



Come Away With Me

Song of Songs 2:1-17

Grace Church | 6.12.22

A few years ago a popular post was circulated around Facebook that detailed how thousands of long lost letters from Albert Einstein to his daughter had been uncovered, and one of them was particularly quote-worthy. In the letter, Einstein compared his famous formula for Mass-Energy Equivalence, $E=MC^2$, to the “true” power of the universe: the power of love. Love, said the letter, is the only force powerful enough to change the world, because it has no limits.

Quite tantalizing words from a physicist. The only problem? Einstein never wrote them. So shrouded in mystery is the daughter he apparently wrote them to that most historians believe she either died as a child or never even existed. Why would we so easily believe that a man who committed himself to studying energy and power would say “love is the most powerful force in the universe”? Perhaps, social media has made us incredibly gullible. But more likely, I think, is because we want it to be true. It’s a sentiment we don’t bat an eye to. Love—present love, past love, love lost, love desired—is that one category of human experience which feels most tempestuous, like an uncontrollable storm. Why then do we say we “fall” in love? Christian, pagan, atheist, physicist—all know the power of love, especially romantic love, to enrapture us, to spring us to action, to mystify and exchant us.

But love also has the power to go terribly wrong. Passionate love, so says the greatest love Song ever written, is like a great beast that is not to be awakened or stirred against his will. It’s dangerously sweet. But what we will also see from this text is that the time for fully awakening our eternal love is coming. We just have to be patient.

In our introduction to Song of Songs, we clarified that the Song is an idyllic picture of human marriage that is meant to draw us to consider God’s perfect love in Jesus. Its images are pointing us back to Eden and forward to the perfection of the New Heavens and New Earth; the beloved king is a type of Christ, and the bride is our teacher who we are to model and learn from as she experiences love in the Song and we experience love in our marriage to Christ and human marriage that points to it. Any love and intimacy we experience in this life, especially the unified intimacy of marriage, is only a picture of true love. God is love, and no greater love in action has ever existed than his love for his people. So in chapter 2 today, we will see three aspects of God’s perfect love: **it is powerful, it is promised, and it is patient.** In each of these aspects, I want us to consider how we are being welcomed into the lovesong of God in Christ. It is his love that we are created for, it’s his love that is calling out to us, and it’s his love that we will enjoy forever.



Love is Crazy (1-7)

You are made to powerfully desire the Beloved.

In **2:1-2** we have already noticed how the beloved responds to his wife's insecurities with superlatives. She is not just a lily, she is a lily among brambles: one in a million. So then it makes sense in **verse 3** that the woman makes a similar comparison: her beloved is like an apple tree among normal forest trees. Apples are not native to ancient Israel, and the fruit here is difficult to determine, but the meaning is clear: sweet, ripe, unique. The beloved is not just any tree: he is a fruitful one. This kind of imagery is contrasted with the bride lamenting earlier in chapter 1 that she was unable to keep her vineyard, that is her own body, as she would have liked. Her beloved, she sees, is more fruitful than she could imagine, meaning he is one who provides for her, no matter her insecurities. This image is reinforced in the rest of **verse 3**. It is her delight to sit in his shadow, and his fruit is sweet.

No sexual innuendo is inferred here, but the image is still exceedingly romantic. The love of her beloved is *sweet*, and he brings her to a "banquet house", literally, a "wine-house". He spreads his "banner" over her in **verse 4**, a public declaration of love that has militaristic overtones. It's like saying: "his love has enraptured me, marked me". This love, says the bride, is her identity, her name. For the rest of the chapter, we find the bride speaking in a kind of dream-like situation. She is thinking of her love, and it leads her to an ecstatic fantasy land. In short, love has made her crazy, in the best possible way. In **verse 5**, she calls out to her companions. The word for "refresh" me is also translated as "spread", as in making a bed. She is so enraptured with love, she needs to lie down and be sustained with sweet food like raisin cakes and fruit. Appropriately she describes her state in **verse 5** as "I am sick with love". This wording here of "lovesick" is why I am led to believe she is picturing her beloved while he is away, and why starting in **verse 10** the words of the beloved do not have the heading of him speaking directly, but rather quotation marks. They are words she is picturing him saying, because no one is lovesick when their love is with them.

