

Sunday, July 18, 2021

May I come in...to the Bedroom?

(Message 6; Series: *My Heart, Christ's Home*)

(Matthew 19:1-9; Hebrews 13:4)

Scripture: Matthew 19:1-9; Hebrews 13:4

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

⁴Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Message:

I came across this "marriage" test in Reader's Digest - so you know it has to be accurate. ☺ I didn't do so good. Let me share it with you so you can see how you do. (I know not everyone listening this morning is married; but marriage is a huge part of our society. Most people are anticipating marriage someday, engaged, currently married, or have been in a marriage at some point in their life.)

1. If you have to ask your spouse if he or she loves you, something is wrong with your marriage. (a) true; (b) false.

2. What is the most common problem for couples today? (a) sex; (b) money; (c) communication (i.e., the sharing of feelings in addition to just facts).
3. Who breaks off love relationships more often? (a) men; (b) women. (Women do it twice as often; I got that wrong!)
4. In marriage is it normal for one spouse to not be physically attracted to the other for extended periods of time? (a) yes; (b) no.
5. Jealousy is more likely to be a sign of (a) love; (b) insecurity; (c) competitiveness. (Got this one wrong too.)
6. Who lives longer? (a) Married people; (b) single people. (I knew that one!)
7. Can a person be deeply in love with two people at the same time? (a) yes; (b) no.
8. Do people expect too much from their marriage (a) yes; (b) no (They expect way too much and contribute way too little).
9. Who copes better with loneliness in the absence of love? (a) husbands; (b) wives.
10. Commitment is essential to a good love relationship. (a) true; (b) false.

Robert Munger, in *My Heart, Christ's Home*, pictures Jesus asking to come in and check out the rooms of our heart. We have already talked about the nursery, the study, the dining room, and the workroom. Today Christ wants to come into our **bedroom** and talk with us about our most intimate of relationships – that is, how we treat people of the opposite sex, our dates, our fiancés, and our spouses.

A few years ago, we'd hardly heard of Harvey Weinstein, Larry Nasser, Al Franken, Matt Lauer, Robert Anderson, James Levine, Steve Wynn, John Conyers, Deshaun Watson... They, along with numerous Roman Catholic priests and a number of protestant pastors, are part of a long and growing list of people who have been accused of sexual misconduct. Some have been indicted, tried and imprisoned for their behavior. Our world struggles with sexual intimacy.

Now Jesus, as he continues his tour of our heart, steps into our bedroom:

“Let me help with those intimate relationships; if you fail and feel shame and guilt, know I still love you and will remain with you...”

“Talk to me about it. Acknowledge your failures. Take immediate corrective steps so you do not repeat them.”

“I’m interested in your intimate relationships because they tell me a lot about the state of your heart; let me tell you what I’ve planned...”

In our text, Hebrews 13:4, there are three words I'd like to highlight. ***"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."*** And then at the end, I'd like to add a fourth word.

HONOR

The first word is "honor." "Honor" is the initial and primary focus of this text: "Marriage should be honored by all." Let's look at that phrase.

First, the word "*honor*" means to "cherish, esteem, reverence, and value highly." Marriage is to be "highly valued" because it is relationship **designed** and established by **God**; it was his idea; he wrote marriage into his creation plan. We have perverted it with sin; but sin did not destroy it.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uses marriage to symbolize God's relationship with his people: He is the "husband" to us, the Church; we, the Church, are his bride (**Ephesians 5:22ff**).

Since He designed marriage, God requires we hold it in "honor."

Second, the word "*marriage*" here in the Greek has multiple nuances. It is a reference to the wedding **ceremony**, i.e., to the legal event of "binding" a husband and wife together in marriage. The word also underscores the marriage commitment of living together **for life**.

Even the Greeks, in their promiscuous culture, understood marriage as a commitment between one man and one woman. Until recently, the word "marriage" has always suggested a public and legal union of one man and one woman designed to last a lifetime. That is how God and Scripture define "marriage."

