

A Vision for Marriage
Genesis 2:20b-25; Ephesians 5:25-27
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Happy Father's Day. And I hope that you realize this morning that it is purely coincidence that I chose to do a two-week series on marriage beginning on Father's Day. I promise, men, this is not going to be a beat-up on fathers. I saw a joke this week that on Mother's Day, it is all sunshine and roses; on Father's Day, it is complaint and clouds. So it is not going to be that this morning.

So, I want to encourage you to turn in your Bibles, if you will, or simply look at the screens before you. We're going to be looking at two passages this morning as we do this two-week series on marriage, a marriage primer. First, this week, is "A Vision for Marriage," and next week is "Healing Marriage."

I am eternally grateful for a number of authors. Much of what I am going to say here is born of study, but also experience, and also the teaching of Doctor Bryan Chapell, Doctor Timothy Keller and his wife Kathy, Mike Mason, and Dan Allender, among many. These individuals have greatly impacted my own understanding and richness of the Scriptures regarding marriage, and have also impacted my own marriage, and continue to do so to this day, and will long into the future. But consider this, from Mike Mason:

To put it simply, marriage is a relationship far more engrossing than we want it to be. It always turns out to be more than we bargained for. It is disturbingly intense, disruptively involving, and that is exactly the way it was designed to be. It is supposed to be more, almost, than we can handle. It was meant to be a lifelong encounter that would be much more rigorous and demanding than anything invented on their own. After all, we do not even choose to undergo such far-reaching encounters with our closest and dearest friends. Only marriage urges us into these deep and unknown waters. For that is its very purpose: to get us out beyond our depth, out of the shallows of our own secure egocentricity and into the dangerous and unpredictable depths of a real personal encounter.

Dangerous, dangerous, dangerous is the reality of marriage. And I promise you, if you are single, this is not a sermon for just married people. So stay awake. Don't leave. Because this can be a difficult place to be as a single person. I recognize that. So let's look at God's Word, first from Genesis chapter 2, and then also from Ephesians chapter 5. Hear now God's Holy Word.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. [Genesis 2:20b-25]

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. [Ephesians 5:25-27]

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me this morning?

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the institution and gift of marriage. Lord, we recognize that we are desperately in need of your mercy and grace, regardless of our marital status. And I pray, O Lord, that

you would give us a deeper, more Biblical foundation and vision for marriage, aided by your grace. We need you, O Lord, to be at work in us by your Holy Spirit in every marriage in this place—in every marriage that will be, for all who can hear me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

So this morning, together, I want to outline for you what is outlined by these verses. First, companionship. Secondly, holiness. Thirdly, fuel. Companionship, holiness, and fuel.

First, companionship. We see it very easily here in the Book of Genesis, chapter 2. One of the things that needs to be made abundantly clear—that there was such a thing as loneliness prior to the fall into sin of Adam and Eve. Adam did not find complete companionship with the Creator God. He needed something different than what he found. And so the Lord gave to him what the text tells us here in verse 20: "But for Adam no suitable helper was found." This word translated as "helper" is "helper-companion." It was someone who was suitable to him. And it is not just suitable physically—they would see each other face-to-face—it would also be suitable for the work that God had given to Adam. For they were to live in the garden, to cultivate the garden, to build life there in relationship with God the Father, made in his image. Man and woman were made in God's image. And so, therefore, we need to remember, woman was not made in man's image. The whole idea of woman being taken from man is one like himself, as a suitable companion, fit to work alongside him, all made in the image of God.

So this idea of companionship needs to be first understood in the Biblical concept of friendship. That is what is being imaged here, this deep understanding of Biblical friendship. And this is particular to the Bible itself, when we consider that one of the qualities of friendship is constancy, especially in the face of adversity. We learn of this in Proverbs chapter 17, but also we learn of its counterfeit, of the false-weather friend, when the friend is only there in the midst of celebration. "True friend stick closer than a brother," Proverbs 18:24. And one of the essential characteristics of friendship is transparency, candor, directness, the affirming of one another. We see this in Proverbs twenty-seven. And yet a faithful friend is also one who doesn't just come alongside and give the encouraging slap on the back. It is also one who is faithful to wound another friend, but doing so with love. It's a friend who comes along and recognizes not only our strength, but also our liabilities—our weaknesses.

