

Sermon July 7th 2024 – Kent A. Tollakson

What is Marriage?

Good morning everyone, it's good to be with you as usual. If your unfamiliar with me or catching this online (welcome to anyone online) – My name is Kent Tollakson and I lead our youth ministry, our small groups ministry and provide biblical counseling with my wife Karalee here at East Lincoln.

Join me in a word of prayer:

Father, you know I have not felt adequate or sufficient for today. I have felt weak and dependent upon You during preparation, and that weakness has not gone away. I ask that You would help me be faithful to Your word, to not hinder or blur Your truth. I pray that You would speak through me in clarity and power! That You use this message to help us gain clarity of who You are and be motivated to live for You more fully. I ask this from You... Father, I ask within faith in Your Son and I ask within the power of Your Holy Spirit – Amen.

So this morning, I want to talk to about marriage because there is a lot of confusion about what marriage is these days and I see how these confusions effect our youth....may of you see this too.

The main “unbiblical” message is that marriage is an “idea” that can be applied to whatever situation you want, it can be 2 men or 2 women, those situations are often legally recognized, but marriage has also been misused with people marrying rocks, marrying pets, marrying trains, video game characters, phones, trees and more....not making those up! The point – we are confused humans who refuse to follow God and follow our own desires....which we read about in the bible often... Jude1:18, 1Tim4:1, 2Pt3:3 to name a few of the places where God says mankind will follow its own passions, desires, and think they know better than God.

...And, because of all of this, if you asked several people off the street “what is marriage” you will probably get lots of different answers!

Therefore, I will start with what God says marriage is - before moving into a few applications.

I will stress:

SLIDE: 3 points

1. God designed marriage into the fabric of creation from the beginning.
2. God intended marriage to be a “dramatic example” of a covenant-promised relationship – of Christ and the church.
3. Christians are called to practice marriage in a way that displays Christ and His covenant with the church, His covenant with believers.

With this effort I hope we are motivated to love God through our marriages and FREINDSHIPS, which in turn, motivates our youth to honor and support Gods design of marriage in their lives.

Point 1 - Gods Design of Marriage

The answer to “what is marriage” for Christians, should be something like:

Marriage is a covenant promise, made here on earth, between a man and a woman, to be united in life, so they can display the love of Christ to the world, until death takes them home to the Lord.

I say it that way, because of the bible....

Open to Genesis chapter 2.

Gen2:18-25

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.” **19** Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed⁶ every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. **20** The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam⁷ there was not found a helper fit for him. **21** So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. **22** And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. **23** Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD

Let's focus on how God did not want man to be alone (vs 18) and how God solved it by making a woman (verses 21-23.) God wanted man to have a "helper"

OR - God wanted man to have a teammate in life.

And, verse 24 tells us that God always knew that sons and daughters would pursue- a "teammate" (marriage). **24... a man will leave... father and.. mother... hold fast to his wife, ... they shall become one flesh.**

It's a good plan. And, at first it was really good.

Verse 25 says, Adam and Eve were naked and unashamed.

And I'm not saying it was really good because they were naked. I'm not talking about sex. I'm talking about the awesome depth of being completely open and honest with your spouse, being completely free to be yourself with your spouse, with no fear – unashamed.

Without sin to complicate matters we would be completely free, completely exposed with no fear - completely "unashamed".

But we know what happens. Satan comes and lies about God. Satan asked Eve "did God actually say 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" Eve stands her ground and says Yup – God said don't eat from a few of the trees or we will die. (Adam & Eve, way to go, good teammates! explaining the rules - Gen2:17 – disobey and you get death) (That's why Rom6:23 says the wage of sin is death)...But, Satan lies...."You will not die, God is lying....God doesn't want you to eat from that tree because then you will be like Him."

So Eve – let temptation melt her trust in God and she ate some of the delightfully good looking fruit. Adam, being right there with her (but frustratingly silent...why didn't Adam speak up!? Why didn't he grab that snake Satan, throw him on the ground and stomp on his head? He is supposed to be a warrior teammate with his wife...not a silent, inactive bystander!) (and we know that where Adam fails, Christ prevails! (Gen3:15) foreshadows Jesus stomping on Satan's head and in the process bruises His heel – and yes, Jesus was wounded for our transgressions – but He in does crush Satan's head on the cross – so put your hope in Jesus – not people!) anyway...Eve offers Adam a bite, Adam eats too. Their trust in God fades and sin begins to grow. God comes to visit like normal and gives them an

opportunity to confess... He asks (Gen 3:11-13)....¹¹ ..., "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate."¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."people now are just like Adam and Eve then...they don't like to admit their own responsibility. We don't like to confess our sin! (that's why confession brings such powerful forgiveness & healing – 1John1:9)

As bad as it was for Eve to trust Satan and not God (get deceived 1Tim2:14 says) Adam is worse...he doesn't trust God and...he throws Eve under the bus.

