

What Matters to the Master – Marriage

By Phil Brainerd

Presented to Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

Sunday, October 4, 2020

Introduction

Over the last few weeks, we've been using a lot of different images to introduce our topics. One of those images is that of a gift. We've used that to highlight the fact that God wants to give us gifts. Those of you who have reading in will recall - These are not just any gifts. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights..." (James 1:17). God wants to give us good and perfect gifts.

Sometimes, when God gives us gifts, they're simple - Surprisingly simple. Take sunshine. Many of you had heard the John Denver Song:

Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy
Sunshine in my eyes can make me cry
Sunshine on the water looks so lovely
Sunshine almost always makes me high
(“Sunshine on my Shoulder” by John Denver)

Sunshine is beautiful. All you have to do to enjoy it is look out the window on a nice day. Better yet, go for a walk.

In this session, we're going to see that some of God's greatest gifts are complex. We're going to learn about one of God's greatest gifts to humankind. We're going to learn that Marriage Matters to the Master.

In a moment, we'll read our passage, but let's be reminded of just one more thing. Here's how we're structuring our approach: We discover that various things are important to the Master, Jesus Christ. We start by trying to understand those things. In this section of Scripture that we're calling "The Christian Manifesto", we learn that Jesus tells us things that matter to him are under attack in some way. So, we ask three questions:

- How have they come under attack in the past?
- How were they under attack in the day of Jesus?
- How are they under attack today?

Note: In our series, these questions don't necessarily appear in order.

Having said all that, let's read what Jesus had to say to his disciples:

27 You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:27-30)

Well, that was pretty strict, huh? You say, "Pastor, we've got people cutting off body parts and warnings about hell. Should we start installing seat belts in the pews?" Well, you will be happy to know that there is some very encouraging material in our discussion today. But yes, there are also some stern warnings ahead. How do those things fit together? Let's find out.

Let's read the first statement from our Lord.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' (Matthew 5:27)

Why is Jesus talking about Adultery? Because adultery is an attack on Marriage. And marriage matters to the Master. Let's learn more.

Marriage – God's gift to humans.

Once again, we will go all the way back to Genesis 1. God creates a universe and a planet earth. All of it is good. As his final act of creation, God places Adam and Eve on the earth. Only then was God's creation complete. Human life is the pinnacle of creation.

That's why you must understand the flow of the Christian manifesto. We learned that God's Word matters to the Master. From God's Word, we learn of God and his love for us. We meet God in the pages of God's Word, the Bible. That's why we know all everything we know about God.

Then we learned that Human life matters to the Master. We're going to learn that, **because** human life matters so much to the Master, he gave us the amazing gift of marriage. Let's see how that works. Let's look at the wonderful gift of marriage.

I. The Gift

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.
(Genesis 1:27)

Again, humans are the only created things made in God's image. We are not like anything else, not even the angels. This is greatest gift that God gave to mankind.

Now, this image, this gift, is expressed in several ways. For today, we'll discuss the fact that it's expressed through our gender. We are created male and female.

How does that work? God is complex. Christians believe he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is three distinct beings, yet one. The three being all have equal value. Yet, they have different roles. Even though they are distinct, and they have different roles, they work together in perfect harmony. So, it comes as no surprise that when God made humans, he would make more than one. Look at the way God structures this sentence:

in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

The genders are equal, and yet they have different roles. They're designed to work together in perfect harmony. We don't see that today because our world is broken. We'll take that into account as we move along.

Before we do, we need to mention something very important. It's something we draw from this. Gender matters to the Master. We'll be looking at that in a later discussion

Let's read more in Genesis 1.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Genesis 1:28)

God says two things to this new couple.

1. Be fruitful and increase in number.
2. Rule over the earth.

Rule

We'll take these in reverse order. Let's look at the second one. Adam and Eve were to work together as a team to rule the earth. Some might translate the word "rule" as "manage". It's implied that the couple will rule in a benevolent way.

Here's another way that the image of God is expressed through humans. God is the ruler of the universe. He doesn't rule it for his own advantage. He rules benevolently. He rules for the benefit of others. God serves humans and his creation by maintaining the universe. When people rule and manage the world around them, they express God's image.

That's why the first job that God gave to Adam was to tend the garden.

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. (Genesis 2:15)

God rules the whole Universe. We rule a small part. When we choose to rule benevolently, when we choose to serve others, we express God's image. We become more and more like him each time we choose to behave the way that he created us to behave. When we do this, we also experience him. The privilege of ruling is an awesome gift from God.