This is the picture of friendship, and we see it in the New Testament. One of the things that happens among friends are just—quick things—the following: they confess their sins to one another, James chapter 5; they uncover one another's blind spots, Romans chapter 15; they push one another to love in good deeds—one might say they prod, they actually disturb one another to love and to good deeds, Hebrews chapter 10; they exchange forgiveness, they acknowledge sin and receive forgiveness, Ephesians chapter 4; but they also seek reconciliation, Matthew chapter 18. So confession, the uncovering of blind spots, pushing one another to love and good deeds, exchanging forgiveness, and rejoicing in the reconciliation that comes through Jesus Christ. This is the picture of what Biblical companionship, friendship, looks like.

And so the question is, do you understand, or do you know, that husbands and wives are first meant to be friends? Let me go one step further and say that, actually, they are to be your best friend. How's that going? Have you ever secretly wished that your spouse and their friends would be able to uncover the problems with your spouse? Right? Have you ever wondered if maybe, in that conversation with his friends or her friends, that that one thing that you so want to talk about with your spouse but you find so painful and so scary to do—that maybe it'll just come up naturally among their friends?

Why? Because we recognize in some way that real friendship is supposed to be a safe place where you can sort of jokingly deal with your faults and your sins. But so oftentimes when we put a ring on it and we say Mr. and Mrs. and we enter into marriage—it only takes a few weeks, when suddenly the freedom of friendship feels very scary. Where before, in pastoral counseling—if you had pre-marital counseling, and I recognize there may be a whole swath of you that never even had pre-marital counseling—but when you're in pre-marital counseling, it's safe to talk about the challenges that you

might face in your relationship. But boy, once you get married, it is so not feeling very safe. Am I right? I know I'm right. I'm just going to tell you, I know I'm right. I've done too much counseling—I know that I'm right.

And the scary thing is how deeply saddening it is of how often times we can feel more free in talking about what is really going on internally with us with someone on our phones and someone with whom we are a friend—far easier than it is to talk about with the one we share a bed with. Why is that? It's because, somewhere along the way, either by our own choices or by our own being convinced that somehow marriage is either too dangerous for friendship, or we didn't understand that husband and wife are to be friends, even best friends.

And the beauty of friendship, the beauty of what Adam and Eve were to have before the fall, was not only that they were to be companions and friends, but they also understood that they had a common destination. Their destination was to be one with the Father. And even after the fall, friends who are in Christ, friends who are in relationship with each other in the context of knowing God the Father, they understand that they have a common destination. And that destination is this—in the most intimate relationship of husband and wife, we recognize that we have a common destination, and that is Christ-likeness, that what will define us into eternity is not marriage. Marriage does not go on into eternity. What does? Our relationship with God the Father.

So therefore, God has designed marriage and its unique friendship—and, yes, with the injection of romantic love—that that be the place where we recognize that our destination is to look more like Christ as a result of being married to one another than we would have been otherwise. God has intended for your marriage to be a day-in, day-out laboratory of becoming more like Jesus. Now, if that doesn't put the fear of God into you, I don't know what will. Right? It's just a reality. It is what God has designed. Why? Because it tells us here, it says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy." That whole idea of being holy, which I'm going to get to in a minute, is the destination of being like Him.

Here's the question. What did you come into marriage thinking was your ultimate destination? Was it having children? Was it having a house together? Was it settling down and having a dog or a cat? A job and a white picket fence? I recognize that most of the time, no matter what we say we believe in regard to the gospel, what often shapes our marriages are the expectations we brought into it. What were the expectations that you brought into your marriage? Was it that your marriage was intended to be by God as an instrument to make you more like himself? Do you as a husband or wife recognize that your spouse is to be the tool of God's sanctifying power so that you might be able to look more like the Savior? If you don't see that, then confrontations and arguments take on a far more painful reality than they were intended to. But it was never meant to be easy.

Let me say this. If you are a Christian and you are not married, or if you are a Christian and you are, let me tell you—and hear this loud and clear. If anybody ever tells you the opposite, they are lying to you or they are deluded themselves. God does not promise you a happy marriage just because you're a Christian. Just because you're a Christian and you marry another Christian, God does not owe you a happy marriage. But he gives you and me the tools whereby we can experience deep and profound joy and happiness in marriage. And that begins by seeing it as the place—even the epicenter—of friendship and companionship, whose destination is to be like Christ.

