

A Marriage Fit for a King

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As I begin this message on marriage in the kingdom of God, I want you to know that I am very much preaching these truths to myself and my own marriage. All our marriages need what God's Word brings today.

The big news this week was of course, the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States. Inaugurations are, by design, intended to display the importance of the country and the importance of the role of president. Lots of pomp and circumstance. Lots of marching music and military. Traditions are followed. There is solemnity, history, grandeur, and pageantry befitting the glory and power that comes with the presidency of the United States.

They often do these man-on-the-street interviews. Inevitably there is some half-wit who is interviewed on TV and asked, "Why are you here?"

"I don't really know."

"What's the purpose of all this?"

"I'm not sure."

"Who is the new president?"

"I don't know." They are part of something really important but are clueless as to the higher purpose.

Lots of married folk are part of something really important but have little idea what the higher purpose of marriage is. By virtue of finding someone to agree to marry them, they are married. But the "why" of marriage is either lost on them or they refuse to submit to it. Like the protesters on Friday, they are part of the inauguration but refusing to submit to it.

Marriage has a higher purpose than marriage. For our marriages to thrive over the long run, not only do we need to know what it is, we must pursue that goal as the uniting principle between the husband and wife.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 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. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 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. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband." (Ephesians 5:22-33)

This section of Scripture has much to say about roles in marriage and the purpose of marriage. Husbands who love their wives. Wives who respect and submit to their husbands. Could it be any simpler? Why do we mess this up so much?

Apparently, it wasn't that simple in the first century when this was written. Merely telling spouses how their marriage should function was not enough. Paul could have just said, husbands do this. Wives do this. No problem; on we go. First century couples could not and would not have successful marriages if they didn't realize the higher purpose. Marriage has a much higher purpose than marriage or sex or companionship or children.

Look again at verses 31-32. "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" That passage may sound familiar. It's had two important appearances in the Bible already.

The Creation of Marriage (Genesis 2:24)

Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. Why is that important? It's when God created marriage in the first place. Marriage is a divine institution whose purpose is divinely established. So when the Supreme Court of the United States alters the definition of marriage constitutionally as they did, marriage doesn't change. They may as well redefine of gravity. Gravity doesn't change by how man defines it. Real marriage doesn't change with culture and time; it is what it has always been because it is sourced in God's eternal purpose and decree.

Marriage is between a man and woman. That's scandalous today but it bears noting. A man leaves his primary role as son and assumes a new primary role and human identity as husband. While not stated, it is inferred that the wife does the same leaving of her family. And the husband and wife constitute a new primary relationship of oneness. A plurality in unity reflecting the plurality and unity of the trinity itself.

The Covenant of Marriage (Matthew 19:5)

The second prominent spot is from the teaching of Jesus. Jesus was asked about divorce in Matthew 19. The culture of his day, much like our own, was laid-back about divorce with some prominent teachers in Judaism saying husbands could divorce their wives for nearly any reason. Jesus' reply was nothing short of radical and shocking. "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*" (Matthew 19:5-6)

Jaws dropped. People couldn't believe it. To suggest that a couple was obligated to remain married was inconceivable. We know that this is what he was saying by the reaction of the disciples—most, if not all of whom, were married themselves. "*The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry."* (Matthew 19:10)

I wonder what Peter's wife thought when she heard that? Peter probably got an earful in the car on the way home. *What do you mean it would be better not to marry? I can't believe you would say something like that! I am the greatest good that you are ever gonna get!* But the disciples heard what Jesus was saying. Marriage is a God thing. "*What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*" (Matthew 19:6) I wonder spouse, do you realize how sacred your marriage is for the simple reality of who put you together?

It makes me think of what we occasionally hear in the art world. Someone will pull a frame off an old picture and discover behind it a sketch by Michelangelo or da Vinci. They're just

some scratching and doodles really but it will sell for millions of dollars. A month ago a da Vinci sketch was accidentally found and estimated to be worth \$16 million dollars. What makes those doodles so valuable? The artist who drew them. You may say, *Pastor, my marriage is no Mona Lisa*. Maybe not, but God has joined you and your spouse. Your marriage is way more important than you realize.

Isn't this the challenge of marriage in the day-to-day of life? I remember when I got married to Jennifer. Many of you were here for it. Great, great day. Our honeymoon was an enchanting experience. Four and a half years later, is every day enchanting? Over time the special in marriage becomes the normal, the mundane, and pretty soon she's the old ball and chain.

How do we fight that? Exotic trips? Nightly foot rubs? Lavish gifts? Those help. The Apostle Paul knew first-century Christian couples had to realize something extraordinary about their own marriage. *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."* (Ephesians 5:32)

This is what I want you to hear clearly: if the purpose of your marriage is a mystery, your marriage will struggle. Why? When we disconnect marriage from its higher purpose and try to extract from marriage itself the reason to be married, stay married, be happy in marriage, marriage can't provide it. God never intended marriage to be the source of marriage's happiness.

Further complicating it is that no matter who you marry, you are married to a sinner. Look to a sinner for happiness, and guess what happens? Disappointment and ongoing failed expectations. Marriage needs a higher purpose. Don't get married because your family expects it. Don't get married for sex. I remember hearing a pastor say that when I was single. I remember his words, *"My wife is smoking hot but I would not get married simply for sex."* (Source Unknown) Sex like everything else will disappoint when we look to it for meaning and purpose in life and marriage.

What Does Every Marriage Need?

