Series: The Mystery and the Masterpiece

April 30, 2017

Message Seven:

**The Promise**

Ephesians 5:31-32; John 3:16

**When the series begins – send out “Save the Date” invitations for this Sunday.**

**In the first two weeks of April, send out wedding invitations …**

**Decorate the Worship Center for a wedding?**

**Have ushers in suits seating people as in a wedding?**

**Set the entire service as a wedding? Choose songs for a wedding... include communion …**

**Close with a variation of the wedding vows – except I will read the vows Christ makes to us … lead the church in repeating vows that the church would say to Christ.**

**Reception afterwards?**

**Intro:** I have used terms like portrait, picture, and masterpiece to illustrate what I believe to be this central truth: that Christ will be eternally married to His people and our earthly marriages are intended to be the greatest illustration of that truth.

**God’s Ultimate Message in this Work of Art Is Love**

Though it is a mystery that has been hidden to many, as Paul said in Ephesians 5, marriage is God’s masterpiece to illustrate the greater reality of the relationship between Christ and His church.

Ephesians 5:31-32 - As the Scriptures say, “A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.”
This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.

I’m not an art student. I’m not an artist. I have trouble writing my own name legibly. But I believe when most artists put their paintbrush to the canvas, they intend to make a point. Pictures, paintings, and portraits rendered by artists who died many years ago, are the subject of unending debate in university classes and art studies. What was the artist trying to say? What was his point? Why did he choose this lighting? This shade? The coloring? Why is the subject’s face the way it is? Is Mona Lisa really smiling?

***Picture of me at Mona Lisa –*** *you tell me …*

There is a clear point with God’s masterpiece. He loves us. He wants to pour His love on us. The most oft-quoted verse in the Bible is a revelation of God’s great love:

John 3:16 - For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

Who gave this man – the son of God – the God-Man – to be married to this woman – us? God says, “I do!”

Here’s a beautiful picture:

Genesis 24:67 - And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah’s tent, and she became his wife. He loved her deeply…

There is a lot said there in just a few words - the way a great painting can say a lot with a few brush strokes. She was a gift to him, she had been looked for - sought after – a long journey at great expense, cost & energy took place to find her - and he cherished her. This is how husbands should see their wives. This is how Christ sees His church.

Ravi Zacharias used this picture of Isaac and Rebekah in writing about marriage in his book, *I Isaac, Take Thee Rebekah: Moving from Romance to Lasting Love.* In it he said, “Chivalry in love has nothing to do with the sweetness of the appearance. It has everything to do with the tenderness of a heart determined to serve.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

Paul wrote about this love that is tender, serving, and reflects the love of God:

1 Corinthians 13:4–7, 13 - Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance… Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

We are human, flawed and marred by sin, but Christian men need to let the Spirit of Christ lead them in becoming Christ-like in loving their wives as Christ loves the church: not keeping a record of wrongs, not demanding their own way, not jealous or proud or rude; and Christian wives need to let the Spirit of Christ lead them in loving their husbands in the ways the Scriptures describe the church’s love for Christ.

God is our Creator. He created us as we are for certain roles. Those roles are intended to show the world the relationship He desires with us. Only through that relationship can any human find their true fulfillment and purpose!

In speaking to these God-given roles, Ravi Zacharias says, “On one occasion a press reporter challenged me by charging that Christians hold to a double standard when they say they are against racism but at the same time are prejudiced against homosexuality. ‘Is that not somewhat duplicitous?’ she chided. I knew she was genuine in her concern, so I said, ‘Race is a very sacred thing. It is the gift of God to each individual. It is something in which we had no choice or say. We were born with our ethnicity; it is not a culturally assigned quality. Therefore, it should never be violated. In the same way, sex is a gift of God, to be treated with sanctity. We protect sexuality from being violated as much as we protect race from being violated. It is you who have to explain to me why you treat race as sacred and at the same time desacralize sexuality. That is where the duplicity really lies.’”

Further, Zacharias writes, “The Lord who made us and knows our struggles comes knocking. He knows the frailties that limit us in the battle and comes to offer a different glimpse, a different strength, and a different path by which to live. That path places a noble value on sexual purity. Is it any wonder that a generation that has become profane of speech and violent in entertainment scoffs and belittles those who wish to treat a person’s body as sacred? Sexual promiscuity is condemned in the Ten Commandments for the same reason murder is condemned in the Ten Commandments—it is the marring of the image of God.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Marriage is God’s masterpiece. It is His great piece of artwork designed to show the relationships that He wants to have with us. It can only be what the Master Painter painted. It should be cherished and highly valued as He intended. It should be our desire to live that out before the world in our relationships.

**My Prayer - My Desire for Your Marriage**

I stated in the Introduction of my book, that is was not intended to be anti-anything or anti-anyone. My desire is simply to share a viewpoint that I think has not been explained very well. There is no intent here to attack—just explain.

