

## Marriage sermon – symbolism and reality

The first negative judgment we find in Holy Writ is a judgment on loneliness. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." ~ R. C. Sproul ~

Some people think of marriage as a sacrament [A sacrament is an act of worship which uses symbolism to convey a spiritual blessing- A visible sign of an inward grace.]

The reason we **do not** see marriage as a sacrament is that

1. It was not specifically commanded by Jesus that all his followers should get married
2. In the sacraments there is nothing special about the bread, wine or water, whereas marriage is important to God, not simply for what it symbolises, but in and of itself.

Having said this we must acknowledge that marriage is used symbolically in the Bible

There are four words to remember from Today's sermon

- 1.[and 2.] Church Community
- 3.Covenant
- 4.Communication

### Today's Passage

**Ephesians 5:22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

**5:23** For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

**5:24** Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**5:25** Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

**5:26** that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

**5:27** so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

**5:28** In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

**5:29** For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

**5:30** because we are members of his body.

**5:31** "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."

**5:32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

**5:33** However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

### Symbolism in scripture

**Today's passage draws upon the Old Testament imagery of God being like a husband to his wife Israel which also reminds us of the faithfulness of God and the adulterous nature of Israel. It also reminds us of other Old Testament symbols found in marriage:**

- **Provision**
- **mutual care**
- **love**
- **and above all Covenant**

### **Covenant [berith] cutting**

*The blood covenant began with the sacrifice of animals. After splitting them precisely in half, the animal halves were arranged opposite each other on the ground, leaving a pathway between them. The two parties making the covenant would walk from either end of the path, meeting in the middle. The meeting ground between the animal pieces was regarded as holy ground. There the two individuals would cut the palms of their right hands and then join these hands together as they mutually pledged a vow, promising all of their rights, possessions, and benefits to the other. Next, the two would exchange their belt and outer coat, and in so doing, take some part of the other person's name.*

*Mary Fairchild*

Two people meeting each other after walking down an aisle holding hands and pledging to share their lives together is a covenant.

### **God makes a covenant with his people, the church is a covenant people**

*"A churchless Christian is an oxymoron." Calvin*

Being part of the church you share in a covenant relationship with every other person in the Church.  
WE ARE MORE THAN MEMBERS, WE ARE FAMILY BY VIRTUE OF A COVENANT

**Today's Passage also draws on New Testament imagery**

**It emphasises the role of Christ as the one who makes the church holy.**

**This is why Jesus told the parable of the 10 virgins.**

**Matthew 25:1** "Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom.

**25:2** Five of them were foolish, and five were wise.

**25:3** For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them,

His church recognises his role as Husband and takes it seriously. As a consequence upon his return his church is given the place of honour that only a bride could hope for.

This analogy is continued in the final book of the Bible when we are described as being invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 19:6** Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

**19:7** Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

**19:8** it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

**19:9** And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

**19:10** Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

The Church only has three duties

1. Loving and respecting God
2. Bringing others into the covenant relationship with God [church]
3. Looking after and loving the other members of the covenant relationship [church]

**"WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE WELFARE OF ONEANOTHER"**

"For those to whom God is Father the church may also be Mother." *Cyprian*

### **Marriage in society**

The symbolism and the reality are identical except for one thing marriage is an institution through which God intends to build a better future. God defines Marriage as a covenant entered into between a man and a woman over which he presides and out of which the world will be blessed and the nations increased.

*It amazes me that the generation of people who felt that they were qualified to redefine marriage, were the very generation who had the highest marriage failure rate in the history of the planet.*

*James Watson*

### **Wives Submit to your husbands**

Please note that submission is something that all Christians are required to do as Ephesians 5:21 indicates, but in the context of marriage the wife is called to submit and show respect because these are qualities God wants to develop in all people to work against a culture of disrespect and arrogance. The church too is expected to live this way and so ironically the married women of the church should be raised to positions of authority to guide us in these virtues.

How much do you value submission or respect?

As I told you in my sermon on the Lord's Supper- If you do not like the concept of submission you are going to struggle with following Jesus and learning about God's Nature.

