

Sermon Notes

Song of Songs 1:4b - "Angels Rejoice"
A Sermon Meditation Series on the Song of Songs
September 29, 2019

Introduction

- 1) What have been some of the great moments of joy in your life?
 - a) When someone has protected you or came to your aid?
 - b) Maybe a simple memory from childhood, when you were more innocent?
 - c) Or when your child was very young and he/she responded to you in innocence?
 - i) "Innocence" in the broad worldly sense.
 - ii) The smallest of children are still sinners who need Christ.
 - d) Or when someone you looked up to praised you?
 - e) Or how about those time of close fellowship with those you dearly love?
- 2) Let's ponder this by meditating on the Song of Songs 1:4b, which is very challenging, but sublimely rewarding.

Recap About the Song of Songs

- 1) With maybe the exception of Revelation, the Song of Songs (SoS) is one of the most challenging books in the Bible to interpret.
- 2) Most important issue: What approach should we take in interpreting this greatest of songs?
 - a) Pastor Doug follows the ancient method of reading the SoS as an allegory.
 - i) It's really not about the surface literal reading of a mere love poem between two lovers who want physical union.
 - ii) But instead is an allegory between Christ (the Bridegroom) and His church (the bride) and their love, and desire for, spiritual union.
 - b) This reading requires maturity.
 - i) First, the sensual, earthy and romantic imagery could easily be misused and misunderstood by an immature, juvenile mind.
 - ii) Second, because the SoS is meant to be meditated on like a great work of art, allowing the reader to freely, theologically ponder its imagery, it requires a great deal of theological maturity to set firm orthodox boundaries.

Literal Reading of SoS 1:4b

- 1) In SoS 1:1-4a the woman/bride speaks about how desirable the man/bridegroom is.
- 2) In verse 4 she desires that he draws her to himself and that they hurry to the king's chamber.
- 3) At the end of verse 4 a chorus chimes in.
 - a) One of the challenges of the SoS is figuring out who is speaking, since the text doesn't tell us directly. (See appendix.)
 - b) Having a chorus speak is common in ancient poetry.
 - c) To act like a prologue and/or to highlight, direct, or affirm the poem's actions.

- c) This chorus is a group of young maidens.
 - i) They are happy and rejoice at the love between the man and woman.
 - ii) Rightly do the maidens love the man, for he is handsome, rich and powerful.

Allegorical Reading of SoS 1:4

- 1) For an allegorical meditation, who would the chorus of maidens be?
 - a) Maybe the church/Christians?
 - b) Pastor Doug thinks other normal people mentioned SoS better fit the church.
 - i) Like the shepherds in SoS 1:8.
 - ii) Though again there is freedom in one's meditation, as long as it is orthodox.
 - c) In Pastor Doug's opinion, the better interpretation would be the maidens are angels.
 - i) Not saying angels are women!
 - ii) As in those theologically terrible Christmas decorations.
- 2) To recap about Angels: They are (technically) extraterrestrial thinking spirit creatures.
 - a) They are NOT humans that have "earned" their wings in heaven.
 - b) They are immortal, created, finite, intelligent, spiritual beings, not tainted by sin & have superhuman abilities and powers

Dan 7:10; Matt 26:53;
Luke 2:13; 9:26; 20:36;
Heb 1:14; 12:22, 23; 1Pet 1:12

 - i) Angels can appear in human form.

Gen 18:2; 19:1, 10; Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10
 - ii) In their true form the Bible strains to describe these primordial monstrous creatures, especially the highest rank of angels, the Cherubim & Seraphim.

Num 7:89; 1Sam 4:4; Ps 80:1; 99:1;
Is 37:16; Ezek 1:4-14; Dan 10:13; 12:1;
Zech 1:9, 11; 1Thes 4:16; Jude 1:9;
Eph 1:21; Col 1:16; Rev 4:6-11
 - c) Some angels did fall and are now demons.

