

September 20, 2009

Title: "Marriage as God Intends It"

Texts: Ephesians 5:21-33, Genesis 2:18, 22-25

Reflections

How hard it is for me, who live
in the excitement of women
and have the desire for them
in my mouth like salt. Yet
you have taken me and quieted me.
You have been such light to me
that other women have been
your shadows. You come near me
with the nearness of sleep.
And yet I am not quiet.
It is to be broken. It is to be
torn open. It is not to be
reached and come to rest in
ever. I turn against you,
I break from you, I turn to you.
We hurt, and are hurt,
and have each other for healing.
It is healing. It is never whole.

Wendell Berry, "Marriage"

How many of us have realized that we are always to think of the married state in terms of the doctrine of the atonement? Is that our customary way of thinking of marriage? . . . Where do we find what the books have to say about marriage? Under which section? Under ethics. But it does not belong there. We must consider marriage in terms of the doctrine of the atonement.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Life in the Spirit

Sermon Overview

Marriage is an institution created by God. Not only did he create marriage, he wrote the owners manual in Ephesians 5 that tells us how to think about and be married. Marriage is a signpost pointing to and dramatizing the gospel.

This sermon provides an overview of the weeks to come and serves as a table of contents for key considerations in marriage. The principles invoked give help to those who are already married in thinking about their marriage and they help the unmarried think about “whom should I marry?”

I. The Soil of Marriage: Submitting To and Serving One Another (Ephesians 5:21)

If “service over self” is not the mantra of your marriage – all you have is a convenient business arrangement. Christians and non-Christians alike recognize that marriage involves sacrifice and service. For those who are married, Ephesians 5 offers the Biblical criteria by which they can assess how they are doing. For those who are dating, the criteria ought to be used as a way to answer the question: “Is this the person I should marry?” For people not dating, these principles should help guide who they consider dating.

II. The Bloom of Marriage: Friendship (Genesis 2:18 and 25)

Marriage was given as a consolation for loneliness; even in paradise, the solution to Adam’s loneliness was a spouse. The primary purpose of marriage is friendship. When seeking their future spouse, single people ought to be asking “who is (or has the potential to be) my best friend? Who is my #1 counselor?” For married people, if your spouse is not currently your best friend, there is hope: because all friendships take work and cultivation.

III. Nurturing Your Marriage: Marriage as Priority

A marriage not only must be but *is* at the center of a person’s life and therefore must be a priority. Your marriage relationship has unrivalled power over your life; it is the vortex of your life. If your marriage is strong, but everything else around you is crumbling, you still go out into the world in strength. If your marriage is weak, no matter how strong the rest of your life is, you go out into the world in weakness.

For a marriage to be strong, you do not have to have everything in common with your spouse, but you do have to have a common vision for life.

A spouse is someone who looks into the bottom of your soul and says, “I believe in you and want to be a part of your future greatness.”

IV. The Roots of Marriage: A Covenant

A marriage is based on vows NOT feelings. Marriage vows imply mistrust; there will be a day you want to walk away but your vows bind you.

V. Conclusion

How does a person push ahead amidst fears of commitment? How does a failing marriage find hope? By looking to the gospel. In the gospel (like in a marriage) God sees us at our best and worst – he looks to the bottom of who we are and He stays. Not only does He stay, He sees who we will be and sticks around to see it realized in us.

Community Group Discussion

I. Biblical & Thematic Notes

“Covenant” is one of the central ideas in the Bible. When God relates to humankind he does so through a covenant. A covenant is, “a compact or agreement between two parties binding them mutually to undertakings on each others behalf” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd Edition, 299). When used in relation to God and man, “it denotes a gracious undertaking by God for the benefit and blessing of humanity, and specifically of those who by faith receive the promises and commit themselves to the obligations which this undertaking involves” (Ibid.).

God binds himself to us by a covenant. The most vivid picture of this (outside of the cross) is in Genesis 15. In the Ancient Near East, two parties who made a covenant would take various animals and tear them in two pieces and create a walkway between the pieces. After agreeing to the terms of the covenant (each side would have obligations, benefits and responsibilities), the two parties would walk between the pieces of the animals – thus symbolizing that if any of the conditions of the covenant were not met the offending party would be torn apart like the animals. In Genesis 15, God alone passes between the parts (in the form of a smoking fire pot) – suggesting that when Abraham and his descendants break the covenant, that God himself would be torn in two to satisfy the terms of the covenant. Which is, of course, the story of the Jesus and the crucifixion.

This “covenant theology” is the undergirding to the marriage covenant. Two people bind themselves one to another publically with vows. This is why all the old wedding ceremonies appropriately use the words “solemn and weighty” to describe what is taking place.

But of course, we all break our wedding vows in small and sometimes big ways. This is why we look to the covenant keeping God as our only true spouse.

II. Community Group Questions

Getting to Know One Another

1. Share about the most exuberant wedding you ever attended? What made it so much fun?

Looking at the Bible

2. Read Isaiah 61:10-62:5 and Revelation 19:6-10. What is the overall feel of each passage? What do the passages reveal about how God feels about us, his bride?

3. Read Genesis 15. Define the word "covenant." What is the place of vows within a marriage? What is the place of feelings in a marriage?

4. Talk about the relationship between *good feelings* (Isaiah 61-62, Revelation 19) and *vows* (Genesis 15) in a marriage.

Application

5. "Marry your best friend (or potential best friend)." Respond to that statement.

6. What do you hope to "get" from this sermon series on marriage? What did you learn this week about God's view of marriage? What are ways that your perspective on marriage is more influenced by the culture at large than by God's word?