So it is in **verse 6** that she remembers and pictures the embrace of her lover. It is worth noting here that while the imagery is romantic and even erotic, it is not explicit. In contrast to other ancient love texts of the era, it would be downright pedestrian and PG. This is because God is intentionally drawing us to consider that even sex in marriage is less about the physical act and more about the picture it is portraying, the covenant of love. Remember too that the marriage picture here is idealized. Meaning, it's how we would feel if we encountered a perfect love. But many of us can relate to these feelings and emotions even as we experience imperfect love in this life! And if we can't relate to these feelings from experience, we long to. And what I want to offer today is that intense desire, that longing, that feeling of "love-sickness", is intended by God. His love is crazy, unfathomable. He made love pleasurable and desirable. He made us creatures who long for love. Why?

Because again, he is love. It is in his Triune nature—the Father eternally loving the Son by the Spirit. Made in his image, we are created to be the object of love and to model him in showing and



giving love. So when God saw that in the garden it was “not good” for man to be alone and made woman, what he was doing was creating sexual love in marriage as a picture, an image, of the purpose of creation. In loving one another and desiring one another, husband and wife display the kind of all-in intimate love God *is* and *has* for his people.

You were made to desire. And by this I don’t mean you were made for the purpose of sexual desire. Your sexual desire is pointing to something else: a desire for true love, a desire for God. The fact that you to want to be held, to not be lonely, to be known, to be embraced; your desire for sweet relationship and companionship and intimacy, even your desire for sexual intimacy—single or married, all of it is God’s intended way for you to long for him. You are made to desire. But that desire was broken by sin. Instead of desiring God, in the garden Adam and Eve desired their own gain. Now the power of love makes it not just exhilarating and sweet, but incredibly dangerous.

We know this to be true because all of us have been broken by love, and by our sexuality. We have lusted or desired in ways that were bitter, not sweet. We have had images thrust on us or actions done to us that we never wanted, a banner of desire over us not of love but of hatred and evil. All of us have been broken by the power of desire. The Song of Songs is aware of this too. It’s why there is a warning that comes in **verse 7**. The bride stops, and addresses us, in her wisdom and experience. We are the daughters of Jerusalem who are eager to learn from this perfect love. She appeals to us “by the gazelles or the does of the field”. Why appeal to animals? These animals are both representations of romantic love. So she is personifying them: as if she is saying: “I appeal to you by love itself”. And her appeal is simple: don’t awaken love until it desires.

She personifies love as having a will, or a desire of its own. You may desire love, but love also has a will. There is a right time and place for love, and it’s not up to you to decide when that is. On the human level, we recognize the wisdom here, which we find all over Proverbs. To dive into sexual intimacy outside of marriage is to awaken romantic love on your own terms. It means you are headed for destruction and pain, and it shows that you don’t value love at all. But to try to awaken the love you were created for through sexual immorality is just one way we impatiently seek love on our own terms. Anytime we settle for lesser loves than Jesus Christ and believe they will satisfy, we are awakening disaster. This is why sex is reserved for marriage: it’s God’s way of “awakening” human sexuality in a way that is faithful, patient, and bound by covenant—just as his love is.

You are made for desire. But more specifically, you are made to desire perfection. You are made to desire beauty, that which is true and good and right. When Adam first looked at Eve, he saw in her the perfect image of God, and he sang a song of poetry. “At last” he said, “one who is like me”. So you too, as a son or daughter of Adam, are wired to want what is perfect and lovely and suited for you. If you are married, God has brought you a picture of that desire in your husband or wife, to love and sing over. But ultimately, the only one who can satisfy our desire and make us truly “lovesick” in the best way is Jesus Christ, the perfect beloved.

