

IT STARTS YOUNG

Song of Songs 8:8-15

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In every generation there has been young people listening to music. It was by early model radios in the twenties, LP records in the fifties, and the apps on our smart phones today. Many of the songs they enjoyed were love songs. So, it has been and will continue to be so. It is my prayer that our young people will also enjoy the greatest of all love songs. The Bible's love song, the 'Song of Songs'. This beautiful song, very intimately and sensuously, but also with great honour to God, has shown the love between a man and a woman. Intertwined with that it has shown the amazing love of Jesus for his bride, the church. The song shows so wonderfully that our sexuality is a precious and deeply fulfilling gift from God. The song's refrain has reminded us that this delightful gift has a proper time and place for expression (Song of Songs 2:7) *"Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you... do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."* That proper place is in marriage.

The question for this morning is how will the young learn this biblical lesson? That's been one of the reasons for preaching this series. If we as the church and as parents don't openly and honestly teach the lessons of this song, our children will learn about these things from other songs and other places, like the internet. And what they hear in so many other songs can be quite different. In these final verses of the 'Song of Songs' is a message for us as parents and children. (Song of Songs 8:8) *"We have a little sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?"* Here the woman thinks back to when she was a little girl at home. She remembers her brothers talking: 'we have a little sister'. They were concerned for her wedding day: 'what shall we do for the day she is spoken for?' It may be that her father had died, because the brothers speak as her guardians. It may also reflect the culture of the time where the brothers were involved in who married their sister. In a similar way Abraham's servant had to deal with Rebekah's brothers when he asked her to be Isaac's wife (Genesis 24). And when Jacob's daughter Dinah was taken by Shechem the Hivite (Genesis 34) the issue was handled by the brothers. So, the brothers are preparing their sister for marriage, even when she was young. How young? *'... her breasts are not yet grown'*. The Hebrew culture of the time was very earthy. It is saying she had not even reached puberty yet. She was still very young and immature. She was

not even thinking of boys. But the brothers were already thinking of her wedding day. To have a successful marital relationship it starts young. It needs thoughtful nurturing by the parents of the attitudes and character of their children.

We see that the brothers studied their sister's character. They worked out their upbringing accordingly (Song of Songs 8:9) *"If she is a wall we will build towers of silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar"*. If she is a 'wall', it means she has a strong character. She can see what God wants. She can resist temptation. She can say 'No'. That needs to be encouraged. She will be rewarded, with trust. They do not want to exasperate her by being overly strict. If she is a 'door' it means she is not strong. Her character is too easily open to be misled or used by others. As a 'door' she wavers in her attitude. So, for her own protection the brothers would 'enclose her with panels of cedar.' In other words, they must set some boundaries. They must be strong for her. Otherwise she could ruin herself. The point here is not lost on us parents. We know that our children can be so different. They all come from the same nest, but their characters can be poles apart. So, we cannot use the same style of instruction and discipline on all the children. Yes, the final goals of our upbringing are the same. That they know the Lord. That they are aware of and develop their own God given potential. That they follow God's way for life and love. But how we get them to that point may take different paths. Whatever path is taken for a child, the key point is this: our children's attitudes, and how they go in their love relationships, depends on what we do now. My Master's degree research in psychology dealt with marriage relationships. It showed that our expectations have a significant impact on our marriage. Our family of origin determines a lot of those expectations: how we express love, how we deal with conflict, how we spend time together. So, the key lesson for today is that when we think about our marital relationships it's not just about us as a couple. It is also very much about our kids. How we relate now, and model love, will greatly determine how it is for the next generation. I can still see my father sitting at the head of the kitchen table. He always insisted mum sit close to him, because she was 'his 'princess' and he wanted her close. Dad was a 'diamond in the rough' but showed his five sons something beautiful in the way he adored mum. He admitted to me once that mum was God's greatest gift to him for which he was very thankful. And it showed.

I can look back now on this modelling of love by my parents with appreciation. But that doesn't mean I understood all the implications when I was young. Nor did I appreciate dad's discipline when he wanted to set boundaries for me going out as a teenager. That's often the way it goes. Our children will not always appreciate the intent of our parenting. There will be frustration. At times young people will want to rebel and reject what their parents say. At times parents may be inclined to give up on