Let's look now at the first command that God gave to the first humans.

Increase

Adam and Eve were to increase. How do you do that? You get married.

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

Look at that word "one" for "one flesh". It's a word that is used in a very important place later in the Bible.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

The same word for describing God as one God is used when describing the one flesh that men and women enjoy when they come together in marriage. So, when men and women come together in marriage, they express God's image. And, as I've been saying, any time we behave the way God designed us, when we express God's image, we experience him. So, just like ruling, marriage is a wonderful privilege- A wonderful gift.

This gift does a number of things. In Genesis 2, God expanded on the creation story:

The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18)

So, when people come together in marriage, they can help each other. They don't need to be alone. They provide companionship for each other.

And of course, there's more than just companionship. There's love. The great King Solomon wrote about this.

How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! (Song of Solomon 4:10)

Solomon called love “delightful”. He’s just getting started. God had sent him a woman who was a friend like a sister. And she was beautiful.

You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride;
you have stolen my heart
with one glance of your eyes,
(Song of Solomon 4:9)

The king’s heart was stolen. He was captivated by his bride.

But it didn’t stop there. His bride sang to him:

Awake, north wind,
and come, south wind!
Blow on my garden,
that its fragrance may spread everywhere.
Let my beloved come into his garden
and taste its choice fruits.
(Song of Solomon 4:16)

The writers in those days were very discreet. This is sex. God didn’t just command Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. ***He made multiplying a whole lot of fun.***

Humans are very important to God, so he wants lots of them. And what do you get when you multiply? You get a family.

Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one’s youth.
(Ps 127:3-4)

You know what we learn from all of this? Family matters to the master. We’ll learn more in that in a later discussion.

So, God creates humans and gives them one of the most incredible gifts he can give. He made humans in his image. And that means he gave us some of himself. God could not give us anything more valuable.

That gift is expressed by our gender: Male and female. It’s expressed when we rule the earth with a spirit of serving others. It’s expressed when men and women come together in marriage. They become one flesh. They marry and have families.

And this is very important: Any time we do the things God designed us to do, we understand and experience him. These are all wonderful gifts.

II. The Attack on the Gift: Adultery

But then, sin entered the picture. Sin dulls our eyes to the wonder of God. When our vision of God dims, something else goes with it- Our ability to understand the gifts God offers to us.

It's amazing: God appears to have designed into humans the understanding that marriage is meant for life. Every fairy tale ends with the following words: "And they lived happily ever after." So, for centuries, many people happily stood before altars and said things like, "Until death do us part."

But then, time goes by. Sometimes it's years. Sometimes, it's surprisingly quick. All of a sudden, others start to look good. And the gift of marriage comes under attack. The "one flesh" of marriage is defiled when people break their oaths and start partnering with others.

Because of this, God had to give specific warning in the Ten Commandments:

You shall not commit adultery. (Exodus 20:14)

How important is this? How serious is this to God? Does he just give us a warning? Does he say, "hey, boys and girls – don't do that"?

No, God gives a very stern warning with a penalty.

If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.
(Leviticus 20:10)

Let's make this clear: **Adultery was a death penalty offense.** It was to be taken very seriously.

I have to give a quick note here. When we discussed the fact that human life matters to the master, we discussed the death penalty. It's mentioned in Genesis chapter 9. I suggested at the time that there is still a place for the death penalty today. My suggestion is that it is appropriate when someone has committed murder. If the murder has been thoroughly investigated by the authorities and judged in a proper court of law, then the death penalty would apply.

Is the same true here? In John, we read this:

For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)

Sometimes, Jesus is applied principles of grace to things presented in the law. In John chapter eight, a woman who committed adultery is brought before Jesus. Jesus tells her that he does not condemn her. Many feel that this removes the death penalty for adultery.

What does all this mean for us? This is a big topic, so I'll just have to give my opinion for now. In the Law, God assigns the death penalty to a number of things. By doing that, he's saying that those things are very, very serious. When grace is applied to those things, it in no means diminishes the seriousness of the offense. It just shows how wonderful Grace is. Grace doesn't say, "sin is no big deal". Grace says, "sin is serious, but God's mercy is greater than our sin."

So, we see that the wonderful gift of marriage came under attack. When humans become sinful, they fail to see the wonder of the gift. They defile the gift by partnering with others. This act of attacking God's wonderful gift is something that God takes very seriously.

This brings us back to our main text.