And make no mistake, being God, he *is* love, and he has a will and desire. So the wisdom we are receiving here is that *you don’t love Christ on your own terms*. You will not find him until he pleases.



True love isn't something we ascend to, it's something that comes to get us. For those of us in Christ, he has called. He has made us his own, he did it in his death and resurrection! Then he went away, didn't he? He ascended, sending us his very Spirit. But he said: "I am coming again soon". His call now is: "If you love me, you will obey my commandments". In other words: save yourself for me. Don't give yourself to other loves, don't try to awaken the love that only I can awaken. So, we wait for the day when divine love comes to get us.

What are you lovesick for? What makes you crazy with longing? Is it the love of Christ: are you eager to feel it in full? Hear this though: even if you have not saved yourself (and all of us have, in sin) for Christ, and you have pursued other loves: it's his divine prerogative to love you, and his joy.

Love is Calling (8-14)

The Beloved is coming to call us away.

If you are unsure of what it means to "not awaken love until it pleases", the rest of the chapter will show us. In **verses 8-10**, the bride pictures her beloved on the day when he comes to take her away. In her mind, this is the day that "love pleases to awaken". Love comes bounding over the hills, like a gazelle or stag—strong and powerful, but graceful and sure footed. He comes up to the wall, peering through the windows, calling out to her. The image is like the prince riding up to the tower to rescue and take away the princess. It's romantic, long expected, perfect.

What does the beloved say? Wonderful, timely things, centered around the call that the bride longs to hear: "Arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away", a refrain he repeats again in **verse 13**. How do I know that the bride is picturing the time when her love is finally awakened? Because of how the natural world is described as "awakening" in **verse 11-13**. Spring comes shining forth from winter. Like the melting of Narnia where it is always winter and never Christmas, when the beloved comes to call away his bride, it will finally be a "time of singing", of flowers and fruit and ripe vines and sweet smelling blossoms.

I have always wondered if paradise would have winter. I'm not sure, but this much I do know: if there is winter when we are with our beloved Jesus, it will be a fruitful, sweet, joyful winter—like Christmas everyday. This is the promise of true love. Marriage is a picture of this: why do you think God commanded that the man "leave his Father and mother and hold fast to his wife?" Because they are called to "go away" together, to make their own spring, their own fruit. The call of love is to "arise and come away". That call is issued in **verse 14**, by the beloved as he compares his love to a "dove in the clefts of the rock". Doves hide in rock clefts because they are skittish, shy. So the beloved calls for his love to throw off her timidity with him and show her face and let him hear her voice. When the beloved comes, there will be no more need to hide, just as in marriage, there is no hiding but a complete sharing of life together. This life together is also free of nuisance. The call in **verse 15** is to "catch the foxes." You may find foxes cute, but they are vermin in this context. The love that is awakening in this song is one that has no room for outside forces spoiling it.



This is the love promised to us by God. This is what we are waiting for, the “awakening” that we are to save ourselves for. But it’s not easy. Most of us are familiar with Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the story of “star-crossed” lovers who risked it all in order to pursue love—and lost their lives for it. I can almost picture the famous scene where Romeo is calling up to Juliet’s window here in these verses. Both confess their love, ready to run away with each other and forget that they are Montague and Capulet. But Romeo has come too soon, and their love isn’t ready. The same passion that drove them to call each other away is the passion that drives them to their death. Romeo and Juliet could not bear to live in a world where they couldn’t be totally and freely together—so in the end they choose not to live at all.

The story is a warning for us in this way: we have tasted and seen the love of God in Christ, but he has not yet come. Our hearts are thawing, and day by day we are closer to Eden again, but it’s still winter. There are times, in our walk with Jesus, where we feel so close to him. We feel enraptured, lovesick even. We picture in our minds what heaven will be like, we feel spring. But then, we wake up. Times of suffering come, of sin and darkness and pain. Our news feeds flash again with reports of murder and hatred and evil. And we are tempted then, to find our satisfaction instant gratification, to awaken love in some other way. We turn to pornography, to sex outside marriage, to romantic or erotic fantasy or masturbation, to discontentment and covetousness, or simply to numbing busyness. It’s much easier to try to find satisfaction in cheap love than to wait for the consummation of the love we were created for.