Secondly, holiness. The holiness that is spoken of here in Ephesians chapter 5—and let me say that I recognize he's speaking to husbands here. But friends, if you look at how Paul talks to men and women and talks about friendship, and if you think that this is only the role of the husband to make his wife more holy, but the wife's job is not to make you more holy? Men, you're missing the forest for the trees. Don't get down in the deep sauce and assume that this is only for husbands to wives. This is a two-way street when he says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to

make her holy." So the purpose of loving the church was to make her holy. So therefore, we recognize that the goal, the destination, of being like Christ, is itself holiness.

What does that look like? It looks like what the Scriptures call, and what the church calls, sanctification—a progressive work of God fueled by his grace to make us look more like Christ. Here's the key. Here's the operative word. Are you ready for it? Progressive. That's important. Because why? Sanctification is not compatibility as we understand it. If we were to think about compatibility in our culture, compatibility is largely built on someone who accepts me as I am. My soulmate. Right? We think about it as someone who we're sexually attracted to—someone who, perhaps, receives me as that pure, beautiful, divine self that I know I have all down in here, and they're the only ones who see it. Right? But that's not sanctification.

Because why? Does God in Christ accept you as you are, where you are? You be the does. But if you think that's where he's going to leave you, you haven't heard the full gospel. A soulmate might accept you as you are, but they're not going to be a very good mate if they don't help you become what you were intended to be. Sanctification is progressively becoming and reflecting the grace and love and character of Jesus Christ in your work, in your hobbies, in your parenting, in your relationships—in everything you do, to look more and more like him.

Therefore, husbands and wives are to come along as God's divine instrument, to pray for, to encourage, and even to be iron sharpening iron, so that we are progressively made more like Christ. Kathy Keller says it this way. She says, "Oftentimes, most of the problems come because most people, when they are looking for a spouse, are looking for a finished statue, when they should be looking for a wonderful block of marble." We want a finished statue. Oh, but inside of about a few weeks of marriage, you realize, "Oh, how did I end up with this lump of marble?" Right? You may not say it yet. We'll give you a month. But it's true.

And so the reality is, we are never finished. And there has been nothing more beautiful, more incredibly, soul-strikingly, shatteringly difficult, than when my wife has loved me so much as to confront me and show me where I'm failing to live in line with the gospel. In those moments, it doesn't feel like compatibility. It feels like someone taking a chisel to this hardened heart. And yet by God's grace alone am I able, over time—not immediately, right?—over time, to come back to you and go, "Oh yeah, you're 99% right." You know? Most of the time. Maybe like 1% not, but okay. But it's true. It's hard. Right?

And I will tell you, husbands and wives, it is so scary. But it's God's design, because he accepts us as we are, as sinners. And I am deeply a sinner, and so is my wife. And yet I recognize it is only in Christ that I am able to see who she is meant to be and who I am meant to be. That is what God wants you to see today, because more than sanctification—even more—this whole idea of holiness is that the husband and wife are intended to help each other sense Jesus. Sensing him.

Here's what I wrote, because it's better than what I'm going to say to you if I don't look at my notes. Sensing Jesus is a desire for your spouse to see Christ as more beautiful and desirable than you. You are more committed to the growth of your spouse in pursuing Christ in their character, in their vocation, in their relationships, than you are about them meeting your needs. Sensing Jesus is that they are more in awe of his grace than they are of you as their husband or wife. And I see that as the destination of Christ loving his church so much that they would be holy—he goes further to say "cleansing her by the washing with water through the Word to present her to himself as a radiant church." What is she radiating? She's reflecting his glory, because she senses the glory and beauty of Christ.