### **Husbands love your wives**

*When the New Testament speaks of the church's glory, it is speaking of its dignity. By analogy, the husband is called to give himself to the purpose of establishing his wife in the fullness of dignity. When he uses his authority to destroy his wife's dignity, he becomes the direct antithesis of Christ. He mirrors not Christ but the Antichrist ~ R. C. Sproul ~*

### **Protecting our marriage**

There are many outside influences [people and activities] that can affect a marriage for better or for worse. The trick is to control what you allow in and what you keep out. But the greatest problem any marriage will have to face is that of civil war.

Marriage does have external enemies. The devil and the world seek to destroy the institution of marriage

On Monday this week a family first study showed the link between the increase in child poverty and the decrease in married parents over the last 50 years.

Subsequently many have denied the link as being too simplistic but there is no doubt in any serious philosophers mind that the decrease in our ethics and the increase in our poverty of spirit are linked. Ultimately the forces that seek to destroy marriage are those of self promotion and individual effort. Occasionally jealousy envy and lust ruin marriage, but the root cause is often simply pride.

### **Personal example**

Marcie and I both suffer from the external influences of stress on our lives and at the moment stress is at an all time high, and this is a good example of an external influence affecting our marriage.

However the real problem for us is that we both deal with stress in different ways.

I objectify the stress. By looking at the cause of the stress and dealing with that situation or problem I defuse the cause of the stress and then I can feel satisfied or happy or relieved.

Marcie needs to process her feelings before or while she is dealing with stress, this relieves the stress for her.

Neither way of dealing with stress is wrong. However my way is not helpful for Marcie trying to process her emotions and Marcie's way just prevents me from dealing with the cause of the problem and forces me to think about all the feelings that a solution would allow me to avoid.

To solve a marriage problem, you have to talk with each other about it, choosing wisely the time and place. But when accusations and lengthy speeches of defence fill the dialogue, the partners are not talking to each other but past each other. Take care to listen more than you speak. If you still can't agree on a solution, consider asking a third party, without a vested interest, to mediate.

~ R. C. Sproul ~

REMEMBER: The greatest personal enemy you ever face is yourself and the greatest threat to any marriage is the married couple.

### **Communication**

*There were many good things I could have focused on but I feel this was the most important today.*

It sounds a bit cliché but if you stop talking or listening to one another your relationship will die.

Remember the great deception in the Hans Christian Andersen story

*“But if you take away my voice,” said the little mermaid, “what is left for me?”*

*“Your beautiful form, your graceful walk, and your expressive eyes; surely with these you can enchain a man’s heart. Well, have you lost your courage? Put out your little tongue that I may cut it off as my payment...” [Said the sea witch]*

But she could not express her love without being able to communicate, even though she had given up her whole life for him at great risk to herself and suffering great pain and even although she had shown in her action that she loved him, it was not enough. [Humans cannot read minds]

Without communication the knowledge of love cannot exist.

Likewise if we fail to read our bible or pray our understanding and knowledge of God's love can fade.

Effective Communication is vital because

- it enables coordination of work
- it enables clarification and explanation
- it builds our relationship with each other [within marriage] and with others [outside our marriage]
- it gives us a way of sharing our burdens and joys
- it stops loneliness from taking over

Please note my marriage is not perfect and this sermon is but a brief look at Marriage in general. I acknowledge that reading Nicky and Silla Lee's Marriage Book has big part of my preparation for this sermon. [And of course many years being married to a wonderful woman: Marcie].

### **Summary**

- 1. marriage is used in the Bible to explain the covenant relationship God has with his people**
- 2. marriage is used in the Bible to explain the faithfulness of God and the faithfulness evident that is found in the people of God whom he calls his Bride**
- 3. Wives are to Husbands as the Church is to Christ [submissive and respectful]**
- 4. Husbands are to wives as Christ is to the Church [humble and dignifying]**
- 5. There are threats from without that seek to destroy Marriage**
- 6. The greatest threat is from within [individuals or a couple]**
- 7. Effective Communication [without this any relationship is powerless]**

### **Parting shot**

Don't force your spouse to learn about you and demand that they change their behaviour, show them you love them unconditionally by learning about them and changing your own behaviour. Christ showed us he loves us [the church] by giving up what it was to be God and Dying in our place. That's your example- if he can do that for a wretch like me, what can I do for my spouse?