Gen 1:4?; Is 14:12?; Matt 25:41;
Luke 10:17-20; 2Cor 11:14;
2Pet 2:4; Rev 12:7,9

The most powerful is the Devil, or Satan.
They have no hope of redemption.
 - d) The major purposes of angels include:
 - i) Angels are in heaven, rejoicing, blessing and praising God.

1Chr 16:31; Neh 9:6; Job 38:7; Ps 103:20-21;
Ps 148:2; Is 6:2-4; Dan 7:10; Luke 2:13-14;
Luke 15:7,10; Rev 4:8-9; 5:11-13; 18:20

Since angels are created beings, like us,
they are not to be worshipped.

Col 2:18; Rev 4:6-8; 5:11-14
Rev 19:10; 22:8-9
 - ii) Messengers for God. Both the Greek & Hebrew words for "messenger" can mean normal human messengers or angels.

Job 1:14; 1Sam 11:3;
Is 42:19; Hag 1:13; Mal 2:7;
Luke 7:24; 9:52; Rev 1:20
 - iii) Agents of God's providence, carrying out His sovereign will.

Ex 12:23; Ps 104:4; Heb 11:28; 1Cor 10:10;
2Sam 24:16; 1Chr 21:16; 2Kgs 19:35; Acts 12:23

- iv) Especially carrying out God's plan of judgment and redemption.¹
- 3) For our focus, based on SoS 1:4b, let us ponder how angels interact and react to us.
- 4) **Heb1:14** reads, "*Are they (angels) not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?*"
- a) Angels clearly work for the salvation of God's people right now in some spiritual way.
- i) It is true there is much more to this reality than the physical world we see through our fallen sinful eyes.
- ii) There is the "unseen world," as the Puritans called it, of spiritual realities.
- b) The exact details of how this works, we are not given.
- i) So let us not go beyond Scripture, lest we fall into idolatry and superstition.
- ii) As **Deut 29:29** teaches, "*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*"
- iii) Let alone the warning of Christ, "*If I told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?*" – **John 3:12**
- c) Yet the angels clearly are working for our good, right now.
- i) The "our" is God's people, the "elect" as the Bible calls them, those chosen by God. Matt 22:14; 24:22,24,31; Mark 13:20,22,27; Luke 18:7; Rom 8:33; Col 3:12; 2Tim 2:10; Titus 1:1; 1Pet 1:1; 2:4,9; Rev 17:14
- ii) Those who are trusting in Christ.
- 5) Other texts also teach that angels are protecting God's people.
- a) **Ps 34:7** – "*The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear Him, and rescues them.*"
- b) **Ps 91:11-12** – "*For He will give His angels charge concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. They will bear you up in their hands, that you do not strike your foot against a stone.*"
- i) Though this text does apply to believers.
- ii) It is first and foremost about Christ. Matt 4:6; Luke 4:10-11
- iii) The saints are not above their Lord.
- Just as Christ knew suffering in this life, He was administered to by angels, and raised on to glory. Is 53:3; Matt 4:11; 25:31; 28:2-8; Luke 22:43; John 15:20-21; 20:12,13; Acts 1:10-11
 - So too with the faithful.
- iv) Because our hope is never in the work of angels, but the work of Christ, whose angels are mere ministers of Christ's will and work.

¹ This includes: Ministered on earth (Gen 18; 19; 24:7,40; 28:12; 32:1); Rebuked idolatry (Judg 2:14); Calling leaders (Judg 6:11,12; 13:3; 1Kgs 19:5; 2Kgs 6:17; Zech 1-6; Dan 4:13, 23; 10:10,13,20-21); Proclaimed Christ's birth, resurrection & ascension (Matt 1:20; Luke 1:26-38); Ministered to Christ (Matt 4:11; 28:2-8; Luke 22:43; John 20:12,13; Acts 1:10-11); Minister to God's people (Ps 34:7; 91:11; Heb 1:14; Matt 18:10; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3; 12:7; 27:23); Rejoice over a penitent sinner (Luke 15:10); Bear the souls of the redeemed to paradise (Luke 16:22) and agents of judgment at the end times (Matt 13:39,41,49; 16:27; 24:31).

