

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

Marriage And Divorce Part 2

May 22nd, 2022

Matthew 5:31-32

Ephesians 5:21-33

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 5:31-32. This is part 2 of a sermon we began last week. If you weren't here for that – don't worry, I will do a little bit of review – but as I was preparing the message for last Sunday I just felt that we couldn't do it justice in the 40 minutes or so that we had. This is such an important topic and such an emotional freighted topic – that we had to go slow and we had to cover all the bases. So I apologize if this feels a bit clunky today, we are sacrificing a bit of STYLE for the sake of pastoral sensitivity.

Let's begin with a bit of review. As I mentioned last week, the Sermon on the Mount IS NOT a sermon about how to get saved. If you look at verses 1-2 of Matthew 5 you see that Jesus WITHDREW from the CROWDS and gathered the DISCIPLES to himself and he began to teach THEM. So this is a sermon directed at FOLLOWERS OF JESUS. It is DOWNSTREAM from issues of conversion. He isn't telling the disciples how to GET SAVED he is telling them how to live AS SAVED PEOPLE in the world. And thus, the Sermon on the Mount is “aspirational” and “normative”. It tells us how we SHOULD LOOK, how we SHOULD LIVE and how we

SHOULD LOVE. Every time you read the Sermon on the Mount you should be convicted. If you aren't convicted, then you aren't doing it right and you need to go back and do it again.

In terms of structure, in the first 12 verses Jesus describes the ESSENTIAL CHARACTER of the Christian and then in verses 13-16 he describes the EXPECTED WITNESS of the Christian and according to Jesus, the LATTER is supposed to flow out of the FORMER. Meaning if we actually LIVE like Christians, then we will GIVE a distinctive and compelling witness to the world.

And so here in the paragraph we're looking at Jesus begins to correct some misunderstandings that the disciples have – some WRONG CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS – that the disciples have about marriage. There was a very low bar for divorce in first century Judaism. Men in that culture were able to divorce their wives for basically ANY REASON. If your wife displeased you in ANY WAY, you could write her a certificate of divorce and send her away. That was the bar and so in this paragraph Jesus is taking hold of that bar way down here and he is lifting it way up here - BACK to where God originally had set it. The teachers of the day had kept the piece in the Old Testament about the process for divorce – but they had left out the part about legitimate grounds and by doing so they had obscured God's original intention for the permanence and durability of covenant marriage. So this is Jesus sticking that bar back in. That's the essence of the passage. Jesus says:

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:31–32 ESV)

Now, remember, all of this relates to the issue of maintaining a distinctive character and witness as the followers of Jesus Christ in the world. A bar that LOW, Jesus says, won't cut it. If we just do sex and marriage like the culture, that's not going to cut it. We need to be different and we need to maintain a distinctive and noteworthy commitment to the original design and purpose for covenant marriage. If we do that, our marriages will PREACH! That's what Jesus is saying here.

Last week we looked at the passage under 3 headings. We talked about the distinctive principle: Christians are going to maintain a very high commitment to the permanence and durability of covenant marriage.

We also talked about the recognized exception(s) to this principle: Jesus did mention an exception in the case of sexual immorality and then the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 added what we usually refer to as “the spiritual abandonment clause”.

And then finally we talked about the potential witness of a marriage like this, specifically in terms of what it would communicate to the world about the value and worth of children.

If you missed that or if you want to hear more about that you can find last week’s sermon on the website. Today I want to EXPAND UPON what we said last week about the POTENTIAL WITNESS of a LIVED COMMITMENT to covenant marriage.

The Potential Witness

In essence, today, we are going to say MORE about what a marriage like this could potentially communicate to a watching world. Last week we gave you POINT ONE; we talked about how a marriage like this could and should say something to the culture about:

1. The value of children

This week we are going to ADD TWO MORE POINTS HERE. We are going to talk about how a high commitment to the durability and permanence of covenant marriage says something about the beauty of mutual submission and also about the nature of Christ’s relationship to the church. We’re going to pull both of those observations out of Ephesians 5, so if you have your Bible open in front of you, flip over now if you can to Ephesians 5:21-33.

