

HOW TO TAKE A WIFE IN PURITY

9/25/2011

Scripture: Acts 17:13-29

INTRO: You will wonder what the Scripture that was read, Acts 17:13-29, has to do with our subject. We will get to that by and by. You see, our subject matter is, "How to take a wife in purity." In the last message, I went overtime. I will seek to do better today. But in the last message we considered the basic problem of our subject and that is the purity factor. In Genesis 1 it says God blessed man and told him to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. When it says God blessed them, it means He endued them with the potential to fulfill that command. So powerfully did He endue man with the desire to fulfill that command that it seems almost a curse at times. That is because the devil got in there and messed this thing up worse than absolutely anything else that God made. And now, we have this purity problem.

Let me add one word here for young people. Last message I told you in no uncertain terms: Don't ever date for fun. And you might ask, "Why date or court then?" My apologies. I should have answered that as well. When our children got to this age we encouraged them to never date for fun. Only date someone because you think this is a potential marriage partner and you want to make sure. That is the only legitimate reason to date or court anyone as I see it. So, when you have a genuine interest in that person and would like to see if this is a person you could live with for the rest of your life, dating or courting is the time to find this out.

Now in this message I want to get one point across to us. Though all the married folk know this point, I want to bring it out most forcefully because we do not like to dwell on this subject. We would like it to go away so we did not have to deal with it. It is this. I told you of a little window of time in a person's life that is most dangerous. It is that time of life when one gets interested in the opposite gender until one is married. I want to give a parable that I think will help us to grasp the dangers of that time and our responsibility as Christian parents to help our young people in that time.

III. THE PARABLE REGARDING ACQUIRING A WIFE

So, let me tell you a little story. And I want this story to serve as a parable to illustrate the dangers young people face during the time they become interested in the opposite gender until they are married. I will call that time period the *time of the grey beards*. Now the phrase, 'grey beards' does not speak of old people. It does not even speak of people. It speaks of a kind of treacherous wave on ocean waters. These are waves that frighten even experienced sailors.

Now the story I am about to tell you is a story I have read a number of times. The story I want to tell you is of Sir Ernest Shackleton, of whom I have told you on a good number of occasions. But I have not told you this part of the story before. Now Sir Ernest Shackleton was an early explorer who wanted to be the first to reach the South Pole. He left East India docks from England August 1, 1914. It was an expedition to reach the South Pole. Almost four months later, Christmas day, 1914, Shackleton and his crew are in heavy ice pack in the Weddell Sea not too far from the South Pole. On January 18, 1915, their ship, the *Endurance*, is in trouble in the tight ice pack through which they have been trying to navigate. Then, one of the worst of scenarios for sailors happens, their ship is frozen into the ice of Weddell Sea. For nine months they remain inside the ship which is frozen in the ice, waiting for the ice to break up, but it doesn't. Rather, the great pressures of the frost make it become more and more dangerous to stay in the ship. And so on October 27, a year and three months after they set sail, the ship finally is too dangerous to stay in any longer. So they move out and set up camp on the open ice. One month later, on November 19, the ship, the *Endurance* cannot handle the stress of the shifting ice any more, and it sinks to the bottom of the Weddell Sea.

They have kept three smaller life boats, in hopes that the ice will yet break up. And so they float on the moving ice until April 19, 1916, waiting day after day, month after month for signs of the ice breaking up. They live mostly on penguins and

seals. And then, a year and four months after their ship froze in the water, the ice opens up and they are finally able to get their little life boats into the treacherous water, loaded with ice bergs and ice floes all around them. They manage a miracle, and a few days later they land on Elephant Island. All of this is in icy weather, with very strong winds. Many times, in those dreadful months, death is but a hair's breadth away.

Now Elephant Island is not a hospitable Island. Nobody has ever lived there and their best hope of help is 750 miles across some of the wildest ocean waters on the face of the globe. And so, to survive, they must get to the whaling station on South Georgia Island. Shackleton determines to make one of the life boats sea worthy, leave 24 of the 27 men on Elephant Island, and travel these 750 miles through these dangerous waters. Their navigational equipment is minimal. Their maps, without which they have no hope, are wet. They are four men living in very cramped quarters, sleeping in rotting sleeping bags made of animal hides, which are constantly wet. The dangers they face are beyond comprehension. If they miss this little island by making a mistake ever so slight in navigation, they will die in the icy waters of the southern ocean and their friends will die waiting for them to return with help.

