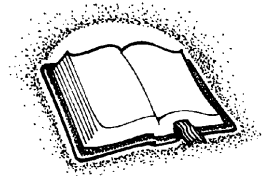


Unlocking the Bible (29)



Altogether Lovely

Reflections on the Song of Solomon

In contrast to the practicality of Proverbs and the turgid nature of Ecclesiastes, we have the exotic language and pictures of Songs. This is a love poem, full of ecstasy.

It is not easy to follow its sequences nor to know who is saying what, to whom, and when. Yet, equally it is quite easy to share in its sayings and imagery, to identify with these and to recognise in them something of the precious and fascinating interaction and relationship between the two lovers.

The book is full of vivid pictures and graphic descriptions. There are fragrances, tactile experiences, sights and sounds - all associated with the beauty each beholds in the other. There are exquisite expressions *'He brought me into His banqueting house and His banner over me is love, I am my beloved's and he is mine, the Rose of Sharon , altogether lovely,* and so on. It is hard to excel on these descriptions.

There is a play between these lovers. They meet and interact. But they also are elusive and disappear, only to be eagerly sought.

What can be said about this Book and its contribution to this trilogy of 'wisdom literature' and teaching?

Firstly, there are two distinct elements in the narrative and what they seek to convey. If the details are hard to put into exact positions or to attribute to one party or another there is no doubt about the quality of the relationship, the enjoyment, the fascination and the sheer enjoyment, both in the actual and in the prospect. It is something beautiful, enjoyable, and precious. That points to the value of the experience of God that is possible. Many of these phrases and descriptions are frequently used in devotional expression: *altogether lovely, the fairest of ten thousand,* Hymns of praise abound with terminology borrowed from this source. One hymn puts it like this:

*But ,what to those who find?
Ah this, no tongue nor pen can show.
The love of Jesus what it is,
None but his loved ones know".*

True worship, true communion is exquisite. . It is wonderful.

Yet, in contrast, there is an element of transience weaving its way through the story. The lover disappears, evaporates almost. Its tenderness and delicacy is such that its presence cannot be guaranteed; it is easily disturbed. That is something that also characterises devotional expression and praise. It is delicate, vulnerable and transient. It is easily disturbed. The hymnist expressed it in this way:

*Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus and His Word.*

There are sins which, sadly, may *'drive him from my breast'* Unbelief, slackness, insincerity, creep in and they drive away the dove, they are *little foxes which spoil the vine,* they are the factors that contaminate worship in spirit and in truth, regardless of the correctness of time and place and form.

Secondly, Songs represents a complementary aspect of the living out of life in the dear of God within an ordinary context. If Proverbs represent the day to day living, then Ecclesiastes emphasises the foundation and the basic principle while Songs deals with the beautiful expressive aspect. Life goes on, the foundation is always there but the expression is beautiful – yet delicate. It needs to be cherished.