Now, I know you get tired of hearing me say this, but this will not work on your phone. You need to see this in an actual Bible. In your Bibles the publishers have put in verse numbers, paragraph breaks and section headings. All of that is wonderful but none of that was in the original Greek manuscripts. Paul wrote this as a letter. Letters don't often have chapters, verses and headings, so these things are added to help us find things that we're looking for – but the problem is that they sometimes chop things up into smaller units that the author intended. We want to turn the Bible into a bunch of fortune cookies or one off principles, but often ideas are connected to other ideas and I think it is important for us to see that.

Alright, so hopefully by now you have your Bible open. Look at verse 22. In most Bibles that looks like the start of a new section – in my Bible it is given the heading: “Wives and Husbands”. However, the main verb for this entire section actually comes back in verse 18 as in “be ever being filled with the Holy Spirit”. So actually Paul is saying that Christians need to learn to be controlled by the Holy Spirit SO THAT they can live distinctively in a variety of ways and the essence of that, he says, is about mutual submission. People in the world LIVE FOR THEMSELVES!!! People in the world DO WHATEVER IS BEST FOR THEM. People in the world are INDIVIDUALS. They are dominated by the instinct for SELF PROTECTION and SELF FULFILMENT. But you – saved by Jesus and FILLED with the Holy Spirit – YOU are capable of something BETTER. You are capable of living a life of self giving, other serving love and kindness. You can do that! IF YOU ARE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT, you can do that.

That's the flow of the argument – but it is OBSCURED by the paragraph divisions here and I think that is very unhelpful, because if you just come to this passage looking for the marriage advice – and you miss the part about being filled with the Spirit, I think this could be devastating. Almost as devastating as thinking that the Sermon on the Mount is a sermon about how to GET SAVED instead of a sermon about how to live as a SAVED PERSON – these sorts of distinctions make all the difference in the world.

Alright – so the main verb here is in verse 18 – be ever being filled with the Spirit – the SET UP was in verse 15: “look carefully then how you live in the world” – which sounds a lot like the Sermon on the Mount – and then the application begins in verse 21, so let’s read the paragraph now, beginning however awkwardly it sounds in English, at verse 21. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:21–33 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

Joseph Heinrich wrote a book last year that has caused quite a ripple in the academic world, it is called “The Weirdest People In The World: How The West Became Psychologically Peculiar and Particularly Prosperous”. It builds upon a book written a few years before by Kyle Harper which argues that the sexual revolution initiated by Jesus essentially BUILT the modern world that we are all so busy now trying to pull apart. Did you know that Jesus started a sexual revolution? He did actually. We think of the sexual revolution as that thing that happened in the 1960’s when women were encouraged to be as selfish and unrestrained as men were when it came to sex but actually the original sexual revolution happened in the first century when Jesus told men to be as restricted and selfless as women when it came to sex.

You see, in Jesus' day, men had a pretty good deal. They could have sex with whomever they wanted. A Roman man would have sex with his slaves, with prostitutes – really with anyone he wanted OTHER than his neighbour's wife, that was considered immoral. Which is why Jesus is telling his disciples that they will not impress anyone simply by adhering to that incredibly low bar. And Jewish men could marry a young woman and enjoy her beauty and her company and then send her away the moment he found anything in her that was displeasing. No consequence. No censure.

But now here comes Jesus and he is making it virtually impossible for a man to send his wife away. The disciples picked up on that and they complained about it. They said to Jesus:

“If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” (Matthew 19:10 ESV)

“You mean if we marry a woman we are going to be stuck with her for the rest of our lives?”

That's exactly what I mean, Jesus says. Our marriages are going to be about love, mutual service, submission, intimacy, safety and nurture for children and lifelong friendship.

That was the revolution that built the modern world – according to the secular anthropologist Joseph Heinrich, who by the way, is the chair of the Department of Human Evolutionary Biology at Harvard University.