- 6) The most personal references to angels, and us, however is **Matthew 18:1-10**.
- a) If the Bible teaches we have guardian angels, it is in this text.
 - b) The disciples ask, “*who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?*” – Matt 18:1b
 - c) The Lord calls a child to Himself, “*and said, ‘Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me;’*” – Matt 18:3-5
 - i) This is not about being nice to humans under 18!
(Though there is nothing wrong with loving children.)
 - ii) This is about having that simple faith as a little child.
 - Like a little child obeys his or her father without question.
 - To humble oneself like a little child before authority.
 - iii) Which we moderns have a really hard time doing.
 - The world defines humility as being “nice” and “not having strong opinions.”
 - This is false.
 - Godly humility is to submit to God’s Word.
Which is Christ, the Word of God, who explains in Holy Scripture, the written word of God, as proclaimed and administered by Christ’s body on earth, the church.
 - iv) As Christ commands here: We are to receive God’s children, i.e. the Church!
 - d) The Lord Jesus then warns about stumbling blocks that will come.
 - i) And He pronounces indignation on those who cause Christians to stumble.
 - ii) He warns that Christians should flee sin, and if your foot causes you to stumble then you should cut it off. (This is talking about sin, not body parts!)
 - iii) Lest one “*be cast into the fiery hell.*” – Matt 18:9
 - e) The Lord concludes, “*See that you do not despise one of these little ones,*” – Matt 18:10b
 - i) Again, this refers to believers in Christ.
 - ii) We are called to love Christ’s church and not cause any saint to stumble.
 - iii) Why?
 - iv) The Lord explains, “*for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.*” – Matt 18:10b
 - v) It appears that the faithful, the little ones in Christ, have an angel.
 - vi) Note the angels location, however; it is not on the believer’s shoulders, but in heaven, continually beholding the face of the Father.
- 7) So, we have learned that angels . . .
- a) Spiritually aid the saints here in this world in some mystical, mysterious way.
 - b) We have angels that know us and who are before the Father in heaven.
 - c) But what are those angels doing?

- 8) In **Luke 15:1-10** the Lord gives two parables explaining why Christ receives penitent sinners.
- a) It is like a shepherd who rejoices to his family and friends when he finds the lost sheep.
 - b) Or a woman who loses a day's worth of wages and finds them.
 - c) This joy is nowhere nearly as great as the joy in heaven over a sinner who repents.
 - d) As our Lord teaches . . .
 - i) **Luke 15:7** – *“I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”*
 - ii) **Luke 15:10** – *“In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*
 - e) When we repent, which is to mentally turn away from sin, Satan, our self and the world, and turn to Christ, there is great joy in heaven!
 - i) Not earthly things that might excite us (power, money, dominance, etc.).
 - ii) That simple thing of faith, which leads to hope and produces love.

Conclusion

- 1) I asked what moments in your life do you remember that brought you joy?
 - a) Assuming they were not against God's Law, they are a gift of God's grace.
 - b) Yet they are mere shadows and figures of true joy that awaits the saints in heaven.
- 2) For our joy is not in this world, but in Christ.
- 3) And how wonderful it is . . .
 - a) That God's angels are working out God's grace to us.
 - b) That God's angels are protecting us.
 - c) That the angels in heaven rejoice of the saints, especially when we repent.
(Turn from this world, sin, Satan and yourselves, and to Christ.)
 - d) *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;”* – Rom 8:28-29
- 4) Truly the angels “will rejoice in us and be glad.”
 - a) They “will extol our love more than wine”
 - b) Because, “rightly do the angels love Christ” who loves us!
- 5) It is comforting to know we are not alone in this life; we have the church, there are angels protecting us, but these are but creatures, all glory laud and honor belongs to the Triune Creator.