But God is calling us to use our bodies for love in a way that is patient for his coming, to point our desires to eternity. In fact, this is exactly what we are doing when in singleness we abstain from sexual intimacy and in marriage we remain faithful to one sexual partner: we are showing that we value eternal love enough to restrain our desires for temporal love. We are not awakening true love until true love pleases. And make no mistake, true love will please one day to awaken. He has already shown that the grave can’t keep him. One day, Jesus will come back, the beloved for his bride. But how can we remain until then, both full of his love and faithful to him alone?

Love is Coming (15-17)

The consummation of the Beloved is soon, and is already secure.

The answer comes in **verse 16-17**. A more poetic description of the consummation of all things could not be given than what we read in **17**. Soon, all shadows will flee and the day will “breathe” freely. No more smog, no more dark corners to hide. But until then, the call to the beloved is to “turn”, that is “turn away”, back to the mountains and “cleft” hiding places. Although the image the bride has of her beloved is so powerful it causes her to be sick with love, she knows the time is not yet. But although spring has not fully sprung on the Earth, it doesn’t mean our relationship to Christ is in doubt. It doesn’t mean his love for us is in question. Notice the confidence of the bride: “my beloved is mine, and I am his”. This is union language, plain and simple. He grazes among the lilies—she is the lily of the valley, the lily among thorns! The time to “come away” may still be coming, but this does not mean he is far off. Even now, he is the stag who grazes with the lilies.



This is commonly called “the already not yet”. Christ has not yet come to bring all things in time to a close, but when he came to earth he announced truly “the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. Jesus lived and died and rose to unite you to him if you place your faith in him. Your marriage and intimacy is no more in doubt than the turning of the seasons. To make it so, he has sent his Holy Spirit into the hearts of his people as a guarantee, a down payment for what is to come.

You can wait patiently for the consummation of the love of God, because you know that even now, he is yours and you are his. You aren’t living in paradise yet, but Jesus is not half-heartedly loving you. He is with you, and as one puritan put it “he is the very heaven of heaven”.¹ When I was engaged to my wife, we lived 12 hours away, and it tortured me! But that is not you and your beloved. “Behold, I am with you always”, he says, until the day breathes and the shadows flee. What is Jesus doing in the meantime? Why is he tarrying? It’s for you—even now he is praying for you, applying his righteousness and blood to you, washing you and preparing you to be holy and spotless. He is making a house for you, a home where you can live together with him forever. He is not dallying—his timing is perfect, you can trust him. The already not yet means that you can simultaneously long for the joy of heaven and experience tastes of heaven here on earth. We taste his love with the church, we taste his love in his Word, we taste his love every time we turn our hearts to notice his grace and kindness to us.

Jesus Christ is the great love of your soul. And his love is powerful and pleasurable. One day, we will taste his love fully. Until then, he says: “don’t awaken love”. He is saying “be true to me. Don’t give yourself over to others. Save your devotion for me alone. Make my love be your banner, no other. Don’t settle. Prepare yourself for me.” The great purpose of your life is to get the bride ready for the bridegroom. The holiness and devotion of the church in anticipation of her bride should be the great passion of your existence. Don’t stir up other loves that fail to feed that love. Don’t awaken other ends that lead you away from the holiness of your beloved. Make your marriage a picture of heaven. Make your faithfulness in singleness a beacon of the desirability of Jesus. Your great love is coming, and his love is crazy powerful. It’s crazy enough to melt all the sin from your heart forever, to break away the winter of all your burdens. To call upon Narnia again, the king is coming, and as Mr. Beaver has said: “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good.”²

And even now he is calling... “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.”

¹ Richard Sibbes, “Christ is Best”.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*

