

CUPID'S ARROW

Exploring the Mystery of Romance | 4Love (Part 3)

Texts: Song of Songs 1

Few images are as familiar on Valentine's Day and elsewhere as the cartoon picture of Cupid firing his arrow. Raise your hand if you've ever seen that picture? What happens when that arrow strikes its intended target? That's right! LOVE happens. But not just any kind of love, is it? No! It's hubba-hubba love... It's a hunk, a hunk of burning love... It's the kind of love that Beyonce' dances about and Marvin Gaye sings about and Nicholas Sparks writes about and a lot of us would like our lives to be more about... You see, it's a sweet thing if your life is glazed by AFFECTION (storge); and an even better thing if your life is filled with FRIENDSHIP (philia); but it's something else if you've been pierced by the arrow of ROMANCE (eros).

A Circle Larger Than Sex

Ever wonder where the character of Cupid came from? From classical history. Cupid is the name of the Roman God of Romance. The American's call him Christian Grey or Ryan Reynolds. The Greek's called him Eros. That Greek word Eros is the word from we get the term "erotic," as in "erotic dancer." True confession: I dated an erotic dancer when I was in college. No, wait, she was a neurotic dancer. Very different. I mention that word erotic, however, because for a lot of people, Romance and Sex seem like pretty inseparable things.

How many times in the movies do you see a couple who've just gone through this heroic experience together, and they turn to face one another, and you just know what is going to happen next. "Kids, cover your eyes!" Or you're watching TV and you see the silver-haired man and the noticeably younger woman holding hands in some romantic spot. They're looking fondly into each other's eyes... like they could just sit there forever and be happy with one another... and the voice-over says: "When you know the time is right... Cialis is there for you." It's like Romance and Sex just go together. That's partly true.

But it's also partly NOT true. There are people who have sex with each other, but enjoy little or no romance. In fact, as soon as the sex is over, they want to get as far away from that person as they can. Conversely, there are people who enjoy an amazing romance without being sexually active. For this reason, the very brilliant thinker, C.S. Lewis, suggests that when we're talking about pure sexual desire, it makes more sense to use the Greek word VENUS. Venus is what George Michael was voicing when he sang: "I want your sex." Venus can certainly be a component of EROS, but Romantic Love is the larger and greater thing.

Now, I'm not minimizing sex here. There's been this bad strain of teaching in

some religious circles that if we have sexual desires, it's because our animal nature is winning out and if we kill that it makes us more like angels. Wrong. God invented sexual relations. He should get an award for that. We make such a big deal about people who wrote a song about saying HELLO on a telephone or writing the best screenplay for a movie about Storks. God invented sex! And the winner is all of us – thank you, GOD!

Sex matters for several reasons. First, because sexual passion is part of the body's share in marriage which, by God's design, is a mystical image of the union between God and humanity. The marvelous pleasure, play, and intimacy of loving sex is a foretaste, the Bible suggests, of the infinitely more rapturous experience of being united with God. Secondly, sexual desire matters because it is the river that leads to the awesome possibility of producing another human life and the huge responsibilities of parenthood. And thirdly, sex matters because sexual union has an impact upon the souls and sentiments of those who unite and then separate. You don't glue two people together and then casually pull them apart without leaving something of the other within them and around them. Sex is such powerful, sacred stuff.

One way of thinking about the relationship between sexual desire and Romance, is that Venus yearns for consummation, while Eros longs for communion. One wants the body, the other the Beloved. Romance may contain sexual desire for the other; but it is the passion to truly know the other that is the preeminent one. Without Eros, sexual desire is mainly about us. When Romantic love is present, the same sexual desire becomes more and more about the Beloved. Is she fulfilled? Is he truly with me?

A Kind of Intoxication

The Bible is full of pictures of Romantic love, especially in the Old Testament. In Genesis we read: **Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of his mother Sarah. So she became his wife, and he loved her** (Gen 24:67). Later on we're told that **Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.** (Gen 29:20) In the book of Judges we hear that **[Samson] fell in LOVE with a woman whose name was Delilah"** (Jud 16:4) And the writer of Proverbs says: **May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth... A loving doe, a graceful deer... may you ever be intoxicated with her love** (Prov 5:18-19).

In every one of these passages, you get a glimpse of the dizzying nature of Romantic Love. AFFECTION quietly sneaks up on us. FRIENDSHIP is practical. But ROMANCE is intoxicating. I think of the scene in the book/movie, TWILIGHT, in which a friend is speaking to the lead character, Bella, about the effect of the vampire Edward: "He's like a drug for you, Bella." Though it was written thousands of years earlier, we meet the same sentiment in the Old Testament

Song of Songs: **Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine** (Song 1:2). This is why when Cupid's arrow strikes someone, you always see little hearts floating up from them like champagne bubbles.

