

Sunday Sermon

1/28/24

Series: Little Foxes

Passage: Song of Solomon 8:5-7

Title: The Little Fox of Transaction

Good morning, church! We got a good one today. Please turn in God's Word to Song of Solomon 8. We will be reading verses 5-7 this morning as we continue in our "Little Foxes" series. Song of Solomon 2:15, "**Catch the foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyard.**" This is a series about relationships, specifically, what God's Word says about creating healthy relationships with one another, especially within the marriage context. When God created marriage, he didn't create it thinking to himself, "Yikes! I hope these people can tolerate one another long enough to procreate before they kill each other."

No! God created the marriage relationship to be the primary example of a God-like, deeply connected, loving, intimate relationship. Beyond the marriage, God's heart is that we would be one with one another as he is one with himself. You see, broken relationship is a product of sin. It grieves the heart of God. He doesn't like it, want it, desire it. The question is, are we going after it? Going after his heart in the way we live with and treat one another? And we've seen that two things are needed if we are going to live in a way that honors and worships the Lord. **1) We need to be connected to him.** Holy Spirit dependence is the only means of victory in the Christian life. Jesus says, "**The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.**" – Matt 26:41

The Spirit of God gives us everything we need to be able to bring God's blessing and flourishing into our relationships. Where we go wrong is trying to do it in our own strength. Despite what the world may say, healthy relationships are not a 7-step process because our flesh gets involved. We are, by nature, selfish creatures, and if the Lord isn't at the center of our relationships, those relationships will not reflect the design of the Lord. We need to be connected to him. And in that, **2) We need to catch the foxes.**

Little foxes which, if left unchecked, bring devastation into the relationship - stealing fruit, gnawing at the roots until the vine withers. More often than not, it's not the big things which ruin relationships, at least not right away. It's the little things, which if allowed to run free, so often grow into big things. Beloved, are you letting that happen? Worship the Lord by catching and killing the little foxes.

So far in our series we've looked at **three little foxes:**

The little fox of discord. A fox that runs free if in conflict there is no heart or intentionality to reconcile a relationship.

The little fox of dishonor. A fox that brings its devastation when we don't set up and value one another as we should. When we don't create a culture of honor in our relationships.

Last week, we examined the little fox of neglect. A fox which gnaws away at a person's identity and can only be killed by pursuit – by having hearts that stretch out after one another.

This week, we set in our sights a fourth little fox – the little fox of transaction. So let's ready ourselves before we jump in. Will you pray with me? (pray)

1 Cor. 13:5, **“...[Love] keeps no record of wrongs...”**

When you think of record keeping, what do you think of? I think of a ledger. A ledger is a book in which accounting transactions are recorded. Each account is meticulously tracked. It has an opening balance, a list of transactions, and an ending balance.

When it comes to our little fox this morning, let me unpack what I mean by transaction. Simply put, transaction is the action of conducting business – a business deal, if you will. Relationally, it can be understood as an exchange between people. One definition I came across this week defined a transaction as: **a finalized agreement for transferring goods, services, or assets in exchange for something.**

Why is this dangerous? Hang with me for a moment as we dive into a philosophy lesson. There is a prevalent philosophy that exists today called utilitarianism. Without getting into the nitty-gritty, the basic idea behind Utilitarianism is that **people are viewed as objects which are then judged according to their utility or usefulness to me or to the whole.** The end of this philosophy is the maximization of my happiness and well-being. Utilitarianism says that **an object is judged according to its ability to produce benefit,** advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, or prevent pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party/person whose interest is being considered.

We could just stop right there this morning. Kill that. Amen. Let's sing. Can anyone see the danger in that when it comes to our relationships? And yet, so many relationships are based in this idea of using one another for self-motivated reasons. I married her because she's hot. I keep him around because of his money.

Question: what happens when someone becomes no longer “useful” to us?

When someone hotter comes along? When I feel that the other person is holding me back? When I've outgrown the relationship? When the other person doesn't or can't bring to the table everything they were bringing before? Maybe because kids have entered the dynamic. Maybe because of a health issue. Maybe because of increased job responsibilities. All of a sudden, the dishes don't get done, or intimacy changes, or recreation fades. Why do I not have any clean underwear? Why hasn't my car been fixed? Why isn't dinner on the table? Why am I the one driving everyone around?

We keep score. **The truth is that so many of our relationships, marriage and otherwise are based in and built around a transactional mindset.** A mindset which says, “As long as I'm getting something from you, as long as you're pulling your weight, as long as you're scratching my back, I'll scratch yours.” And when the transaction is taking place that works for us. The problem is that's not love. And that's not God's design for the foundation of our relationships, especially of the marriage relationship which is supposed to be a picture of loving one another with the same heart and in the same way that God loves us.