So, you can imagine the excitement when their navigational equipment tells them they are nearing South Georgia Island, and maybe also their fear that they have made a navigational error and there is no way to go back. And when, according to their navigational information they are close to South Georgia Island, they begin desperately looking for land. But the weather is so bad that mostly they cannot even see any distance. And now, miracle of all miracles, according to their navigational information they are within 10-20 miles of South Georgia Island, though because of the weather they can as yet see no sign of land. And then, with a little break in the weather, dead ahead and not too far away is

South Georgia Island! It is an incredible moment. They have made it, or have they?

Let me read a little from the book written by Alfred Lansing. He writes, "Everything seemed perfect. But not for long. Within a few minutes the deep rumbling sound of breakers reached them. Then dead ahead and off to the right an occasional spout of bursting spray shot skyward hurtling shoreward as the Cape Horn graybeards blindly advanced to their destruction on uncharted reefs.

"The whole complexion of things suddenly changed. There could be no thought of landing, not here at least, for the boat would not have lived ten seconds in those breakers. It was something they didn't deserve—a needless cruelty. The land lay just in front of them, and they had earned it. Yet now that the journey was done, sanctuary was ironically denied them."

Now it would take me a long time to tell you the story of their ultimate landing. It would take me longer to tell you of the terrors that faced them before they finally sat in a hot tub of water at Stromsness Bay whaling station, but they did get there. However, in this parable I am telling you, I want you to picture the time when a young person first becomes interested in the opposite gender until marriage, as that short period of time pictured when Shackleton's crew spotted land until they landed. I want you to picture some experienced sailors take their young man or young daughter this close to the island, then put them in a little boat, push it off and hope they will make it safely by themselves. You see, any inexperienced sailor having come so close to his destination would try to make it safely to land in those waves. An inexperienced sailor would think he is almost there, he only needs to get to land. But arriving at land in those grey beards is certain death.

In the book of Acts, chapter 27, the passage that was read for us earlier, we have a similar

account to the story I have told you. Paul, who had made his last trip to Jerusalem was apprehended by the Jews and they wanted to kill him. This news then came to a Roman commander and this commander then had him captured he allowed him to make his defence before the Jews. When it was discovered that Paul was a Roman citizen, they took him before the Jewish Sanhedrin where, when it looked like Paul would be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to take Paul into custody. Paul's sister's son had heard how some Jews had planned to kill Paul and so two centurions were selected with 200 soldiers and seventy horsemen and 200 spearmen, and Paul was sent to Caesarea. Here he was brought before Festus and King Agrippa and after Agrippa was brought to trembling by the preaching of this man, he sent him by ship to Italy, because Paul, as a Roman citizen had appealed to Caesar. Well, it was a bad time of year to be going by ship and after some difficulty they came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea. By now, traveling by ship had become dangerous because of the time of year, but because the harbour was not suitable to winter in they set sail and eventually came close , not La Crete, but Crete. I wanted to read this whole story for you, but I do not want to go overtime like last Sunday. I encourage you to read Acts 27. But let us simply read verses 27-29.

So, when Shackleton and his experienced crew got close to the land they were so desperately seeking, and there were greybeards, what did they do? They also feared that they would run aground on the rocks. And what they did is they poured every last ounce of energy into staying away from land. It took them all that day and all night to fight off the sea until they found a safe passage to a landing place. Only an experienced sailor can land safely in circumstances like that. Experience is imperative in such circumstances.

And the waves they met that went crashing against the rock cliffs of South Georgia Island are called, Cape horn rollers or greybeards. Here is

what an internet article said about these waves, "The winds south of Cape Horn, at the southern tip of South America, follow the "Screaming Sixties" all the way around the world without interruption by continents. This endless fetch produces long, powerful waves known as "graybeards" or "Cape Horn Rollers" by mariners who claim they have seen them measure a mile from crest to crest and reach heights of 200 feet. Such figures were once discounted as the result of fancy and fear by oceanographers convinced that no wave could surpass 60 feet in height without collapsing. But this "60-foot rule" has been challenged recently by computer models that seem to prove that powerful storms are capable of creating waves as high as 219 feet."