Do you see the goal of making one another holy in sensing Jesus? Here, we must confess how easily we go to our own corner, wishing that our spouse just paid more attention to us in one way or another. We get more wrapped around the axle about that than whether they are reflecting the character of Christ. Why do we argue and quarrel among us, James asks? Because we do not get what we want. And

so much of marriage and its conflicts and its brokenness are not born out of the huge, colossal mountains of sins that we think of as adultery and all kinds of infidelity—no. Oftentimes, most of the time, most of the brokenness of marriage is in the mundane stuff of life. We get wrapped around the axle because our spouse didn't meet a need that we so believed we deserved, instead of recognizing that God is at work in them, and my goal is to enable them to sense the beauty and the glory of Christ more than to sense my beauty and my glory.

That is impossible. Everything I just said to you—absolutely impossible, unless we have the fuel. Do not walk out of here, if you are married or if you are single, thinking you need to go and do all of this stuff. You can't do any of it—nor can I, until I am coming to a place of rest in finding one fuel, and that is the fuel of Jesus Christ in my own relationship with him. It is this: his deep love and his deep grace. It's present here in this passage: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Only when I am able to see that my own sin, as deep and as ingrained as it is in every fiber of my being—only when I'm able to see that and recognize that Christ gave up a place of glory to take on human flesh, to walk in my place, to love me so dearly while I was yet his enemy, that Christ died for me—only then will I be able to love my wife as Christ has loved the church, because I recognize first not her deep need, but my deep need, for his deep love and his deep grace. Only when you and I are grounded and growing in our understanding and experience of the deep love and grace of Jesus will you and I be able to give grace to our spouses.

This isn't a formula. There aren't five steps. I know you've probably heard of the love languages. Maybe if we go and apply the love languages to our marriage, that will be the solving of it. Maybe if we go to a marriage seminar, that will help us. It can. Maybe going and reading a good book. Maybe. Maybe it will help you. But the place we must begin, and the place we must always end, and the thing that must always carry us through—is that only when I recognize my own deep need of his love and his grace will I be able to love and have grace towards my wife and towards you. It's true of every human relationship, but it is most acute in the marriage relationship, which was to be the metaphor that Paul would use to picture Christ's self-sacrificing love for our sin on the cross—the metaphor of marriage. That means being able to pray that my wife would love Him more than she loves me. Praying that she would reflect Christ more than being compatible to all my whims and desires. But, friends, I must tell you, we cannot, until the grace comes in.

If you are hurting in your marriage, it begins here, drinking deeply of the grace that we are getting ready to celebrate in this supper—celebrating the gift of Christ, whose body was given for us, whose blood was poured out for our sins. He receives us as we are to make us like himself, taking from us hearts of stone, and giving us hearts of flesh. This is where marriage can find renewal. If you are deeply hurting in your marriage and you do not believe your spouse is your friend, guess what? God is not done with you yet. There is hope, and there is renewal. There is forgiveness, and there is grace. And his grace is greater than all of your marital brokenness. He offers it to you.

If you are a single person, I tell you, this is a sermon for you as well in that what the world tells you about compatibility is simply wrong. Let me use this closing illustration. If salvation were like a dating website, how would we do? If salvation before our Heavenly Father was like us putting up our profiles on some website where God would see it, what would we want him to see? Our accomplishments. Our beautiful picture. We like to take long walks on the beach. Read books and listen to classical music. Go to see music festivals and enjoy fine art and good relationship movies. We would want God to see all these things, but the reality is, right, if salvation were like a dating website, none of us would ever find a date. Because in truth, God walked into a very dark bar, and he found a spouse deeply addicted to herself, deeply addicted to sin, and drunk in her own egocentricity. But Jesus, in his love, became one of us, died for us, washed us clean, to present us as holy before the Father. And he has meant for that grace that redeems us to also be the same grace that redeems marriage.

Two sinners, united as one, to be made more like Christ for his glory. This is a vision for marriage. May God give you grace this day. May he bring healing where there needs to be healing. And come next week, so that we can talk about the healing of marriage. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for your Word, for it both confronts as well as it encourages. It deeply stings, but it also brings peace. Lord, I pray that you would strengthen and renew the marriages of this congregation, and those who are planning to be married, and even those who are single hoping to be married. Lord, I pray that you would bring first your work of renewing grace, to give us a vision for marriage that is not defined by our culture or the whimsy of our desires, but rather, established on the work of Jesus Christ. Do this in us. Enable us by grace as we celebrate the supper now, the picture of your self-sacrificing love to present us holy to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.