You see at the heart of the little fox of transaction is the issue of record-keeping. **So much bitterness and conflict in relationship comes from a fleshly desire to keep score.** “We did it your way last time. I remember when you didn’t get that done. I remember when I had to absorb inconvenience?” And the little fox roams. Beloved, burn the ledger.

Listen: God has in mind an entirely different foundation for our relationships.

Now quick disclaimer: That doesn’t mean that your actions don’t matter. Hopefully throughout our series you’ve seen that actions matter a great deal in relationships - bringing blessing or curse, building up or tearing down. We reap what we sow.

But that’s not what this is. In that verse we just read, **“Love keeps no record...”** The word used there is the word “logidzomai.” Literally – to take into account, to reckon, to count, to calculate.” Love doesn’t do that. If record-keeping is the basis of your relationships, God says “That’s not love. I desire a different kind of relationship. Relationships not based in transaction, but in love.” You say, “How do you know that?” And the answer is because that’s how God is in relationship with us. In Christ, God has burned the ledger. Our sins have been forgiven. Forgiven literally means “to give up, keep no longer” In other words, in Christ, God keeps our account at zero.

But in our relationships, so often we find ourselves still keeping score. Making sure what I’m putting in is being returned to me with interest. That I am in some way benefitting because of it. Beloved, kill the fox of transaction. Burn the ledger. And if you start a new one, burn it again.

Our text is going to unpack this concept for us this morning. Look with me at Song of Solomon 8:5, **“Who is that coming up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?”**

There is some debate as to who is speaking here, but for our purposes this morning that doesn’t matter much. What I want us to focus on, is what the one asking the question is looking at.

That word leaning is a fascinating word. It is the word “raw-fak.” It means “to support or rest upon.” What’s fascinating is that this is the only time in all of scripture that this word “raw-fak” is used. And when I saw that this week, I said, “Time out. That can’t possibly be the case - that the word “leaning” is not used anywhere else in the Hebrew scripture?” And I very quickly found that leaning was, in fact, used all over the OT.

Here are a few examples. In 2 Samuel 1:6, when King Saul was about to die, it says, **“...and there was Saul leaning on his spear...”** In 2 Kings 5:18, Naaman is talking with God’s prophet Elisha **“...when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm...”**

So I thought to myself, “That’s interesting. It must be a different word.” Sure enough, it was. It was the word “Shaw-ann.”

This is why I love doing word studies in God's Word because they reveal so much that we would just miss in English. What's the difference between these two words and why is SoS the only time "raw-fak" is used? Here's what I learned.

The word "shaw-ann" means "to lean or to support oneself." In other words, the action is one way: Saul was leaning on his spear. It wasn't leaning on him. The King of Syria was leaning on Naaman. You can be sure that Naaman wasn't leaning on him. The leaning goes one way. With "Raw-fak," the leaning is a reciprocal action. The man and woman were leaning on one another.

The picture being painted here is of two people walking along, and as they do, they are right there together, side by side, actively supporting one another. Listen: Saul was leaning because he was hurt. The King of Syria was leaning because he was old. Here, this couple is leaning not because they had to, but because they chose to. "We're just in this together." It's not transactional, it's not record-keeping, there's no egocentricity, no "Listen, you leaned on me for the last 50 feet, now it's your turn to pull the weight." They were invested together working toward a common goal.

And this is further supported by the rest of the verse. Now remember this is poetry, not meant to be understood literally otherwise it would be really weird. ***"Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your mother was in labor with you; there she who bore you was in labor."***

What is this talking about? To understand it, we need to understand the use of metaphor here. Earlier in Song of Solomon (2:3), the apple tree was a metaphor used to describe being in a state of security and trust. Its use is the same here. The woman is not concerned about performance. Or approval. Or expectations. Or roles, but dwells in a state of security and trust with her beloved. Again, that doesn't mean she never does anything. All of Song of Solomon is about them doing things for one another. But security, not transaction, is at the foundation of their relationship. It was the foundation when their relationship started, just as it was the foundation of his family when he was born.

Beloved, let this be a lesson in generational discipleship, for what we model and what we sow in our relationships we will pass on. In counseling we talk about learned patterns of thinking and behavior. Is what we are living in and living out in our relationships an example to the next generation of what is right, and good, and healthy?

Beloved, kill the fox of transaction. Healthy relationships are not about keeping score, but about leaning together. God reshapes the whole paradigm.

