

The (relative) Insignificance of Marriage (I Cor. 7:29)

I. Introduction

A. We're here this afternoon to celebrate the marriage of Hope and Peter

1. And at weddings, we join together to celebrate what God has ordained as the normal and glorious pattern for human thriving in the institution of marriage - and because we are celebrating what God has ordained, as Christians, we usually set aside a few minutes during a wedding ceremony to hear from God's Word
2. And we have a wealth of glorious passages to meditate on, and we know our favorites, for example:
 - a. Genesis 2 - *Therefore a man will leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife*
 - b. Ephesians 5 - *Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church*

B. We like these passages and rightly celebrate them, but the Bible also has some confusing teaching about marriage

1. The Bible holds up marriage as an excellent blessing from God and God's perfect plan from the beginning
 - a. The second story of the Bible starts with these words from God, **Genesis 2:18** - *Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."*
 - b. And Proverbs looks at the world, and with sovereign wisdom says, **Proverbs 18:22** - *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*
2. But, the Bible also says other things about marriage, for example, Paul says, in **I Corinthians 7:38** - *So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.*
 - a. At first glance, that passage doesn't match Genesis or Proverbs - how can it be 'not good' for man to be alone, how can marriage be 'favor from the LORD' and, at the same time, it be better not to marry?
 - b. And Paul doubles down on this thought in **I Corinthians 7:29** - *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none,*
 - c. Most of the Bible seems to exalt marriage as one of the highest goods from God - but Paul seems to want us to devalue marriage, to set it aside as not supremely worthy
 - d. And Jesus Himself said similar things at times, for example, **Luke 18:29-30** - *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."*

C. Now, we don't always want to think about these passages at a wedding - I know when I was getting married I didn't

1. I can remember some years ago standing where you are, Peter, and if someone asked me that day whether **I Corinthians 7:38** was true, there would have been an extraordinarily long pause - on the one hand, clearly Scripture isn't wrong, but there's nothing in me that agrees with that verse at the moment
2. But the longer I've been married and have wrestled with Scripture and tried to submit myself to it, the more I'm convinced that the challenging passages on marriage in Scripture only serve to make marriage more glorious
3. So, as we celebrate Hope and Peter's marriage, I want to spend a few minutes wrestling through these passages, especially **I Corinthians 7:29**, and consider what it means to be married and to live as though you were not, and then, Hope and Peter, give you three charges from these passages

II. The (relative) Insignificance of Marriage

A. First, to live as though you were not married means recognizing that there is something much greater than marriage

1. As we meditate on these confusing verses, the first thing we should see is that marriage isn't bad, it's just that there is something significantly better, perhaps something infinitely better than marriage
2. **I Corinthians 7:38** - *So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.*
3. **Luke 18:29-30** - *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."*
4. **I Corinthians 7:29-31** - *This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, ... For the present form of this world is passing away.*
5. The best conclusion I can make from these verses is that marriage is really good, but it's a temporal, secondary good and there's something infinitely better, something for which giving up marriage would be worthwhile

B. And Paul and Luke clearly tell us what that better thing is - knowing, loving, and serving Christ

1. Paul says in I Corinthians 7:32-34 - *I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided.*
2. Paul's goal wasn't to desecrate marriage, but to show that marriage can't hold a candle to the greater joy, blessing and privilege of knowing and serving Christ
3. And Luke records Jesus' teaching in the same way Luke 18:29-30 - *And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."*

C. So, it's not that marriage isn't extremely valuable and glorious, it's just that knowing Jesus and serving Him is so much more valuable, infinitely more valuable that it makes marriage, in comparison, look completely insignificant

1. Living as though you were not married means choosing Jesus above marriage and above your spouse because He is infinitely more valuable
2. But, I don't just want to leave with a view of the insignificance of marriage, because marriage isn't done away with after Jesus comes - I'm married and I'm here participating in your wedding - so clearly there has to be something more

III. The (glorious) Significance of Marriage

A. If the glory and goodness of marriage pales in comparison to that of Christ, then the logical conclusion is that the only honorable purpose of marriage is to help you, your spouse, and others to see, know, proclaim and enjoy Christ

1. This is Paul's point in I Corinthians 7 - your life should be organized to pursue the most valuable thing, that is Christ, and not get distracted by other, less valuable things
2. For some people, this would mean that not getting married because they will be able to more fully pursue Christ - and if we do get married, it means that we should not value our marriage as an end in itself, but only pursue marriage inasmuch as it helps us, our spouse, and others pursue Christ
3. In fact, that ought to be the overarching, even the only purpose of our marriages - if we pursue marriage for any other reason, we're sacrificing the greater for the lesser, we're losing our hold on Christ in order to pursue pleasure and satisfaction in this world: Jesus is better than marriage and our lives must show that