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Fast forward from the days of Moses to the days of Jesus. When Jesus tells us "What Matters to the Master", he often starts topics by saying, "You have heard". He then says, "But I tell you". We learned that he's not undermining the things that God said to the ancient Hebrew people through Moses. He's correcting the way that these words have been reported.

In this case, the command, "You shall not commit adultery" is actually a direct quote. So surely, he's not going to say it's wrong. But there is *something* wrong. What's wrong is the way the words of God were presented to people in the days of Jesus. They were presented badly.

How were they badly presented?

Ways that God's Words were presented badly concerning Marriage

1) The words were presented out of context.

The people weren't being taught the wonder of the gift of marriage. They were only being taught the penalty if they transgressed. We just spent the first part of our discussion discussing the gift. That should have been taught to everyone.

Why did the teachers miss this?

2) The hearts of the teachers were empty.

The Pharisees and teacher of the law were sinful men who had never dealt with their sin. Because of that, they're ability to see a God of wonder was blocked. They failed to see the wonder of God's gifts.

3) The Law became a checklist of easily accomplished items.

The pharisees woke up every day and said, "I didn't murder anyone today. Check." "I didn't commit adultery. Check." It's really not all that hard to go through your day without murdering anyone. Some days are harder than others, mind you. But having said that, most people don't murder anyone. In the same way, most people can make it through a day without committing adultery. So, the pharisees thought they were pretty good. But recall – Even though Jesus showed mercy to someone who committed adultery, it didn't diminish the seriousness of the offense.

How serious was it?

But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (v 28)

Jesus says that looking at someone lustfully is already adultery. He warns that the problem is the heart. The problem is lust. That's much harder.

What is the penalty for this?

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

Forget the death penalty. Jesus says the penalty is hell. That's serious. Jesus says this is so serious, you're better off losing an eye, if the eye makes you stumble. You're better off losing a hand, if your hand makes you stumble. Better to lose some body parts for the short time you're on earth than to suffer in torment for all eternity.

Jesus says that this is serious. If I was a mean person, I would leave things there. However, we need to understand something about the way Jesus taught. He often used something called "hyperbole". Hyperbole is: "Exaggerated statements or claims not meant to be taken literally."

If you read all four gospel accounts, you don't see any records of the disciples plucking out their eyes or cutting off their hands. So, Jesus is using hyperbole.

You can wipe the sweat off your brow. But understand, Jesus is saying that this is serious.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

Marriage matters to the master.

Because humans are precious to God, he has given us wonderful gifts. Marriage is one of those gifts. It's very important that disciples of Jesus learn to understand it. We also need to understand that God takes attacks on this gift very seriously.

Today, we looked at the first way that marriage has traditionally come under attack. It is attacked by adultery. Again, God takes this attack very seriously. At one time, it was a death penalty offense. But it's even more serious than that. When Jesus spoke about adultery, he went past the physical act. He said that looking at someone with lust is an act of adultery. He said this is so serious, it can send people to eternal judgement. Jesus tells us that no cost is too high to avoid such a fate.

In the coming sessions, we'll talk more about this. We'll ask question like:

- Are there other ways that this gift has come under attack?
- Are there some who are on a different plan?
 - What about people who don't marry?

Until then, let's close with one more thought. The thought involves God's grace.

Jesus started this block of Scripture by saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3) We learned when we studied that saying, that people who understand their sinfulness are blessed. Blessed are the people who know they fall short. They're blessed, because they listen when they hear about God's grace, his mercy and his love.

When we started looking at what matters to the Master, we said, "God's Word matters." No one has every perfectly followed the words of God other than Jesus. Everyone has fallen short.

We learned next that "Human Life Matters". Jesus says that murder is terrible, but it's anger that leads to murder. At some point, we've all felt angry.

Today we've learned that marriage matters to the Master. We've all fallen short. At some point, we fail to understand the wonder of God's gift of marriage. Further, Jesus tells us that adultery is serious, but anyone who even looks at someone else with lust has committed adultery.

So, the starting point for us all is to call upon God's mercy and forgiveness. We must be forgiven. Let us tell you how you can be forgiven your sins. God happily grants forgiveness to all who ask with a sincere heart. Contact us by writing to Info@TrinityTeaneck.org. Or visit Billy Graham's site, PeaceWithGod.net.

Then, we must ask the help of God's Holy Spirit to teach us the important of God's Word, the value of human life, and the wonder of God's gift of marriage. We must ask God's help, because these things matter to the Master. You know what we've been saying:

For the Master to be your Master, what matters to the Master must matter to you.

May God help us as we seek to learn these important things.