

February 10, 2008

“Marriage: Back to Basics”
Genesis 2:18-25

FCF: Troubled marriages needing guidance from the Counselor

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Marriage was designed and given by God.
(magnet) We must look to Him for the sake of our marriages.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

It’s cold and flu season. So read the labels. If that bottle of Nyquil says “Night Time Formula,” you probably shouldn’t take it on your lunch break at work. Check the instructions, be sure of the dosages. Read the labels. That’s what they’re there for.

Valentine’s Day is this week and so it’s appropriate for us to consider the topic of marriage – a topic worth consideration for us all. If you’re married, for obvious reasons. If you’re not, still this is God’s Word and it will guide you as to how to pray for those who are married. Either way, we need to read the labels. What does God say? Why is this important? Need I point to rate of divorce? Need I point to the state of marriage? So much suffering in so many homes so often brought upon ourselves. Such misery among so many couples. Such skepticism amidst so many singles. Need I say more?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Genesis 2:18-25](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

“*Gentlemen, this is a football.*” Stirring words from the legendary coach, Vince Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers. Each year he would gather his players at training camp. There sat some of the best athletes in the world. They had played football since they were children. They were among the highest paid athletes of the day. Some of them are in the Hall of Fame. And Lombardi would stand in front, hold up a football, and say, “*Gentlemen, this is a football.*” He did not have to tell them what it was. He was not demeaning or belittling them. He was simply making the point that they were going back to basics. And still to this day, his teams are known among the greatest of the NFL.

“*Ladies and gentlemen, this is marriage.*” For a marriage to have any semblance of greatness, for it to realize its purpose, for us to experience all it was meant to be, we can never say too much about the basics. “*Ladies and gentlemen, this is marriage.*” It was designed and given by God. We see that plainly in the opening chapters of the Bible.

Something was wrong in Paradise. After the sevenfold refrain, “*And God saw that it was good*” of chapter 1, we read something was not good. God is displeased. But He delays. Adam is given the task of naming the animals – observing and pondering their essence. Which surely took some time. And as he labored over this, he noticed that for him no match, no mate was found. His aloneness became loneliness. “*Who is there for me?*” Now God intervenes ([READ Genesis 2:20-23](#)). These are humanity’s first recorded words. And they are words of longing satisfied, of searching come to an end. “*Here she is! Not a threat because she is equal to me. Not a menace because she is different from me. But a companion. My companion.*” It’s the first arranged marriage.

And it is the prototype of all marriages. The narrator makes that clear ([READ Genesis 2:24](#)). This is the divine ideal, the basics we must learn. “*Ladies and gentlemen, this is marriage.*” Designed and given by God, let’s look to see what we can learn.

I. LEAVING

Clearly, the first thing involves leaving ([READ Genesis 2:24a](#)). This has to do with the priority of relationships. Literally, it is a forsaking, a departing, spoken of here.

Now, what exactly does that mean? What does it mean to leave in this sense?

A) *Not to Utterly Forsake*

1. Not necessarily a geographical move

Understand that leaving does not necessarily mean a geographic move. You can live right next door or you can live 3,000 miles away and still have problems here.

2. Certainly not abandoning the relationship

Nor does it mean abandoning the relationship. “Leaving” your parents does not mean utterly forsaking them. That would surely violate the other commands to honor them.

B) *But to Radically Change*

Leaving means radical change. It has to do with the concern we have for others’ ideas, opinions, their way of doing things. It has to do with the dependence we have upon others’ affection, approval, assistance, and counsel. All of that is to change.

1. Not towards parents

Where once those things were chiefly oriented towards one’s parents, no more.

2. But towards spouse

Now it is towards your spouse. We are to “leave” in that sense.

Now in Moses’ day (when this was written), the leaving of the woman was simply assumed. Here it is explicitly stated for the man. Why? Because they were both to leave. They were both to undergo this radical change together with all its hardships.

Illustration:

Hernando Cortes was leading an expedition into Mexico. He had 11 ships and 700 men. After months at sea, they landed. Cortes had the men unload the ships. And then, just as they were heading out, the men turned back and saw the ships burning!

Their reaction was to fight back. Surely an enemy had initiated an attack! Cortes halted the men. He had ordered the ships to be burned. He did not know what they would encounter. But by burning the ships, he knew he had eliminated the option of going back. Radical change calling for radical measures. A new mission, new direction.

Application:

In marriage, this is illustrated in the giving of the bride. The pastor often asking the father of the bride, “*Who gives this woman to be married to this man?*” “*Her mother and I,*” he says as he places her hand in the groom’s. And then steps away. She’s his now. The larger principle being that the bond of the husband and wife trumps all others – both of parents and any children they might have. And anyone else, for that matter.

Now the thing to be aware of is the temptation to pour oneself into all those other relationships when the marriage is in trouble. Why? It’s easier. But not better. Difficult times are signals to dig in. Now think with me as to the difference this would make if we took that seriously. Leaving, really leaving as we’re called to and not to forget it.

II. CLEAVING

That’s the first thing. The second flows immediately from it – cleaving (**READ Genesis 2:24a-b**). Leaving speaks to the priority. Cleaving to the pursuit. It means to follow hard, cling to, join to, stick to, stay close, cleave. We are to leave and to cleave.

A) *Not a Contract*

Understanding from the beginning and all the while that this is not a contract.

1. Not renewable

It is not renewable. We do not “re-up” for marriage.

2. Not conditional

Nor is it conditional. We do not fulfill our part only if the other fulfills theirs.

B) *But a Covenant*

For this is not a contract but a covenant.