Now I ask you, what chance does an inexperienced sailor have of landing safely in those conditions? Well, it is precisely zero. Now I ask you, what chance does a young person have of reaching his or her wedding day in purity without the help of experienced help? It is about the same. You see, the way the unsaved Gentiles take a wife is like taking a young person within sight of land and shipping off his or her little boat in the grey beards to make their way on their own. But it should not be like that among Christian Gentiles

Now, landing safely among the greybeards in a ship is a business hard to handle with safety when you have experienced seamen on the ship. What I am trying to picture for you is that these are the kinds of seas young people face in those few years, when they are attracted to another until they are married. It is one of the most dangerous times of their lives, if they want to take a wife in purity. Now let me tell you this, that in Sir Ernest Shackleton's case, no inexperienced crew of four men could have landed that little boat safely on land in the conditions that that sea was in. And here is what I am telling you, every young person charting the waters from the time they become interested in the opposite gender until they are married needs experienced help. Without help, he or she is like

an inexperienced seaman in these waters trying to make it to land without damage. What I am telling you is that if they are to manage this short stretch of water alone, and if they are 'normal', they are going to get mangled by those greybeards if they do not have guidance. By this parable I mean that they are going to get mangled by sin before they are married. The chance of them taking a wife without falling into sin, is about as miniscule as an inexperienced person in those dangerous waters making a safe landing when there are greybeards or Cape Horn rollers.

Now let me say this, the greybeards that our young people face in taking a wife are not getting smaller. You see, when this tremendous desire begins to grow in young people, and then the flames of that desire are fanned almost everywhere, then they are in the greybeards. A decent young person cannot even safely listen to some programming of Christian radio, and that station may well run that program with the best of intentions. The marital matters discussed on Christian radio may well be helpful to married couples, but they may mercilessly torment a young person. Christian radio may even rob a child of their childhood by giving information that never was intended for their age. And then, what of TV, videos, music, even the magazines in our grocery stores; maybe even the adds in the mail we bring home? What about internet, or internet right in the palm of your hand? You talk about greybeards! And right at this point, let me advise those of us who are married folk, and young people who are married and are with other young people; take care of your subject content. Let us watch our speech and our actions. Godly discretion on our part can have a big impact on the size of waves our young people face.

Well, I trust this parable gives us somewhat of an idea of the difficulty of remaining pure faced by young people in our culture and world when taking a wife. And now I ask, how have we handled this very difficult time in the lives of our young people? Well, let me begin with how it has been among our Mennonite people in the past and I

understand it is no better among the Amish, if not even a little worse. But what happened over the years is there grew up among us a fatalistic attitude. We excused our inability to help our young people through this age with wisdom by taking on a fatalistic attitude and we said, "Dee mutton sikj ee-mol uut shpringun." I am talking about our past in the traditional church. If I interpret the past right, we said, "There is nothing you can do about this time of life. Young people will experiment. We know there are things they should not do and we should not have done, but it can't be helped. The urges in this time of life are so strong that we did not know better to do than to push their little boat off and hope for the best. So, young people were taken within sight of the Island and pushed off among the grey beards. But our forefathers reassured themselves with this, 'wan dee sikj ee'mol uut jeshprungun ha'n dann woarun dee sikj be'friejun unn dann woat wada aulus fein senn. Once they have run off their energy they will get married, settle down and then life will be normal again.

Well, the unsaved world back in those days did not want early unwed mothers. It conflicted with their views of the need for a grade 12 education and preferably college before marriage. But they could not manage this because of what happens during those youth years and so they excused their inability with this saying, "It can't be helped. Young people will sow their wild oats." There is nothing can be done about that." So this period of time was more than a match for our forefathers and for the world. So our forefathers and the world excused themselves with these sayings, brought their young people within sight of the land, and then pushed off their little boat and let them find land themselves.

But then came the age of modern education. Now, these secular educators, they had the answers. And they said, "Ah, we know what the problem is. Our young people were not taught facts early enough." So they educated the young people with physical facts, and did nothing but add fuel to an already burning fire. They sowed the wind and

reaped a whirl wind. But then the Christian world took up that philosophy and if you listen to Christian radio and talk shows you will hear it. It seems our Christian world at times has absolutely no discernment. Now Mom and Dad can listen to the most intimate of marital problems in the kitchen with all the children listening in. I listened to a man on cd on the Song of Solomon. He preached those messages in church, with every age of person there, and he was shockingly explicit in his descriptions and showed not the slightest bit of concern that this might not be good for many in the audience.

And now I ask you, why did the Jews come up with the betrothal system? I think, after years of experience and a healthy fear of God and hate for sin they said, "There is a way we can safely get every young person through these waters. Number one, marry them off as soon as that time of interest arrives. Number two, we as mom and dad will find a life partner for our son and we will not permit them to see the young lady but once or twice, and that only briefly, until the night they marry." And we call that way the betrothal system. And when we Gentiles hear of the betrothal system our hair stands up on the back of our neck, and we say, "No way!" Number one, that is too young. Number two, we believe they must find the person they have an interest in, not Mom and Dad. And all the people said... We cannot stand the thought of 13, 14 or 15 year olds getting married, nor can we handle the thought of parents choosing their child's spouse. I understand. I am a Gentile. I feel like that too. But we did not find a way to safely bring them to land. So what we did many times in the past is bring them within sight of the island, put them in a little boat, and push the boat off and into the greybeards only to reap disaster upon disaster.