Is there anything nicer than that sort of intoxication? It is one of life's highest highs. Suddenly you see this other person through love's version of beer goggles. That person is just the loveliest, strongest, smartest, most wonderful person. I feel almost woozy around them. I can't get close enough or be together enough or do enough for them. I want to give my whole self to this person. Do you know that feeling? You feel that for your pastors, don't you? The danger of this sort of intoxication, of course, is that it leads to a form of drunk driving.

In her best-selling book, *EAT LOVE PRAY*, Elizabeth Gilbert writes: "I have a history of making decisions very quickly about men. I have always fallen in love fast and without measuring risks. I have a tendency not only to see the best in everyone, but to assume that everyone is emotionally capable of reaching his highest potential. I have fallen in love more times than I care to count with the highest potential of a man, rather than with the man himself... Many times in romance I have been a victim of my own optimism." Gilbert is pointing to something very important. The feelings that come with Romance are so strong, they can blind us to the reality of sin or danger in someone else. It is why Divorce Recovery counselors urge people not to marry someone before you've spent at least four seasons with them.

But the intoxication of Eros can impair our steering in another way too. C.S. Lewis observes that: "Eros, honored without reservation and obeyed unconditionally, becomes a demon." How many of us know people who became so infatuated with someone new that they sacrificed the covenant they'd made with another person, or their relationship with their kids, their parents or friends – only to look back later with heartache? If we are not careful, we can come to worship the feeling of "being in love" itself. Having that warm, bubbly, dizzying feeling becomes the measure of whether we ought to be with this person. But in the name of that idolatry, I wonder, how many people walk away from a relationship with someone with whom, with perseverance, an enormously satisfying life might yet have been forged?

A Fleeting Feeling

In Cassandra Clare's romance novel, *City of Glass*, the main character, Clary, stares into the eyes of her handsome man, Jace. "There is no pretending," Jace said with absolute clarity. "I love you, and I will love you until I die, and if there is life after that, I'll love you then." On one level, that is such a wonderful promise, isn't it? One of the great things about Eros is that it makes promises reminiscent of the kind that God makes: **Never will I leave you or forsake you** (Heb 13:5), says God. My steadfast love endures forever (Psa 118:1).

But what I didn't tell you is that Jace is a teenager. How many times did you fall in a love you thought would last forever as you were growing to the age you are? I counted eight times. What I felt for and had with Mary, two Pams, Garnett, Linda, three Jenny's, and other splendid people, felt at the time like an undying love moving through me from the eternal realm. I was as certain as Jace. But, as C.S. Lewis writes: "Eros is the most mortal of our loves. The world rings with complaints of his fickleness [in light of]... his protestations of permanency."

It should not, therefore, surprise us if our marriage or dating relationship experiences a certain intermittency of Romance. What we need to do in moments when Eros evaporates is lean on Affection and Friendship as the more reliable foundations of their life together. As Amy and I can attest, if you look for reasons for Affection and work at the shared values and commitments that are the key to Friendship, you may be surprised at how Eros (even Venus) finds you again. C.S. Lewis writes: "We must do the works of Eros when Eros is not present." We must treat the other as central to our life, as the one most beautiful or handsome and worthy of devotion, even when our emotional or personal reality is a bit separate from that. We serve and celebrate them. We kiss, embrace, and make love to them, as if love was new. Does that seem crazy?

A Precious Pointer

When I was in Middle School, I had a serious case of Eros for a girl named Arden. I had saved up \$200. I took the train into New York City and used all my savings to buy her this exquisite music box. It confused Arden, because she didn't even like me. She hardly knew me. Part of me sensed that all along, but I just felt this calling to lavish blessings upon her – to give her music, beauty, any grace I could. Here's my question for you: Was I fool to be Romantic? To feel Eros for that unrequited love?

By some measures, certainly. But, in other ways, when love drives us to acts like this, it brings us near to what St. Paul calls "**the foolishness of God**" (1 Cor 1:25). You see, when Eros flows through us and creates a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of a Beloved, to make their flourishing our prime directive, to give whatever it takes to lift them up, even if they turn away, something mysterious and wonderful is going on.

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis: In one high bound, Love overleaps the massive wall of our selfishness; it makes our desires altruistic; it plants the interests of another in the center of our being. Spontaneously and without effort, we fulfill the law [at least toward one person] by loving our neighbor as ourselves...This Romantic love is truly like Love Himself.

In other words, Cupid's Arrow is not only designed to pierce us, but to POINT us.

As fleeting, fickle, and faltering as Romance is, it points us toward that orientation of total commitment to the good of someone else that is the essence of CHARITY (agape) the highest kind of love. As the Bible portends, Eros brings us in to the chambers of the King (Song of Songs 1:4). Romance helps to ready us for the day when "Love Himself rules in us without a rival." (C.S. Lewis)

Let's pray together...

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