1. Timeless

It is timeless. We do these things regardless of the circumstances.

2. Total

It is total. We hold nothing back. In every aspect of our lives, we are married.

It is a covenant, patterned on God's commitment to us. It is a covenant – timeless and total. In fact, some have noted a parallel to when we become a Christian, when we pledge ourselves to follow Christ. Again, timeless and total. And not always easy.

Illustration:

In the movie, "Family Man," Jack Campbell (played by Nicolas Cage) is the president of an investment house in New York City. And he is happily single. He has everything, or so he thinks. But on Christmas morning, his world is turned upside down. He wakes up in a "what if?" scenario, finding himself twelve years into a marriage with his college sweetheart and two small children. He desperately tries to rediscover his old life but in the process begins to find out what he's really been missing all these years.

Toward the end of the movie, Jack has a job opportunity that would revive his former glory. Taking it would mean a move for the family, but Kate (played by Tea Leoni) says she's willing to make a sacrifice for the sake of the family – a defining moment that helps Jack see what marriage is all about. She declares ([READ quote](#)):

Maybe I was being naïve, but I believed that we would grow old together in this house. That we'd spend holidays here and have our grandchildren come visit us here. I had this image of us all gray and wrinkly and me working in the garden and you repainting the deck. Things change. If you need this, Jack, if you really need this – I'll take these kids from the life they love, and I'll take myself from the only home we've ever known together, and I'll move wherever you need to go. I'll do that because I love you. I love you. And that's more important to me than our address. I choose us.

Application:

Older wedding ceremonies spoke to this very thing. "I pledge you my troth." Think "betrothal." This is reliability, stability, trust, loyalty, endurance, without any preconditions. No pre-nuptials. It is essential to marriage, the foundation for intimacy.

Wayne Mack puts it this way ([READ Strengthening Your Marriage quote](#)):

The wife promises that she will be faithful even if the husband is afflicted with bulges, baldness, bunions, and bifocals; even if he loses his health, his wealth, his job, his charm; even if someone more exciting comes along.

The husband promises to be faithful even if the wife loses here beauty and appeal; even if she is not as neat and tidy or as submissive as he would like her to be; even if she does not satisfy his sexual desires completely; even if she spends money foolishly or is a terrible cook.

Now again, think of the difference this could make. Think of what a marriage would be like if we were not just leaving but cleaving in this way, as we're continually called to.

III. BECOMING ONE

([READ Genesis 2:24](#)) Leaving and cleaving. Priority and pursuit. And one more thing – the third leg of three-legged stool yet also the fruit of the other two.

A) *Physical Intimacy*

This is a becoming one – clearly speaking unabashedly to physical intimacy.

1. Place of children

Showing that, in terms of the place of children in marriage, they are the normal result. They are the normal result of marriage. But not the essential thing. There is yet more.

2. Place of sex

Indeed this speaks not to the place of children but to the place of sex. It is from God – created, blessed, and governed by Him. And it is for us – expressing and deepening love.

B) *Spiritual Intimacy*

This becoming one clearly speaks to physical intimacy. And even more – a spiritual intimacy as well (READ Genesis 2:24-25). Part of this is setting the stage for what was to come in Genesis 3. But part of it also sets before us the depth of the intimacy God intended for spouses to enjoy – to be “both naked and not ashamed.”

1. Nakedness and its connotations

Think of the connotations of nakedness. It’s to be exposed. And to stand naked, exposed, before someone and be at ease, there must be the greatest trust and openness.

2. Nakedness and its implications

Which is to say, in terms of nakedness and its implications, God’s intent is that we would really love one another even after the truth has been exposed of who and what we are.

It is a total intimacy, the deepest unity.

Illustration:

It’s why referring to physical intimacy as the “act of marriage” makes perfect sense. It’s both the symbol and culmination of a more complete oneness, of all marriage is supposed to be. It is the thermostat that regulates so much that’s going on in the context of the overall relationship. And it is the thermometer that reads so much as well.

Application:

“A total sharing of the total person.” That’s really an apt description of what it means to become one. And a definition of marriage itself. “A total sharing of the total person.” A commitment to the sharing of body, mind, possessions, abilities, insights, ideas, hopes, dreams, problems, pain, successes, sufferings, fears, and failures.

Secure in one’s identity in Christ, knowing you have nothing to prove, no masks to wear. Knowing that all criticism and judgment towards you has already been dealt with on the cross. Your approval and acceptance assured from heaven itself. Now freed and impelled to encourage and really allow your spouse to be able to open themselves up, to reveal themselves to you and you to them. Think of the difference this could make, this sharing, becoming one. If married, this is what you were made for, made to pursue.

CONCLUSION:

(READ Genesis 2:24) “*Ladies and gentlemen, this is marriage.*” These are the basics, the essentials from which we must never lose sight, the foundations upon which we must continually build. For they alone will hold fast when the storms threaten.

Storms and foundations have been much in the news over the last week. The tornados that ripped through the mid-South killed at least 59 people, hundreds of homes were demolished across the region, and officials are only beginning to tally how much the damage will cost to repair. So many images of structures swept away, the only thing left being the foundations long since dug deep down into the ground. That’s what holds.

Foundations hold in even the worst of storms. Leaving, cleaving, becoming one – those are the foundations. Marriage was designed and given by God. And so before, during, and after the storms, it is to His Word we must look for the sake of our marriages. For it is those foundations and those alone that can hold “*for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health*” such that we are then able “*to love and to cherish*” one another. And so then it is upon those foundations we must build and keep building.

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