There is a lot of shouting going on in our culture. There is much anger. There are so many arguments. Often we are talking past each other, yelling at one another, but not sitting down, sharing together, and reasoning with one another in love. This is happening among those who call themselves Christians. It’s happening as non-Christians impugn Christians as intolerant, hate-filled bigots. It’s happening as Christians angrily point out sin in others without expressing the truth in love and without an awareness of our own sins. Often, the truth is completely missed and love is completely missing.

My prayer is that those who claim to follow Christ will come to understand the biblical teaching of marriage and sexuality more fully so that we can explain why the Bible says what it says, not just tell people that the Bible says not to do stuff. Telling people not to do stuff is not enough. We have to get the “why” right. At least that gives the non-Christian more information to process than a simple, “God said don’t!”

Because God said so” simply doesn’t work very well in our culture. That may be sad to some, but it’s still true.

I also have a prayer for those who do not follow Christ. I pray for those who have been pushed farther away from Christ due to the nature of these arguments, and sometimes the lack of information – the information I’ve tried to give in the book and in this series - and sometimes people have been pushed away by the downright nastiness and un-Christlikeness of many so-called Christians. I pray that the non-Christian will receive this message thoughtfully and understand that it is presented without anger and with a heart of love.

I pray for those who claim to be followers of Christ yet endorse sexual practices that the Bible does not condone. I realize they may have come to their conclusions honestly and with a desire to show love and acceptance for all people, yet they may have never heard some of what has been presented in this book. I pray the Holy Spirit will continue to reveal His truth to all of us in a greater way.

But I also have a prayer for myself. I pray that I will be more like Christ. I want to be more like Christ in my marriage. I want to play my part in this drama the way He intended. I want people to see Christ in me as I love my wife, and I want my wife to know the love of Christ through the way I love her—in every detail. I pray for forgiveness in all the ways I have fallen short of this goal.

I am a pastor – with the heart and gifting of an evagelist. I always want to see more people come into a real relationship with Jesus Christ. Sometimes it does seem to simply be a pressure to register higher attendance and conversion numbers. Pastors and church leaders often try to figure out, “What can we do to influence more people? What can we do to get more people to come to our services? What can we do to get more people to come to church and come to Christ?” I confess that pressure has affected me. I confess to often looking to non-spiritual means to achieve spiritual goals. I confess to often trying to accomplish not only what I am supposed to do but also that which only Christ can accomplish. I often find myself praying for Jesus and the Holy Spirit to do what I cannot do—what only they can do.

One morning I found myself praying and thinking of the marriage illustration that God has given us. I was thinking again of how marriage is God’s picture—His greatest picture—of the kind of relationship He wants to have with us. He called Himself the Husband and Israel the bride in the Old Testament. When they served other gods, He lamented throughout the prophets that they had “played the harlot…gone a-whoring” after other gods. They had committed adultery on Him.

In the New Testament Jesus is the Bridegroom and the church is His bride. This can only happen because of the Covenant of His blood. So marriage as God painted it for us and the gift of sexual activity that He gave us, in order to be pleasing to God and beneficial for us, can only be in a covenant between a man and a woman. The male groom is the picture of Christ, the female bride is the picture of the church. A sexual relationship of any kind other than this does damage to a picture that God Himself painted throughout the Scriptures.

So, like a willing bride desiring her husband to come in so that she can give birth, I found myself praying, “Come into me, Jesus. Come into me—I invite you to come into me, plant your seed in me, so that new life can be born. I want our church to be a lighthouse—I want our church to be a place where souls are saved—I want our church to be a place where new life is born. I want everyone in our church to understand that God the Father gives His Son to us as our Groom. We are His bride, and when He joins to us with His Holy Spirit, the only thing that can happen is new life being born!”

As followers of Christ, sometimes we try so hard at getting other people to also follow Christ. We make all kinds of efforts—that’s not bad. Marriage is work too. We should work at our marriages—but if it is only work, it’s not a happy marriage.

If we will simply allow Jesus to come into us—if we will experience the joy of Him coming into us, new life will automatically happen. It can’t not happen!

Are you a follower of Christ? Have you entered into a relationship with Him through the covenant of His blood? If you have, do you realize that makes you His bride? Invite Him to come into you…often. Invite Him to join with you…often! Invite Him to birth new life through you! Simply the joining will create new life!

If you are not part of His bride—He invites you. He is proposing to you now. He does not force His way. He does not rape, and He does not enter into someone other than through this covenant. But He invites you. He wants a relationship with you. He wants to join with you—become one with you—plant His Spirit in you—give you new life, and cause new life to be born through you.

**Salvation -**

**Come up with a variation of the wedding vows – except I will read the vows Christ makes to us … lead the church in repeating vows that the church would say to Christ.**

**Decorate the Worship Center for a wedding?**

**Have ushers in suits seating people as in a wedding?**

**Set the entire service as a wedding? Choose songs for a wedding... include communion …**

**Reception afterwards?**

1. (Zacharias, 2004) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. (Zacharias, 2004)

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