The Christian practice of marriage CHANGED THE WORLD friends – so maybe we better think twice before we abandon it. This is an explosive idea – this is a culture creating approach to life – and as Jesus said, this is the most effective witnessing program that has ever been conceived. So let's get into it. Christian marriage says something to the watching world SECONDLY and SIGNIFICANTLY about:

2. The beauty of mutual submission

As I said the FIRST sexual revolution was about encouraging men to be as RESTRICTED and SELFLESS in their sexuality as women. The one in the 1960's that our culture celebrates today was about encouraging women to be AS LIBERATED and SELFISH in their sexuality as men – which revolution do you think will build a better world?

Jesus told his disciples to stay married to the same woman for their whole lives which required them to become more restrained and more selfless than they could have gotten away with in that culture. You could put your wife away when she reached middle age in that culture and marry a younger woman – and no one would bat an eye. If you were a Roman pagan, as many of the first century disciples of Jesus were, you could sleep with your slaves anytime you wanted to – that was one of the main reasons to have a slave for crying out loud. But Jesus said:

“I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28 ESV)

You can't touch another woman you can't even LOOK at another woman with lust in your heart, Jesus says. That ruled out sleeping with slaves, that ruled out prostitution – and of course, that would rule out pornography today. Now you could get away with all of that as a man – in the first century world – just like you can get away with MUCH of that in the 21st century world – but Jesus is calling on men here to become as restricted and selfless in their sexuality as were women – at least as were women in the first century. Women in the first century were required to submit to their husbands and they were required, unless they were slaves or prostitutes, to restrict their sexuality to the boundaries of their marriage relationship – so while WE FIND Ephesians 5 offensive to women – there was nothing in Ephesians 5 that would have offended a first century woman. Of course she was going to submit to her husband! Of course she was going to be selfless and considerate in that relationship – that wasn't new – what was new was that requirement being placed ALSO on her husband. He was going to have to submit to her as well. He was going to have to LIMIT HIMSELF so as to serve and minister to her.

That's the secret sauce when it comes to Christian marriage.

It's the mutual submission!

It is about putting your own wants and needs SECOND so as to serve, care for and nurture the other person first.

Now of course we're going to do that in different ways. A man will restrain himself in ways that are unique to his situation and he will force himself – he will lead himself - in ways that are unique to his particular situation.

Listen, I realize that generalizations are dangerous and there are always going to be exceptions to every general rule – BUT – it is generally true that men incline towards laziness and selfishness. Left to himself a man will spend whatever money he makes on toys that he wants to play with and if no one forces him, he will lie on the couch and watch TV while the world goes to hell in a handbasket. And if and when he has any energy he will want to use that energy to seek out all the sex and food he can handle.

Now, if you are offended by that characterization, may I suggest that you read a little bit of human history or watch the Nature channel. The male of our species – kind of like the male of most predator species – tends to do as little as possible – tends to want to eat the most food and sleep with the most females – that's MALE in a nutshell. And most cultures BEFORE and APART from Christianity are built around protecting and enabling those basic instincts.

And so here comes Christianity and it says to men: you get one mate and you need to love her, protect her, provide for her and serve her your whole life long - AS CHRIST LOVED THE CHURCH! That's a pretty high bar, because actually Christ loved, protected, ministered and served the church by DYING on a wooden cross!

So again the bar is going from REALLY LOW to REALLY HIGH – but you can do it! Because of the Holy Spirit of God that is living in you – remember that's how this section began, which is

why I did the really awkward introduction that I did. Because you need to see that! Not by might, not by power, but by my Spirit says the Lord!

So men, if you are truly saved – if you have a new heart and the Holy Spirit living within you – then you can rise above the level of your petty lusts and instincts. You can. PORN ADDICTION does not need to be a fatal disease. The blood of Jesus is stronger than that. The Spirit of God is stronger than that – greater is HE that is in you than THAT which is in the world.

So – yes - Jesus expects more from you because he is prepared to give more to you – but you need to use the power that he gives you to submit to and to serve your wife.

And wives – you need to respect your husbands.

As I said, nothing in this passage would have been offensive to first century women – they were already doing this – the only thing the Bible adds here has to do with attitude. Paul says:

“let the wife see that she respects her husband.” (Ephesians 5:33 ESV)

ADD the ATTITUDE – that’s what the Bible says, because you can SUBMIT without RESPECTING – and in that culture that would have been a very easy thing to do. Not submitting was never an option, but disrespecting? Undermining? Despising even? That was an option, but the Bible here is saying, “that’s not going to be impressive to anybody. That’s just par for the course. But a truly willing spirit? A truly gentle and humble attitude? Well now, the kids and the neighbours can’t help but notice that.”

