

Hymns: 51 Love Lifted Me 54 Oh, How I Love Jesus
 Psalm 31:1-5 I Corinthians 13:4-8, 13

Last time we looked at the Big Picture of the Bible: Paradise lost, God's loving gift of redemption, and paradise regained. We saw that the Bible is God's **love letter** to man. Today, we want to explore that *love letter* concept a little further. February is the month of romantic love, punctuated by Valentine's Day—just ten days ago.

From grade school, we've learned to exchange Valentine's Day cards and to remember our sweethearts. According to Wikipedia, Valentine's Day commemorates the martyr death of a third-century Roman saint named Valentine. He's celebrated by the Eastern and Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches. His life likely involved something related to love and marriage, but the details are sketchy.

Valentine's Day was first associated specifically with romantic love in the Middle Ages by Geoffrey Chaucer. His most famous book was *The Canterbury Tales*. I remember struggling through that **barely intelligible** form of English during my school days. By the 15th century, people had begun practicing the tradition of giving to one another flowers, candy, and cards on Valentine's Day.

You may recall, according to the 2010 IBIS World survey, Thanksgiving ranked second in holiday spending, only behind Christmas. What's shocking to me is that Valentine's Day ranked **third** ahead of Mother's Day and Easter. It's nice though that in a world with so much **hatred and evil** that people still celebrate romance with such fervor.

In keeping with the season then, let's take a brief glimpse at some classic Bible sweethearts.

Bible Sweethearts

Adam and Eve

God made Adam and then created a helper suited for him. God used a distinct process in introducing Eve to Adam. It's interesting to examine carefully the order of events in Genesis:

*[18] And the LORD God said, It is **not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.***

*[19] And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and **brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them:** and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.*

*[20] And Adam gave names to all **cattle**, and to the **fowl of the air**, and to **every beast of the field**; but for Adam there was **not found an help meet for him.***

*[21] And the LORD God **caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam** and he slept: and he **took one of his ribs**, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;*

*[22] And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, **made he a woman**, and **brought her unto the man.** (Genesis 2:18-22)*

The sequence of events is, God:

1. States that it is not good Adam is alone.
2. Says He will make a helper designed for him.
3. Parades all of the animals in front of him.
4. Shows Adam none is suitable (quite a build up of suspense).
5. Performs surgery to take a rib.
6. Creates Eve from the rib.
7. Presents Eve to Adam.
8. Performs the first marriage.

Try to imagine this. Perhaps you can think back to your own sweetheart and your own honeymoon. Whether on a cruise ship, at a resort, or in some form of **man-made** paradise, they would all **pale** in comparison to **this** marriage and honeymoon. Even the celluloid fantasy scenes depicted in the movies and television cannot measure up. Adam and Eve were truly **made for each other**. Theirs was a **marriage made in heaven**. Each was completely pure in thought and motive. Their honeymoon was spent in a paradise that we cannot even imagine.

What did Adam say when he saw her? Many preachers say he said, “Wow!” While he *may* have said that, we’re told something different.

[23] And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. (Genesis 2:23)

How much did he love her?

*[14] And Adam was **not** deceived, but **the woman being deceived** was in the transgression. (I Timothy 2:14)*

We know that both Adam and Eve were created absolutely without flaw. Neither needed any airbrush. Even Barbie and Ken pale in comparison. There was never a smarter, more handsome man. There was never a more capable or beautiful and desirable woman. Within them resided the seeds of the greatest men and women of all time.

Since Adam was not deceived, it means he understood the **consequences** of his actions. He knew Eve would die. Adam's choice was between following God or following his wife to the grave. **He loved her enough to die for her** (does that sound familiar?) and certainly he would die with her. He knew God could create a replacement wife for him if he abandoned her, but he loved **her** and chose his wife, Eve, over God.

Isaac and Rebekah

Next, let's look at the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac's father, Abraham, set out to find a wife for his son after the death of Isaac's mother, Sarah. Abraham sent his **servant**, to go look for him. Abraham's servant **prayed for the Lord to show him a sign** to indicate which woman it should be. In Genesis 24 we read he prayed:

*[14] And **let it** come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, **Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou***

hast shewed kindness unto my master.

[15] And it came to pass, **before he had done speaking**, that, **behold** [note the use of this word], *Rebekah came out*, ... [Abraham's great-neice], *with her pitcher upon her shoulder.*

[16] And the **damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin**, neither had any man known her: and she went down to **the well**, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

And she did **exactly** as Abraham's servant had just requested as a sign in his prayer. He was shocked.

[26] **And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the LORD.**

We skip down in the story to notice here that the bride to be was given a choice.

[58] *And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, **Wilt thou go with this man?** And she said, **I will go.***

We too have the same question asked of us and the freedom to accept or reject our bridegroom.