B. But this is where marriage finds its glorious significance, because marriage is designed to do exactly that

1. Ephesians 5:25-32 - *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. ... "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*
2. In talking about marriage, Paul gets distracted and just starts talking about Jesus - Paul says that marriage is and always was meant to be a temporal picture of Christ's relationship to the church
3. Marriage is only valuable if it helps us pursue the glory of Christ, but God has intentionally and perfectly designed marriage to display the glory of Christ! It is, perhaps, the ultimate picture of Christ in our world today
4. So, Paul often uses marriage terminology to describe the church, for example in II Corinthians 11:2 - *For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.*
5. And John's vision in Revelation shows that time is proceeding toward a final marriage, Revelation 19:6-8 - *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"--- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*
6. So marriage, on its own, is relatively insignificant, but in Christ it takes on a glorious significance because it is designed to reflect the glories of Christ - each temporal marriage now is meant to cause us to long for and rejoice in that great, final marriage when the perfect groom will come and claim His spotless bride

C. Marriage is not significant in itself, but it is gloriously significant because it displays the greater significance of Christ

1. In light of the glory of Christ, marriage loses its glory and its significance, but at the same time it gains back an even greater glory and a greater significance when it is designed and used to display the glory of Christ
2. So, living as though you were not married means using your marriage to pursue Jesus for yourself and others

IV. A Charge to Hope and Peter: What does living as though you were not married look like in marriage? Three ways to recognize the insignificance of marriage and thereby display the glory of Christ

Living as though you were not married means:

- A. ... remembering that your primary goal is not to enjoy marriage, but to help each other see, know, and love Christ**
1. Your marriage is temporary (in the eternal, not the temporal sense) - it is merely the first drop of an unending ocean - your goal is to help your spouse be ready to dive into that ocean, to be ready to hand off your bride (Peter) or your groom (Hope) to their true bridegroom who they will enjoy forever
 2. Marriage isn't forever, and your perceived joy in marriage isn't the ultimate good
 3. This means that in your marriage you won't always do the easy thing, the pleasant thing, the thing that you think might make you or your spouse happiest right now; Your actions won't be guided by what you think you want out of your marriage or your spouse, or what you think looks good to others
 4. Your actions will be guided by what you think (on the basis of Scripture) will help your spouse know, love and enjoy Christ more - even if that thing is hard, unpleasant, might lead to conflict or disagreement, even if that thing is risky or dangerous, even if that thing doesn't lead to worldly, marital bliss
 5. You have to remember that we're in the middle of a cosmic war - you may have times in which you can take great pleasure in each other, but you're getting married in a time of war and your lives will reflect that
- B. ... intentionally designing your marriage to serve Christ and not yourselves**
1. Instead of pursuing your own pleasure and your own ease in marriage, you will intentionally design your marriage to facilitate opportunities to share the gospel with unbelievers
 2. You will sacrifice your time, your money, your ideal family life to intentionally design your marriage to facilitate opportunities to fellowship with other believers and especially members of your church
 3. You will intentionally design your marriage to facilitate opportunities for discipleship relationships
 4. Use your marriage not to pursue your own pleasure but to pursue hospitality and gospel-centered opportunities
 5. In this, you are saying, my marriage is not ultimate, rather how I can use my marriage to serve Christ is ultimate
 6. So intentionally do that - don't let yourselves drift into a semi-worldly pattern of life where your apparent goal is rest, ease, enjoyment of each other and your own family - instead pursue Christ's glory through your marriage
- C. ... enjoying the good gifts that Christ has given to you in each other (caveats)**
1. ... does not mean divorce is ok (that doesn't glorify Christ)
 - a. **Malachi 2:16** - *"For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts."*
 - b. Divorce denies something glorious about Christ - Christ will eternally be faithful to His bride - so rejoicing in the insignificance of marriage cannot mean ever pursuing divorce, because it denies the greater thing
 2. ... does not mean that you don't need to love, respect and sacrifice for each other (that doesn't glorify Christ)
 - a. **Ephesians 5** - *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church ... 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.*
 - b. Failing to love each other denies something glorious about Christ - that Christ loves and serves His church and the church loves and respects Christ - so rejoicing in the relative insignificance of marriage cannot mean forsaking your duties to each other, because it denies the greater thing
 3. ... does not mean that your marriage shouldn't be full of joy (that doesn't glorify Christ)
 - a. Proverbs 5:18-19 - *Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.*
 - b. Failing to take joy in each other denies something glorious about Christ - that Christ and His Church have a relationship full of mutual joy - so rejoicing in the relative insignificance of marriage cannot mean living in a sterile relationship with each other, because it denies the greater thing
 - c. So Hope and Peter, look at each other - Peter, this is the wife of your youth, and Hope, this is the husband of your youth - enjoy each other
 - d. Peter, today, Hope is the wife of your youth, and in fifty years, if God gives that to you, she will still be the wife of your youth, so enjoy her today and every day that God gives you going forward,
 - e. NOT because marriage is that good, NOT even because Hope is that good (though most of us in this room would agree she is), BUT because that displays something glorious about Christ