If you want your marriage to really tell a story then husband, become as restricted and selfless as your wife is, and wife, see – and let others see – that you respect your husband.

In a day and age that is CELEBRATING selfishness and glorifying appetite and desire – a marriage like this will communicate something very compelling about the otherworldly beauty and culture-making power of mutual submission.

And then thirdly, a marriage like this is going to say something to the watching world about the nature of Christ's relationship with the church.

3. The nature of Christ's relationship with the church

Again, Jesus was not an innovator when it came to sex and marriage, he was a reformer. He was always taking people back to God's original design and intention. In Matthew 19 where he gave a longer version of this teaching, he began by saying:

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female” (Matthew 19:4 ESV)

Maleness and femaleness was part of the original design! In Genesis 1:26-27 it says:

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27 ESV)

Are you seeing that?

Human beings were always supposed to SAY something about God! That's what it means to be the IMAGE and LIKENESS of God – it means to resemble and represent God. That's ESSENTIAL to what it means to be a human! And essential to that TASK is our MALENESS and FEMALENESS! In the image of God he created THEM; MALE AND FEMALE he created them!

GENDER communicates! SEX communicates!

Is it any wonder then that these are the very things MOST UNDER ASSAULT in our current culture?

The devil would love to OBSCURE what God intends to SAY through the RIGHT RELATIONSHIP of a man and a woman – and our job as Christians, is to make sure that doesn't happen. No matter what the neighbours do, no matter what pronouns they use, who they sleep with or how they define marriage and family – WE ARE GOING TO DO IT the Jesus way – can you say amen to that?

This will be our witness!

Because WHO WE ARE as MALE AND FEMALE in intimate relationship with one another SAYS SOMETHING to the watching world about God! It says something about how God can be a SINGULARITY and a PLURALITY simultaneously. It says something about how God is LOVE within and overflowing from himself. It says something about how love produces LIFE – it says so many things that desperately need to be said, that the devil is desperate to NOT have said but that we, as God's people have been charged with saying.

And so no matter how hard the devil tries, no matter how many imitations, distortions and deceptions he conceives of, God in his wisdom has ordained that this witness will be PRESERVED and PERPETUATED through the institution of marriage. As long as we do marriage the Jesus way we will preserve and perpetuate a witness to God's character and nature – and Paul adds here, we will preserve an important aspect of that which is the nature of Christ's relationship with the church. Look at verses 32-33:

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:32–33 ESV)

The mystery of marriage is profound! It says a whole bunch of things to a watching world – but I AM SAYING that it says something SPECIFIC about Christ and the church – well what is that?

I think if we go back through what Paul says in that paragraph it becomes clear that he has two things, principally in mind. First of all he is saying that when a husband DIES to himself so as to SERVE and SANCTIFY his wife – it provides a living illustration of the Gospel. Jesus had to DIE to himself. Literally. He had to set aside his glory in heaven, he had to deny himself all his royal dignity and privilege, he had to leave aside riches and comfort – he had to do all of that to save and sanctify his bride!

So husbands, when you DIE to your lusts and when you PUT AWAY your PORN and your TOYS so as to provide for and prioritize your wife you are preaching the Gospel! And when you wash your wife in the water of the word – when you take responsibility for the Word ministry in your home so that she can grow in her spiritual maturity and holiness – when you do that – you are preaching the Gospel! You are demonstrating and illustrating what it takes for people to become the people they were originally created and intended by God to be.

And then wives, when you respect, receive and respond to your husband – you are preaching the Gospel too! You are showing what the church does in response to the ministry of Christ! The church GROWS, the church GLOWS and the church is GLAD when she receives and responds to the goodness and the grace of her husband.

That's the Gospel!

That's a Gospel that the government can never shut down! That's a Gospel that the devil can never silence or obscure! And that's the Gospel that the disciples of Jesus Christ have been charged with preserving and perpetuating across the ages.

Oh God, help!

Let's pray together.

