, and that is to claim that all sex is inherently evil. On one end of the spectrum is the libertine view of sex—no restrictions, no rules, sleep with whomever you want, you don't have to wait till marriage or in any way confine sex to marriage. On the other end of the spectrum is the legalistic asceticism which was part of the heresy Paul confronted when he was writing to Timothy.

The particular false teaching that Paul has in mind is described in verse 3. It has to do with an unbiblical asceticism, a kind of strict self-denial that is not in accord with the teaching of God's Word. They forbid two things: marriage and certain foods. These prohibitions were probably connected to an early form of Gnosticism which held that the material world is inherently evil. And assuming that the material world is evil, these ascetics tried to avoid physical pleasures as much as possible. And thus they taught that marriage is wrong, for within marriage the physical pleasure of sex is enjoyed. They also tried to enforce a restrictive diet.

All I want to point out here is that we can't go too far on either end of the spectrum. We must not violate God's design for sex by pursuing sinful sexual experiences. But neither can we go in the direction of this false teaching that totally rejects and forbids sexual pleasure. I fear that many in the church may tend in that direction—many women, at least. Sex, for some women, may seem like a necessary evil that is part of marriage. You feel the duty to meet your husband's needs, but you avoid it if you can. You think of sex as dirty and undesirable.

I hope that our study of Song of Solomon will help married couples (husbands *and* wives) to celebrate the gift of sex. It is, truly, a gift! It's something created by God, and it's good. It's not to be rejected or avoided in marriage, but received with thanksgiving.

### **Redemption**

Now let's look further at God's gracious redemption in the area of sexuality. First of all, just think about God's infinite creativity and goodness to us in making us male and female, and thinking up the idea of romance and marriage and sexuality, and that He ordained for procreation to happen in this way. We should be amazed by this and should give God praise for what He has made. Have you ever thought of God as being a romantic? I think the fact that Song of Solomon is in the Bible is evidence that God, indeed, is a romantic. A good love story brings Him great delight.

And even though sin has brought much pain and shame into the realm of human love, God has also made a way to forgive sinners. He has instructed us in His Word, and warned us, and gives us good commands for our joy so that we might experience something of the wonder of what He designed for us. We still live in a sinful world, and we will continue to struggle against our own sin, but there is amazing joy to be had in the love between a Christian husband and wife.

Let me read you a couple passages where we see both promises and warnings. This is how God lovingly directs us. It's

the carrot and the stick. There's two ways to get a mule into the barn. You can hold out a carrot in front of it, or can beat it's backside with a stick. Well, in God's love for us, He gives us both the carrot and the stick. He holds out the carrot that is the joy to be had as we obey His commands (His commands which are for our good and for our joy). And He also makes us aware of the consequences and punishment that will result when we disobey. This is how He guides us in a redeemed sexuality.

"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. [I don't know why this isn't one of our memory verses. I guess it could be a little awkward to read at the end of a service. But, husbands, you can make this one of your personal life verses.] [That's the carrot, that's the promise, the encouragement to enjoy God's design for marriage. But then here's the warning] Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin." (Proverbs 5:18-22)

Do you see that? There is delight, there is intoxicating love to be enjoyed in God's plan. Depart from that plan, though, and you will be like a prisoner to your sin. You'll be held fast in the bonds of sin. Some of you know exactly what that feels like and you may be experiencing that right now. You need Christ to free you, redeem you, forgive you.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled [that is God's ideal, that is God's beautiful design held out before us, that's the honorable and pure passion we should pursue, but then here's a warning as well], for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." There's the carrot and the stick. In this fallen world, God redeems His people through the blood of Christ and He gives us clear instructions about how we ought to live. His instructions are for our good (I hope you hear that!). He wants us to know the happiness of what He designed for us.

Ephesians 5:31-32

Genesis 2:24, which we looked at earlier, and which Paul quotes here, is talking about what? It's talking about the sexual union of a husband and wife. So the husband-wife relationship reflects Christ's relationship to the church. The wife submits to her husband like the church submits to Christ, and the husband loves sacrificially like Christ gave Himself up for the church. But there's another element here, too. The one flesh union of husband and wife, which happens in the most intimate embrace of



lovmaking, is a pointer to the union of Christ and His bride, the church. Now, this is not to say that there's anything sexual about Christ's relationship to the church. That's not what I'm saying. Don't get wierded out by this. But the point is that God created a human relationship in which there is such a thing as a one flesh union. The two become one.