Third, the words, "*among all*," refer here not only to "all" **persons**, but to all situations, all **respects**, and all circumstances. That is, no one should, at any time, dishonor the God-idea and design of marriage. No one should promote ideas or activities that devalue or cheapen marriage. No one should participate in movements or behaviors that disregard God's intention for a healthy, intimate life-long relationship.

This is not to say that everyone should get married or needs to be married in order to be "completed" or fulfilled. It does mean those who seriously dating, engaged, married, and those who are not married – i.e., everyone - must honor, i.e., highly value, what God has designed marriage to be.

It is no secret that we live in a society that has real issues with what God has said about marriage in the Bible. Some people have suggested re-interpreting certain passages differently to correspond with our

changing culture; others simply disregard God's prescription for marriage as antiquated and old fashion.

First, God said his design is for marriage is that it be **life-long**. Marriage today is often viewed as a commodity to be traded or as an experiment to be tried rather than a lasting commitment. Marriage is often viewed as dispensable and short-term. Marriages today can be dissolved for any reason. God designed marriage to provide a **secure** and **lasting** environment where spouses can work on their relationship, struggle together with the challenges, and learn to extend grace, faithfulness and offer forgiveness to each other. Yet over forty percent of marriages end in divorce in the United States.

Second, God intended marriage to be between **(one)** man and **(one)** woman. Our world is indifferent to the composition of a Biblical marriage; our world permits, even encourages, marriage between a man and a woman, or two women, or two men, or one man and multiple women. God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman for "*binding two lives in deepening love,*" and "*for its creative power to bring human life into being*" (cf. Munger).

Third, our world places the emphasis on the **individual** – even in the context of marriage - and the individual's **success**. Today, the pressure is on for people to succeed at all costs - even at the cost of their marriage and family.

If one's marriage (or our spouse) appears to be interfering with success, satisfaction or happiness, all too often, it's the marriage that must go. God intended sexual intimacy to be expressed within the context of a loving, self-sacrificing, lasting **partnership** that is deeper and broader than the act of intimacy itself.

Fourth, our world views marriage as a contract that says, "If you do this, I'll do that." If one party violates a contract, the contract is broken. Scripture reminds us God designed marriage is a **covenant** not only between husband and wife, but between the couple and God: "*a cord of three strands is not easily broken*" (**Ecclesiastes 4:12**). Even if one party breaks their covenant commitment, the covenant remains in effect. God longs to be a central part of our marriage so he can bless husband and wife together as "one."

PURITY

The verse continues: "...and the marriage bed (should be) kept **pure..."** Our second word is "**pure**." The (marriage) bedroom should not be spoiled, tainted, **defiled** or cheapened; it should be worthy of Christ's presence and covenant-keeping.

Remember, God created sex. God is pro-sex. God said, "*Sex can be very good!*" Our God-given sexuality is an essential part of who we are, whether we're single or married; whether we're old or young, whether we're male or female.

Our sexuality is designed to be a constant source of mystery, wonder, and joy to be explored and enjoyed throughout our life.

But the best **sex**, God says, is found in the context of **marriage** - in a secure, life-long and covenantal relationship. Sexual intimacy requires a solemn promise, a deep commitment, and a gracious (self-less) and loving spirit. Physical intimacy is a gift of God that allows two bodies and two souls to unite; it is the ultimate form of human unity where, as Munger writes, "*two truly become one in Christ.*"

Being physically intimate with someone outside of marriage is making promises one has no intention of keeping, engages the encounter as a temporary contract, scoffs at commitment, focuses on one's personal pleasure instead of loving the other, and leaves Christ out. It damages people's souls. That's why God calls it, sin.

This command further underscores God intention and design for marriage.

First, by implication, it speaks to **pre-marital** impurity. To play "husband" and "wife" when one is not a husband or wife is not just a bad game, it dishonors marriage. It treats something God desires to be highly valued as something cheap and disposable.