Now I want to say this, that those of us who came out of the traditional churches and were born again by the Spirit of God had a new concern for the purity of our youth and we have done much better. I have done over 30 weddings and have not

yet had to deal with a situation where the bride was expecting. But let me be quick to add that I do not conclude that not having premarital pregnancies means premarital purity. However, I thank God for the many positive steps that have been taken by those who claim to be born again in our community. We give our young people a far greater chance for purity than we ever had ourselves. I thank God for that.

Let me tell you a few of the very big things we have done. First, we have concluded that, "dee mutton sikj ee'mol uut shpringun" is unbiblical. Young people do not have to fall into sin. We have concluded that the Bible can guide us safely through this time of life. We have sought to give them as much of the Bible as we could. We said we will get involved with our youth. We set up youth groups and sought to guide our youth through this time of life. My wife and I have spent many, many hours helping young people through this time of life.

Furthermore, we have concluded that alcohol is not acceptable among Christians and that it is a huge threat in this time of life. Of the young people that came to our youth groups, alcohol dropped anywhere from 95-99%. That is another one of the great things we, of the more evangelical branch have done for our young people. Then we concluded that when our young people have activities together, it is wise to have older oversight among them. Where once we might meet around a fire as a group of young people or in a home the parents had purposely vacated for that purpose, and we consumed alcohol and listened to worldly music and maybe even had some dancing, we now have a youth group and include a devotional from the Bible with older oversight. And I have been blessed many times to see that young people do not despise godly guidance. As a matter of fact, I have rejoiced to see how our young people have enjoyed having the parents come and join them on occasion. For me, from my younger years to see this, is in my estimation nothing shy of a miracle. We have taken some very big steps in helping our young people arrive safely at land.

But my question is this: ought we to raise our evangelical bar a little higher? It is a little difficult to gauge exactly how successful we are because this is a very private area of life. You do not just go to ask anybody the level of intimacy they experienced in their relationship. But let me read Ephesians 5:3 for us once more, "But fornication and all uncleanness..., let it not even be named among you as is fitting for saints..." Some time ago one of our young people, who I thought held a very high standard, shared personally with me and I thank him for doing that. I am the pastor of these young people and not the parent and there are some rights and responsibilities that belong to parents that I as pastor feel I must not usurp. My desire is not to take on your rights or responsibilities. I want to help parents. Some of you may go well beyond what I will recommend in these messages in raising the expectations, and I say, "God bless you." But let me put out one caution. Not all raising of expectations has the desired results. My wife and I have watched this as well. It takes wisdom upon wisdom.

In these messages I am not going to try to tell you what method to use as parents or young people, whether dating or courting. What I will give you is principles from a passage of Scripture. I believe if you obey this passage, no matter what method you use, these principles will guide you safely through this whole process. And what I will say to parents is this, don't push that little boat off and let them find their own way to land. Only experienced seamen can manage that kind of water. You are that experienced seaman. Stay in their boat and guide them over. Whether you choose dating, or courting, stay in the boat with them. That will call for clear and concise instruction in every circumstance your young people meet as they make their way through these dangerous waters. And in the process of this, you, as parents, may come up with the system that works best in following these principles.

CONCL: So, here is the point of my parable. To get a child to the teen age years may bring with it many difficult times. And then, once they are married, there are still many difficulties ahead. But there is a little window of time from when land is spotted until the landing is made that is the most treacherous part of all and that is from the time they are attracted to a possible life partner until they are married. And it is in this most dangerous part of the journey that many, many young people have the least help because we caved in, in the battle and said, "Dee mutton sikj ee'mol uutshpringun." We stand by helplessly in defeat because we think they must sow their wild oats. We do not know what to do. Many were failures in that time of life and expect their children will be too. But I ask, Is there not a more excellent way?

I would be especially interested to hear from those whose weddings Pastor Boehlig and I officiated. What advice do you have for us? If you gave us a word of advice, what would it be? And then, let me give a word to each of our younger couples. Work this matter through before your young people arrive at that first crucial point. You, as parent, have the responsibility to guide them through those years. Be ready before those years come.

And in the next message we want to consider a passage of Scripture that will give us much guidance, as Gentiles, not with the method, but with the manner of taking a wife in purity.

