
Day 146 – May 26

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Psalm of Solomon, Song of Songs

Readings: *Psalm 127, Song of Songs 1:1-8:14*

Reflections:

- The opening of Psalm 127 is a fascinating piece of wisdom to have come from Solomon. As the man attributed with building the temple, the house of the Lord, he declares that “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders’ labor in vain.” Also, Solomon built a huge household for himself with all of his wives and concubines. The sleep God grants is the sleep of peace that comes from complete trust or faith in God. Such a household built by God is blessed with the fruitfulness of sons or children who provide strength and security for the parent or leader. Again, this psalm has an immediate interpretation that focuses on how God blesses and establishes a home. It also has a larger interpretation in how God works through any community and its people. The key obviously is that when God blesses his people he both builds the home and grows the home.
- The Song of Songs is the most difficult book in the Bible to understand. It makes no mention of God, has a poetic structure that is very loose and makes no reference to who is speaking at any given particular time. There are multiple interpretations of what the song is about and even some who say it is just a collection of songs authored by different people. It is highly sexual and has no obvious spiritual focus. Scholars have wondered if this is a royal love song about King Solomon, a song about a love triangle involving Solomon, a shepherd boy and a woman, or a peasant love song that rejects Solomon in his pomp.
- I believe the only way one can understand the purpose of Song of Songs is within the larger story of Israel. Solomon, at the point when Song of Songs was written, was synonymous with lustful idolatry with countless wives. Once this context is understood, the story begins to take shape and make sense.
- The story follows the wedding celebration of a peasant vinedresser and her peasant shepherd. She refers to him as her king and he refers to her as his princess. This is not to be confused with the times when Solomon is named specifically. They exchange love songs with a consistent warning “Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.” Sexual love is so powerful that it can lure you to lose self-control and abandon yourself to idolatrous lust like Solomon with his many wives

and concubines. The lovers in this story are completely impassioned but they have waited until the right time to give themselves to each other. The beauty of this peasant love and sexual abandon is contrasted to Solomon's many wives (many vineyards who are attended by others for pay). The final warning is given for the young women who are just entering puberty (who do not have breasts) and are looking forward to the day of their marriage: be sure to protect yourself so that you can wait for the day when you are ready for love. The story ends with the bride saying, "I am ready, let's run away" and the two lovers escape for their honeymoon!

- The reason this song is in the Bible is that it first of all affirms that the Garden of Eden love affair between man and woman is ultimately at the centre of God's heart. It reminds us that ultimately God delights in true intimacy between man and woman and that he values this first and foremost. All other human loves are built on the foundation of this ultimate intimacy. It also reminds us to be wary of a lust that takes us into the streets and simply desires many women or men. It reminds us that covenant love that is inflamed with sexual intimacy is the most beautiful of all God's creation. It is the return to the Garden of Eden.