Appendix

The New English Translation (NET) of SoS 1:4b, with notes, showing the complexity of the SoS.

The Maidens² to the Lover: We will³ rejoice and delight in you;⁴ we will praise⁵ your love more than wine.

The Beloved to Her Lover: How rightly⁶ the young women⁷ adore you!

² Normally in the Song, the person/gender of the pronouns and suffixes makes the identity of the speaker or addressee clear. However, there are several places in which there is grammatical ambiguity that makes it difficult to identify either the speaker or the addressee (e.g., 6:11–13; 7:9b). This is particularly true when 1st person common plural or 3rd person common plural verbs or suffixes are present (1:3[4]; 2:15; 5:1b; 8:8–9), as is the case in the three lines of 1:3b[4b]. There are four views to the identity of the speaker(s): (1) NASB attributes all three lines to the maidens, (2) NIV attributes the first two lines to the friends and the third line to the Beloved (= woman), (3) NJPS attributes all three lines to the Beloved, speaking throughout 1:2–4, and (4) The first line could be attributed to the young man speaking to his beloved, and the last two lines attributed to the Beloved who returns praise to him. The referents of the 1st person common plural cohortatives and the 2sg suffixes have been taken as: (1) the maidens of Jerusalem, mentioned in 1:4[5] and possibly referred to as the 3rd person common plural subject of אֶהְבֹּךָ (*'ahevukha*, “they love you”) in 1:3b[4b], using the 1st person common plural cohortatives in reference to themselves as they address her lover: “We (= maidens) will rejoice in you (= the young man).” (2) The Beloved using 1st person common plural cohortatives in a hortatory sense as she addresses her lover: “Let us (= the couple) rejoice in you (= the young man), let us praise your lovemaking ...” (3) The Beloved using the 1st person common plural cohortatives in reference to herself—there are examples in ancient Near Eastern love literature of the bride using 1st person common plural forms in reference to herself (S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 92, 99)—as she addresses the young man: “We (= I) will rejoice in you (= the young man).” Note: This problem is compounded by the ambiguity of the gender on בָּךְ (*bakh*, “in you”) which appears to be 2nd person feminine singular but may be 2nd person masculine singular in pause (see note below).

³ Alternately, “Let us rejoice and delight in you.” There is debate whether the cohortatives נִגִּילָה (*nagilah*, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from גִּיל, *gil*, “to exult”), וְנִשְׂמְחָה (*venishmekhah*, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from שָׂמַח, *shamakh*, “to rejoice”) and נִזְכֵּרָה (*nazkirah*, Hiphil cohortative 1st person common plural from זָכַר, *zakhar*, “to praise”) should be classified as (1) cohortatives of resolve, expressing the resolution or determination of the speakers to adopt or accomplish a course of action: “We will rejoice ... we will delight ... we will praise” (e.g., KJV, NASB, NIV) or (2) hortatory cohortatives, exhorting others to join in doing something: “Let us rejoice ... let us delight ... let us praise” (e.g., NJPS).

⁴ A shift occurs in 1:4 from 1st person common singular forms to 1st person common plural forms: “Draw *me* (מִשְׁכְּנִי, *mashékēni*) ... Let *us* run (נָרֻצָּה, *narutsah*) ... Bring *me* (הֵבִיאֵנִי, *hevi'ani*) ... We will be glad (נִגִּילָה, *nagilah*) ... We will rejoice in you (וְנִשְׂמְחָה, *venishmekhah*) ... We will remember (נִזְכֵּרָה, *nazkirah*) ... They love you (אֶהְבֹּךָ, *'ahevukha*)....” Several translations and many commentators end the words of the Beloved at 1:4a and begin the words of the Friends in 1:4b and revert back to the words of the Beloved in 1:4c. The subject of the 1st person common plural forms may be the “young women” (עַלְמוֹת) previously mentioned in 1:3. This is supported by the fact that in 1:3 the Beloved says, “The young women love you” (עַלְמוֹת אֶהְבֹּךָ, *'alamos 'ahevukha*) and in 1:4c she again says, “Rightly do they [the young women] love you” (מִישָׂרִים אֶהְבֹּךָ, *mesharim 'ahevukha*). On the other hand, in ANE love literature the bride often uses plural pronouns to refer to herself (S. N. Kramer, *The Sacred Marriage Rite*, 92, 99). Some commentators suggest that the young man is addressing his beloved because בָּךְ (*bakh*) appears to have a 2nd person feminine singular suffix. However, the suffix on בָּךְ is in pause (after the accent) therefore, the normal 2nd person masculine singular suffix בָּךְ has reduced to *shewa*. The parallelism with the 2nd person masculine singular suffix on דֹּדְךָ (*dodekha*, “your love”) supports the 2nd person masculine singular classification.