This brings us to the kingdom of God and the reign of Jesus and God's purpose in his kingdom. God is restoring what sin devastated—humanity in rebellion. Human suffering apart from their Creator. God restores by conquering sin through Jesus' death on the cross. What sin has broken Jesus is putting back together and that includes marriage. Other than death, marriage is where the effects of sin are felt the most. The brokenness we experience in marriage is one of the most painful in the whole human experience.

After the Fall, what does a marriage need? *"Your kingdom come, your will be done, [in our marriage] on earth as it is in heaven."* (Matthew 6:10, emphasis added) Who prays that sincerely? Only a person who has in their heart submitted to Jesus as King. The authentic desire for Jesus to rule in your life and in your marriage and for his will and purpose to guide the way that you are married flows from Jesus enthroned in that human heart. And might it be that one reason we have so many struggling marriages is that there is not a full submission to Christ in our lives? We want him to get us to heaven but we don't want to apply him in the day-to-day of life and bow our knee to him even in our marriage relationships. To bring the kingdom of God to your marriage you must bring the king to your heart. Until then, it's my kingdom come, my will be done.

Two married sinners living for their own kingdoms produces conflict and manipulation and passive aggressive behavior so often found in marriage. But when a husband and wife

together bow in submission to Jesus, their marriage ceases to be about their marriage, their marriage ceases to be the source of their hope and happiness. Essentially their marriage ceases to be about them. That is the key. It's not about me. You don't exist for my happiness. I am not the center of my marriage. This relocation of purpose for your marriage will transform it.

We don't ask of marriage what it can't and was never intended to deliver. We look to Jesus for our joy and our hope and our meaning and identity and not to a spouse and not to marriage and not to children and not to sex and not to friendship and not to companionship. Jesus is far better at providing those things than any sinner can. So might you be unhappy with your marriage or unhappy with your spouse because you are asking of them what they can never deliver? Are they your Messiah?

"It proceeds from an obedient heart, and the greatest desire of an obedient heart is the glory of God, not the happiness of the household. If we might paraphrase the catechism, the chief end of marriage is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. The reason we are miserable in our marriages is because we have idolized them. But the glory of God is more important than our domestic happiness."¹

Quit worshiping your spouse. *I don't worship her. She wants me to bow down but I'll never do it. I don't worship my husband but if he doesn't change I'm out of here.* Quit worshiping your spouse and quit worshiping marriage.

How to Have a Kingdom-First Marriage

Be clear with each other what the purpose of your marriage is

People get married for all kinds of reasons but a Christian marriage must have one purpose as the guiding and uniting principle of their marriage—to honor and glorify Jesus through their marriage.

Be honest couples, before this message if you were asked, *what's the purpose of your marriage?* might you have struggled to answer or maybe thrown out love, family, good things?

- *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."* (Matthew 6:33)
- *"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."* (1 Corinthians 10:31)
- *"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever."* (Romans 11:36)

For some of us, this may sound unfortunately weird and awkward, but couples, can you purpose sometime today to simply ask, *how do you think we are doing in bringing glory to Jesus in our marriage? What things could we change that would enhance his reign in our marriage?*

¹ Douglas Wilson, *Redeeming Marriage*, pp.11-12.

Embrace the King's design for marriage

There is the second clause in that Lord's prayer, "*Your kingdom come, your will be done.*" (Matthew 6:10) God has a blueprint for marriage. He designed it. Here is a summary: Husbands, love and lead your wives sacrificially. Wives, submit to and respect your husbands as friends, lovers, and companions. Husbands, we resist God's design when we fail to love our wives as servant leaders. Wives, we resist God's design when we usurp our husband's leadership or fail to respect him.

We cannot ask for God's blessing in marriage when we refuse to accept God's blueprint for marriage. But when Jesus becomes King in a marriage, husbands become better husbands and wives become better wives and that marriage finds renewal in God's kingdom.

Apply the gospel to your marriage every day

*"The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."*²

This is the secret weapon in a Christian marriage that will keep love and commitment alive. It begins with a self-understanding of who we actually are. *I am a sinner*. The gospel begins with the harsh reality of my own depravity and guilt. The marriage experience will urge us to minimize our own failures and to maximize those in our spouse. But the gospel does the opposite. It magnifies my sin in my own eyes which minimizes, by comparison, the sin of others, including my spouse.

Here's a way to know if you are applying this principle: *who is the biggest problem in your marriage?* Be honest. What do you think? If you think the biggest problem is your spouse you are not applying the gospel to your marriage. How helpful to say daily, *I am a sinner married to a sinner*. This helps so much in the rough patches. *If two spouses each say, "I'm going to treat my self-centeredness as the main problem in the marriage," you have the prospect of a truly great marriage.*³ The gospel brings humility. The Bible provides a blueprint. The glory of the King is the ultimate purpose.

Here's the encouragement. Spouses who are motivated to honor Jesus by being a godly spouse become better and better husbands and wives. They're more joyful in their marriages. But this joy is a paradox. It reminds me of the old saying, *"I looked to Christ and a dove of peace flew into my heart. I looked at the dove and it flew away."* If you leave here determined to be joyful in your marriage, you likely won't be. If you leave here more committed to finding joy and meaning in Jesus, you may have a happy marriage. We only get the one as the by-product of the other. Or to say it another way, *"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."* (Matthew 6:33)

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² Timothy Keller, *Meaning of Marriage*, p. 48.

³ *Ibid*, p. 64.