Whether you're young and can't wait, or older and simply want to protect your financial assets - don't pretend the public covenant of marriage doesn't matter. God doesn't want us to settle for cheap imitations like co-habitation, a one-night stand, or an affair.

Second, this text clearly speaks to **fidelity** and **troth**. The marriage bed is reserved for the man and woman who have become husband and wife. In marriage as God designed it, a husband commits to and takes responsible for loving his wife selflessly, sacrificially, and intimately. In marriage, a wife commits to and is responsible for loving her husband selflessly, sacrificially, and intimately. They commit to this "until death parts them."

This focus on the fidelity and troth of marriage also has implications for crude jokes, pornography, inappropriate touching, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, sexual assault, rape, sex trafficking, fornication and adultery. They lack purity; they lack honor; and they betray God's intention. Today, eighty one percent of women will be sexually harassed or abused during their lifetime (cf. NSVRC).

Even "the look" is covered. Everyone knows about "the look" even if some think it is innocent. E.g., a couple is in a restaurant; a young woman is waiting on them; the husband finds her attractive and starts staring at her. He does

this to feed his personal ego/desire. You can see it in his face. The Bible calls it lust.

The woman serving knows it and feels awkward or embarrassed; the man's wife notices and feels crushed, rejected and maybe angry. If she mentions it, he will deny it and add lying to his sin and further damage the marriage and his integrity. He thinks he hasn't violated the seventh or any other commandment because he hasn't really done anything except "look.". Scripture says he has.

God's word here in Hebrews about marriage is a requirement, not a recommendation. It's God's will that the bedroom of our heart and home remain pure and undefiled; it is God's will that we should refrain from sexual sin and treat all others as the image bearers of God they are. It is God's will that we maintain purity of thought, purity of conduct, purity of word, and purity of desire.

JUDGMENT

God loves and longs to bless us. God's intentions for marriage are designed so we can receive his optimal blessing. Unfortunately, in our sinful world, our promises, commitments, best intentions, and best efforts fall short. Truth is, there has never been a perfect marriage. A thriving marriage is a gift and the result of hard work.

Jesus was questioned in **Matthew 19** about divorce: "*Why, if God wants marriage to be life-long, did Moses allow men to divorce their wives?*" Note Jesus answer: "*...because your hearts were hard.*"

People who are stubborn and uncompromising, who demand their own way, who are unwilling to admit any personal weakness or failure, and who constantly blame others for their misfortune are said to have a "hard heart." God cannot bless people with a **hard heart**. Like our relationship with God, a marriage relationship can only flourish when the husband and the wife have a **"soft heart."**

A few weeks ago, Pastor Henry's explained the difference using play doe and a rock. When both husband and wife have a pliable, soft heart, God can bless a marriage; when one (or both) spouse(s) has a hard heart, the marriage is troubled. But the health or hurting of a particular marriage doesn't alter God's prescription or intention.

Our third word is not a very popular word; it is the word, "judgment."

The warning goes like this: if you ignore God's design, intention, and commands, you will be judged. This also applies to our following his

directions for marriage. God can't bless an adulterous or sexual immoral relationship.

The word "immoral" is often translated as "fornicator" - that is, one who engages in sexual intimacy before marriage. An adulterer is someone who is married who engages in sexual intimacy with someone they are not married to. So before or after the wedding, people who ignore God will be judged.

God gives this warning repeatedly throughout Scripture. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** - "*Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers ...shall inherit the kingdom of God*" - unless they repent and are forgiven.

It is always wise to take God's warning of divine judgment seriously. In Jesus' day, for example, there were rabbis who wanted to avoid God's judgment by not lusting, so they never looked at any woman (literally). They figured, "*If you don't see one, you can't lust after them.*"

When a woman came into their line of sight, no matter what they were doing, they simply would close their eyes until she passed (I'm not making this up!). They were known as "bruised and bleeding rabbis" because they would walk into walls and trip over rocks in their effort to avoid lusting...and God's judgment. Sadly, most of our world doesn't take God's instructions or his impending judgment seriously.