[63] **And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels were coming.**

[64] **And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.**

[65] *For she had said unto the servant, **What man is this that walketh in the field to meet us?** And the servant had said, It is my master: therefore **she took a vail, and covered herself.***

[66] *And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.*

[67] **And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.** (Genesis 24)

This is the second mention of *love* in the Bible. The first was when God told Abraham to sacrifice this same Isaac “whom thou lovest” (Genesis 22:2). Note the parallels between this and the previous story:

1. The father picked a wife for the son.
2. The wife was a beautiful virgin.
3. The husband loved his wife.

Jacob and Rachel

Our third love story, found in Genesis 29, is that of Jacob and Rachel:

[1] *Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.*

[2] *And he looked, and **behold a well** in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.*

Jacob inquired about his Uncle Laban.

[6] *And **he** said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, **behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.***

[11] **And Jacob kissed Rachel** [his cousin], **and lifted up his voice, and wept.**

Jacob told Rachel that his mother, Rebekah, was her aunt. Jacob met his Uncle Laban and stayed with

his family for a month. Then Laban asked Jacob how he could pay him for his labor.

[16] And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

[17] Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

[18] And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

*[20] And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him **but a few days, for the love he had to her.***

Jacob requested his wife and Laban prepared a feast but deceived Jacob by giving him Leah instead.

*[25] And it came to pass, that in the morning, **behold**, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? (Genesis 29)*

Laban told Jacob to serve him another seven years and he would give him Rachel too. And Jacob worked seven *more* years to earn the hand in marriage of his true love.

Ruth and Boaz the Kinsman Redeemer

Our fourth love story is of Ruth and Boaz. Ruth of Moab married the son of Naomi a Jewess whose family had fled a famine in Bethlehem and went to Moab. Naomi's husband died. Then her sons also died. In those days, family was the lifeline for women, especially, in their old age. Naomi's life was in shambles. She faced poverty and loneliness. Naomi entreated Ruth to leave her and find another husband, but Ruth stayed with her mother-in-law saying these classic words:

*[16] And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: **for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:** (Ruth 1)*

Now, that's a love story in itself, but the bigger one in Ruth's life was yet to come. The Bible says that Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth. Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech, had a *kinsman* (a key word in this story) who was mighty and wealthy. His name was Boaz.

*[2] And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and **glean** ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find **grace**. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.*

Gleaning meant to go in after the reapers and harvest whatever was left behind. In the Jewish economy, God used gleaning as a means of providing for the poor. The nice thing about that welfare system was that the poor were not just given a handout. They worked for their food.

*[3] And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her **hap** was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.*

*[4] And **behold**, Boaz came from Bethlehem, and said unto the reapers, The LORD be with you. And they answered him, The LORD bless thee.*

*[5] Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, **Whose damsel is this?***

He told him that she was from Moab, related to him, and had been working hard gleaning all day. Boaz then spoke to Ruth and told her to come back to his field and glean there and freely drink the water that his young men drew.

*[10] Then **she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground**, and said unto him, **Why have I found grace** in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am **a stranger**?*

Boaz told her that he had learned of her loving support of her mother-in-law in following her back to a strange land. Then he told her to eat with his reapers and instructed his reapers to give her food to eat and give her abundant success with her gleaning.

When Ruth returned, Naomi realized that Ruth had gleaned in the field of her near kinsman, Boaz. She then instructed Ruth in the manner to claim him as her *kinsman redeemer*. Ruth did as Naomi instructed. Boaz accepted Ruth's proposal, and Boaz went out to do the legwork. He then made it official buying back all of the necessary property and securing the legal right to make Ruth his wife.

*[13] So **Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife**: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and **she bare a son**.*

[15] And he [this son of Ruth and Boaz] shall be unto thee [Naomi] a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which **loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.*

**[16] And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.*

[17] And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, **There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David. (4)*

The providence of God rescued the lives of Ruth and Naomi and gave Boaz a lovely young wife who bore him a son and Naomi a grandson who became the grandfather of David and a member of the distinguished royal line of Christ (Matthew 1:5).

Solomon and his Lover

We don't have time for this today, but we need to at least mention the Song of Solomon that celebrates the love between Solomon and his beloved called the Shulamite woman.

Christ and the church.

Are these stories of Adam and Eve, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Boaz and Ruth, and Solomon and the Shulamite woman simply romantic tales for our entertainment, or is there something more here?

*[11] Now all these things happened unto them **for ensamples**: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (I Corinthians 10)*

[31] For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

*[32] This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning **Christ and the church**. (Ephesians 5)*

There is something more. God uses the human institution of marriage (imperfect though it may

be) to give us a glimpse into the **love** and **joy** we will share as we enjoy the fullness of our **covenant** with Jesus Christ in glory. We who believe in Him, the saints, have received the high calling of being the bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-8; 21:9). Adam, Isaac, Jacob, Boaz, and Solomon are all types, or examples in this context, of Christ. Eve, Rebekah, Rachel, Ruth, and the Shulamite woman are all types of the bride of Christ, the saints.

Jesus Christ died on a cross, bearing the sins of the world in His body. His outstretched arms symbolize the open invitation He makes to all that will heed His voice and answer His call---as Rebekah said “I will go.”

***Behold**, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. (Revelation 3:20)*

The Bible indeed is God's love letter to man as Jesus Christ sacrificed for His bride (Adam and Jacob did that), rescuing her from ruin and despair (Boaz did that), and calling her into his loving arms (Isaac and Solomon did that).

Benediction

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)

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