And similarly, although not sexually, Christ and the church are united as one. 1 Corinthians 6:16-17 makes this connection, and quotes the same verse from Genesis. There Paul gives this warning, "Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him." (1 Corinthians 6:16-17)

The wonder of the Gospel is that sinners like us are united to Christ by faith. There is a spiritual union that occurs. We become one with Him in such a way that He takes our sin upon Himself and He clothes us in His righteousness. That's the Good News! And marriage, and even sexual intimacy within marriage, is meant by God to be a pointer to that Good News.

What we look forward to in heaven is an eternal wedding feast celebrating Christ's union to His bride. And that brings us to our final passage of Scripture, which is from Revelation 19:6-9.

"Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God.'" (Revelation 19:6-9)

Jonathan Edwards wrote of this: "Then the church shall be brought to the full enjoyment of her bridegroom, having all tears wiped away from her eyes; and there shall be no more distance or absence. She shall then be brought to the entertainments of an eternal wedding-feast, and to dwell for ever with her bridegroom; yea, to dwell eternally in his embraces. Then Christ will give her his loves; and she shall drink her fill, yea, she shall swim in the ocean of his love."<sup>2</sup> That's not sexual. That's better than sex. That's what sex points toward. And when that reality is upon us (the reality of heaven), human marriage will be no more. Sex will be no more. The pointers will fade into the ultimate reality of Christ's eternal love for His bride. And that's what we will enjoy

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<sup>2</sup> Works, vol. 2, p. 22. Quoted in Ortlund's article on marriage in The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology.

forever and ever. If that doesn't blow your mind, I don't know what will!

My hope for this morning is that we've gained something of a whole-Bible perspective on the Song of Solomon. There are, indeed, warnings about sex in the Bible. But we also have a whole book celebrating sex. So don't let it be said that the church's only message about sex is "Just say no." The message is, Say no to poison, so that you can say yes to the banquet table of pleasure that God intends for us. If you're married, the Song of Solomon will have a lot of immediate application for you. If you're engaged or dating, there will be a lot of relevant application for you as well. If you are single and hope to be married someday, this book should be very instructive for you as well, because it gives a picture of a godly, passionate relationship. This is the kind of relationship you should hope for and pray for and not settle for anything less. And I also want to say to singles, that even if a lot of what is said in these weeks about marriage does not seem immediately relevant to you, I hope you can still look at these big-picture theological realities and exult in what God designed. Marriage, and even sex within marriage, is a pointer to Christ and the church. And so this is something for all believers to marvel at. It's something that should make us look forward to the pleasures of heaven. And also, for singles, this series of sermons should give you pointers as to how you can pray for the married couples in this church, and how to support them. Marriage is *really* important, and we need to be laboring together as a church to support marriages.

I'll close with a quote from Russ Moore, a professor at Southern Seminary, who wrote a very provocative article entitled, "Television Sex: Too Boring for Christians."<sup>3</sup> He writes of the beautiful portrait of marriage and sex that is given to us in the Bible, and he compares it with the world's frantic sexual cravings. He says, "This is why sexual revolutions always turn out so boring. This is why the sterile, condom-clad vision of sex in the contraceptive culture is so dull. This is why pornography is so numbing to the soul. This is because in the search for sexual excitement men and women are not really looking for biochemical sensations or the responses of nerve endings. And, in fact, they are not ultimately even looking for each other. They are searching desperately, not for mere sex, but for that to which sex points—something they know exists but they just can't identify. They are looking to be part of an all-encompassing cosmic mystery. They are looking for a love that is stronger than death. They can't articulate it, and they would be horrified to know it, but, behind all

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.russellmoore.com/2003/10/16/television-sex-too-boring-for-christians/>

their sexual frenzy, they are looking for a glorious Messiah, Jesus, and his glorious bride, the church.”