Instead, we tuck our "bedroom" off to the side in our [heart] homes. Some are able to keep their immorality (lusting, inappropriate sexual advances, adultery) secret - even from their spouse - for a while, even a long while. But God knows. God sees not only our dishonoring acts, but he also knows our lustful heart, our immoral curiosity, and sinful desires. He knows!

God gives us multiple **warnings**, so we'll repent, seek his grace, and strive to live worthy of his blessings. "Stop! Don't go there! Cut it out! Stay away or I will have to judge you!" His judgment is **clear**, significant, and **eternal**. God reminds there is no place for defiant (hard-hearted) disobedience and immorality in his kingdom. We should take his warning(s) very seriously.

GRACE

There is a fourth word - not found in this text but found throughout Scripture. You know the word; the word is "Grace."

You may, in theory, agree with everything we've said, but you still might think, "*You don't know my marriage. It is a mess; it's too far gone to fix. There's no hope. I'm not even sure my spouse loves me. I've tried everything!*"

When a marriage struggles, it is painful for everyone – the couple, the family, friends, and the body of Christ. But God - who created marriage - says, *“Marriage is to be honored by all – even those in troubled, hurting marriages.”*

But how do you handle being ignored day in and day out? Where do you find the strength to endure even one more day of petty bickering? How do you handle the incessant complaining, belittling, and rejection? How can you survive a marriage without any affection at all? How do you forgive a spouses (continual) infidelity? How can you continually muster the hope that it can change?

God answers, “My *grace is sufficient!*” But what does really mean?

God never says, “Stick with it!” without also reminding us **he** will be there **with us** and give us what we need; if that is the courage just to face the next day, he can provide it...

...if that is forgiveness for a boatload of shame and guilt, forgiveness for all our regrets and failures, or forgiveness for not being forgiving, he offers it.

...if that is strength to resist temptation, the strength to respond to yelling with a soft word, if it is the strength to walk the extra mile, his strength is sufficient.

...if that is healing from abuse, betrayal, brokenness, bitterness, or anger; or the courage to go alone after a spouse has left (both literally and figuratively), he can help. Sadly, sometimes leaving is the only way to honor marriage and keep the marriage bed pure.

Of the four keys words (honor, purity, judgment, grace), the greatest is **grace**. Not only is God’s grace sufficient, we all **need** and **depend** on it.

--It is only by God’s grace that marriage can be **honored**, that **purity** can be maintained, and that God’s **judgment** can be avoided.

--It is only by God’s grace and forgiveness, and by both husband and wife reflecting God’s grace, faithfulness and forgiveness to one another with a soft heart - that a marriage – any marriage - can survive, grow, and reflect God’s relationship with us.

God reminds us (over and over) that his **grace** is sufficient; his **forgiveness** always follows our genuine repentance, and **healing** and blessing come when we follow His will.

God also reminds us His grace is most clearly seen in Jesus Christ. The most important person in our marriage must be the most important person in our life (and every room of our heart), and the most important person in our live must be the most important person in our marriage – **Jesus**.

If your marriage (or life) is in trouble, if your life is in trouble, there is no simple formula that will suddenly make it all go away; but help is available, your faith family will support you, and Jesus will provide strength and healing.

Jesus is standing at the door of your heart knocking...he longs to come into your life, into our heart, into your nursery (i.e., your family relationships), into your study (i.e., your control room), into your dining room (i.e., your deepest desires), into your work room (i.e., your life's mission) and into your bedroom (your intimate relationships), take up residence and keep your heart soft.

He is **knocking**. Will you open the door and invite him **in**?

Prayer: (singing) “Into my Heart”

Answers to introductory quiz: (1) b; (2) c; (3) b; (4) a; (5) a; (6) a; (7) b; (8) a; (9) b; (10) a

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