This brings us to possibly the most iconic or well-known verses in the book. Verse 6-7, ***"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised."***

We don't have time to unpack all of this in depth this morning, but Solomon is making the point that there is a permanency and strength, and value in love. Love is not a transaction, it's not a fleeting emotion.

It says, ***“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.”***

One of the Christmas cards we got this year had on it a wax seal. Pretty cool. And in the middle of the wax there was a design. In bible times, that seal was made by a stamp or often by a special ring, called the signet ring. It was a ring which bore a unique mark. The signet ring was used to authenticate documents and mark ownership. People would see a seal and discern “who's signet is this?” It was a mark of identity.

“Set me as a seal” is an identity statement. It answers the question, “Whose am I?” “Upon your heart” is a phrase which means “at the center of everything.” Set me at the center – in a place of affection, comfort, priority at the center of your desire and passion.

“Upon your arm” is a different request. Last week we saw that the word “desire” (tesh-oo-kah) carried in it the idea of an arm stretching out after someone – a longing. “A seal upon your arm” also carries in it the picture of an outstretched arm, but this arm is different. This arm symbolizes strength or power. This is an arm extended, not in longing, but in help, in protection, in covering.

We see this quality in the arm of God, Is. 59:1, ***“Surely, the arm of the Lord is not too short to save...”*** He comes to us as Rescuer, Redeemer, Defender. This is an exhortation to commitment, to faithfulness. If you're going to fight for something, fight for me. If you're going to build something, build our house. If you're going to protect something, set your arm over my shoulders and keep me safe and secure.

Notice that this has nothing to do with self. This is a commitment to love. It's strong. It's fierce. It cannot be quenched, and it isn't founded on transaction. It is wholly different. And in healthy relationships, both people understand God's target: that we would walk together, reciprocal leaning the whole way.

Beloved, kill the fox of transaction. Stop keeping score. Burn the ledger. After all, isn't that what God did for us in Christ?

Again, ***“Love keeps no record of wrongs.”***

David in Ps. 103:10 says, ***“He (God) does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.”***

Instead, ***“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners (still unworthy of love, still not measuring up) Christ died for us.”*** – Rom. 5:8

Again it doesn't mean that we don't need to do anything. But because of love God made the investment. He says, “I'm leaning. Will you lean back?” That's how I designed it. Two become one. God's people walking together.

And then for those who would choose him, choose that relationship, choose to lean back, scripture says that “ ***[it is God] who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.***” - 2 Cor. 1:22. A guarantee of what? Security. That we have been possessed by him, that he is all in, that we have been written on his heart, that we have been adopted into his family, and that we will share in the inheritance he has waiting for us. As Christians, we have been sealed. God has placed his mark on our relationship with him.

Would you accept Jesus Christ as your beloved this morning? For he is our hope and redemption.



LITTLE FOXES

Song of Solomon 2:15

Little Foxes:

- 1) The Little Fox of Discord
- 2) The Little Fox of Dishonor
- 3) The Little Fox of Neglect
- 4) The Little Fox of Transaction

“....Love keeps no record of wrongs...”

- 1 Cor. 13:5



**LITTLE
FOXES**

Utilitarianism:

An object is judged according to its ability to produce benefit or prevent pain.



LITTLE
FOXES

Truth:

So many of our relationships, marriage and otherwise, are based in and built around a transactional mindset.



LITTLE
FOXES

“Love keeps no record of wrongs.”

- 1 Cor 13:5



LITTLE
FOXES

***“Who is that coming up from the wilderness,
leaning on her beloved?”***

- Song of Solomon 8:5



**LITTLE
FOXES**

***“Who is that coming up from the wilderness,
leaning on her beloved?”***

***Under the apple tree I awakened you. There your
mother was in labor with you; there she who
bore you was in labor.”***

- Song of Solomon 8:5


**LITTLE
FOXES**

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong as death, jealousy as fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.”

- Song of Solomon 8:6-7



**LITTLE
FOXES**

***“Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm...”***

- Song of Solomon 8:6



**LITTLE
FOXES**



“Surely, the arm of the Lord is not too short to save...”

- Is. 59:1



**LITTLE
FOXES**

“He [God] does not deal with us according to our sins, nor read us according to our iniquities.”

- Is. 59:1



**LITTLE
FOXES**

“He [God] does not deal with us according to our sins, nor read us according to our iniquities.”

- Is. 59:1

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

- Rom. 5:8



**LITTLE
FOXES**

“[It is God] who has also put a seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

- 2 Cor. 1:22



LITTLE
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