⁵ Alternately, “remember.” The verb נִזְכֵּרָה (*nazkirah*, Hiphil imperfect 1st person common plural from זָכַר, *zakhar*) is traditionally rendered “we will remember” (KJV), but is better nuanced “we will extol” (NASB) or “we will praise” (NIV). The verb זָכַר has a wide range of meanings: “to remember, call to mind” (Gen 8:1; Deut 24:9; Judg 8:34), “to name, mention” (Jer 20:9; 23:36; 31:20; Pss 63:7; 77:4), “to summon, command” (Nah 2:6), “to swear by” (Amos 6:10; 1 Chr 16:4), and “to praise, extol” (Exod 23:13; Josh 23:7; Pss 45:18; 71:16; Isa 26:13; 48:1; 62:6). The Hiphil stem has four denotations, and “to remember” is not one of them: (1) “to take to court,” (2) “to mention,” (3) “to make known,” and (4) “to praise, profess” (*HALOT* 269–70 s.v. זָכַר). NJPS offers a poetic nuance that plays upon the wine motif: “savoring it more than wine.”

⁶ Alternately, “The righteous love you.” Scholars debate whether מִישָׂרִים (*mesharim*) should be taken as a substantive (“the righteous”), abstract noun (“righteousness”), or adverb (“rightly”). The LXX’s εὐθυτῆς ἡγάπησεν σε (*euthutēs ēgapēsen*, “righteousness loves you”) is awkward. The adverbial sense is preferred for several reasons: (1) The verb אֶהְבֹּךָ (*'ahevuka*, “they love you”) in 1:4c is repeated from 1:3c where it was used in reference to the maiden’s love for her lover. (2) There is no group designated as “the righteous” elsewhere in the Song. (3) To introduce an additional party into this poetic unit is unnecessary when it can be easily understood as a reference to the maidens of 1:3c.

⁷ *Heb* “they love you.” The words “the young women” do not appear in the Hebrew but are supplied in the translation for the sake of clarity. The shift from the 1st person common plural subjects in the three cohortatives—נִגִּילָה (*nagilah*, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from גִּיל, *gil*, “to exult”), וְנִשְׂמְחָה (*venishmekhah*, Qal cohortative 1st person common plural from שָׂמַח, *shamakh*, “to rejoice”), and נִזְכֵּרָה (*nazkirah*, Hiphil cohortative 1st person common plural from זָכַר, *zakhar*, “to praise”)—to the 3rd person common plural subject in the verb אֶהְבֹּךָ (*'ahevukha*, Qal perfect 3rd person common plural from אָהַב, *'ahev*, “to love” + 2nd person masculine singular suffix) suggests to many scholars that a shift in speakers occurs at this point: the maidens praise the young man in the first two lines, while the Beloved affirms the appropriateness of their praise in the last line (e.g., NIV). However, the shift in person might simply be another example of heterosis of person (as already seen in 1:2–4a)—this time from first person to third person. Thus, the shift in grammatical person does not necessarily indicate a shift in speakers. It is possible that the maidens are speaking throughout all three lines, and that the third line should be nuanced, “How rightly we love you!”