stubborn teenagers, especially those who are the door types. But hang in there. Good parenting will bear fruit. Even if it takes a long time to see it. We see that in the next few verses (Song of Songs 8:10-12) *"I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus, I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment. Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit."* Here we see the woman expressing her thanks for her upbringing. As she says, 'I am a wall and my breasts are like towers.' There is that Hebrew earthiness again. She is now a mature woman. And she tells us that her character is that of a wall. She has been strong in herself. She knew what God required. And she stuck with it. We have seen that in this song. She repeatedly sang its refrain *"Daughters of Jerusalem...do not arouse or waken love until it so desires."* She is a beautiful woman. Not only in looks but in character and virtue, committed to God's ways. That is why she says, *'Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment.'* The Hebrew has a bit of a play on words here. The word 'contentment' can also be translated 'peace'. It is the Hebrew word 'shalom'. The name 'Solomon' comes from the same Hebrew word. In Hebrew it is 'Shalomah'. When they married she gained 'Shalomah', that is Solomon. And he received 'shalom', that is peace, contentment. She brought him contentment because, using Paul's words in Ephesians 5, she was *"...pure and radiant, without spot or blemish."* As a woman of virtue and faith as well as beauty she brought joy and fulfillment to his life.

Now, because of the joy and contentment both of them received, the woman wants to say thank you to her brothers. And to do that she uses the illustration of a vineyard. She says (Song of Songs 8:11) *"Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver."* Now, this illustration comes very naturally to her. Remember she was herself a keeper of a vineyard. She knows how the system works. 'Tenants' would have kept the vineyard at Baal Hamon for Solomon. They would have given him a 'thousand shekels of silver' for its produce. In other words, they gave him the major portion because he owned the vineyard. They would have received what was left over as the wage for their labour. Now, the woman says she has a vineyard too. That's a reference to herself (Song of Songs 8:12) *"But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit."* Notice she is giving the set thousand shekels to Solomon. He gets the owner's portion. The number one thousand in the Bible is symbolic of fulness. In Revelation one thousand symbolizes the millennium, the fulness of time when Jesus returns. So, the woman is saying she is giving herself fully to Solomon. As she said previously *"My beloved is mine and I am his"*. But, notice, she also says *"...two hundred are for those who tend its fruit."* She is referring

to her brothers. She is saying that she will always be grateful and indebted to her brothers. She is giving thanks for her upbringing, for their care and discipline. She is most grateful now. But she had her complaints earlier. Remember how she complained (Song of Songs 1:6) *"My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected."* Because the brothers worked her hard, she had little opportunity to worry about her looks. There had been little chance to get involved with the young men around at the time. Yet, despite her complaints then, she is thankful now. Discipline is like that. You do not appreciate it when you are under it. But you do when you have grown up and have developed into a well matured person. You are someone who has been guided by the modelling and discipline of your parents. It is then that you look back and say 'Thanks mum, thanks dad. There were times when I thought I hated you. But now I realize you did it because you loved me. And I love you for it.' The rewards for a good upbringing and discipline come later. For both children and parents. As parents we may not get all that much thanks now. We need to be patient for the fruit of the vineyard. And as young people you may be irritated at the moment with the lectures from your parents. 'Be careful. Be on time. No, you can't go there.' In time you too will see the fruit of the vineyard. I have conducted numerous weddings. And a repeated theme occurs at the receptions as the bridegroom makes his speech. He thanks the parents of his bride for the wonderful person she is because of their love and nurture.

Now in the last two verses of this beautiful love song, we see it finishes with the ongoing longing that comes with true love. Solomon says (Song of Songs 8:13) *"You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!"* And the woman replies (Song of Songs 8:14) *"Come away, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains."* The language is very much like that in chapter 2. That's the way they were speaking before they were married. It is the language of yearning and longing to be together. To be alone and intimate. 'Come away my beloved'. It is a beautiful way to finish this song. It shows us that love goes on. True love does not fade out or slowly die out. Those who truly love each other, God's way, will experience a constant renewing of their love. There will be that yearning again as husband and wife, to be by yourselves, to be together, with all your attention on each other. They are moments that will be a renewing of your romance. Moments that build up and strengthen your relationship. The closer our marriages approach the example of Christ and his church, the more it will be like that.

That reminds us that this song is also a picture of the love between the church and its Lord. As the church we are very much yearning for the day when we are fully with our Lord Jesus. It's the time when we will have reached our perfection. We are already the

Lord's possession. We are united to him by faith. We have his righteousness. But our love has a yearning for the time when we are actually with him, not just by faith. It will be the time when we are no longer a sinful stumbling people. A time when Christ himself will be with us on the new earth, where there will be no more pain or tears or sin. Yes, all of us yearn for something better. None of us, and none of our relationships are completely what they should be. But when Christ returns then we will be fulfilled. Then we will be the "... *unblemished, radiant, bride of Christ.*" The woman closes this Song of Songs with the words of yearning "*Come away my beloved*". So, we the church, say with deep yearning the last words of the Bible: "*Come Lord Jesus, come, come quickly*".