How can Eve trust Adam now? She can't. Adam was to be her trusted teammate for life. Her trust was shattered when he blamed her. The free - totally comfortable – totally exposed and unashamed existence with Adam is gone.

The perfection of the entire world was broken by not trusting God. This is why the foundation of becoming a child of God hinges on trust, which we call faith, which plays out as belief. If we believe in Jesus, we have faith in Jesus which is saying we trust Jesus! (where Adam fails – bringing death, Christ prevails – bringing life).

Now, we attempt, to smooth over DISS-TRUST by making a "very dramatic" public – promise to each other. Marriage vows are a verbal – legal contract – (between a man and a woman) - a PROMISE to be trustworthy and faithful to each other for the rest of their lives. And once "said" the man and the woman will begin to "prove" that promise was truthful by the way they live. (This is why we practice a personal public declaration of faith (in Christ) when baptizing – it's a "dramatic public" display with a personal vow - to put their trust in Christ! Just like a marriage vow.)

And marriage is woven into the fabric of creation throughout the entire bible, in the 10 commandments, the fifth commandment tells us to – honor thy father and mother, the 7th commandment, do not commit adultery, and the 10th commandment, do not covet your neighbors wife...ALL marriage references between men and women. Proverbs 18:22 says that *a man who finds a wife finds favor and blessing from God*, Malachi2:14 says *a wife is a man's companion by covenant*, Isai62:5 says *young men shall marry young women*, John 2:1-5 – Jesus goes to a wedding in Cana where a man marries a woman, and on and on it goes.

The bible consistently teaches that marriage is between a man and a woman – nothing else.

And the bible doesn't just talk about how great marriage is...the bible is VERY honest – it points out how marriage will be difficult. Prov21:9 says it's better to live on your roof than in a house with a quarrelsome wife,

1Cor7:28 says those who marry will face many troubles.. (trust will continue to be broken... troubles come when 2 sinners live together!),

1Cor7:32-34 says) unmarried men and women can focus on devoting themselves to the Lord (making disciples)...and married men and women will need to devote themselves to pleasing each other.

Now it's not sinful to please your spouse – it's Godly to please your spouse.

This is Paul pointing out how being single is preferable because it frees a person up to focus on making disciples. (which is true)

So let's talk about singles. According to this, anyone who is single – should have a priority of “being” disciplined and “making” disciples with their life.

Now I have heard “complaints” that pastors talk about marriage too much and singles too little. But – I think the church needs to preach more about marriage – based on some data.

Government data + Pew research + Barna surveys and MORE find; around 65% of people 18 or older in the US... are either married or divorced, leaving 35% as singles. And, 85% of those singles... WANT to be married....and....Paul clearly teaches that people who want to get married, should get married, and not “burn with passion” (1Cor7:9).

So, crunching numbers more (approximate numbers based off several studies) ...the averages are 5% of singles and 5% of divorcees don't want to be married and 90% of the US are married or want to be married,so, maybe its right to preach more on marriage and less on singles?...I don't know....

But I do know – both are about discipleship. AND (an opinion of mine here is) marriages should provide singles with a wealth of wisdom, because - If a biblical marriage displays a faithful team effort to honor God – then everyone should be

able to learn more about how to be a Godly teammate & and Godly friend – by observing them.

POINT 2. God intended marriage to be a “dramatic example” of covenant promised relationship – of Christ and the church.

I don't think anything else in the entire universe is more dramatic than a person coming to faith in Christ...when a person believes in Jesus – the Holy Spirit becomes one with them and they are a child of God – a family member forever.

Marriage is the most dramatic thing a man and a woman can do to imitate the love Jesus gives to them forever....by promising to love in the same way, and then staying committed to that promise, until death separates them. Period. That's why marriage SHOULD be the most dramatic shining example we can give to our youth about who God is...

And, I think, that's why God has ordained so many things to be dramatic about marriage between men and women, the wedding vows are dramatic and wonderful, sex is powerfully bonding and even creates life (that's dramatic). Childbirth is dramatic, parenting is dramatic, growing old together is dramatic...God wants it to be special – dramatic – and it is. When it's done in Him – its awesome.

Unfortunately, our culture often looks at marriage in a negative light... An old joke says “Marriage is like a deck of cards, to start all you need is two hearts and a diamond, but by the end, all you want it a club and a spade.”

And that joke is kinda funny – because the truth is - marriage IS DIFFICULT...

But it's sad because, so many people see it that way.

Marriage should be so grounded in grace and mercy, so dedicated to 2 people mutually striving to love each other as fully, and openly and honestly as they can that the world cannot help but stand back and say WHOA....THAT kind of marriage is impressive! That's what we want to be doing! ...But how?....

Point 3. Christians are called to practice marriage in a way that displays Christ and His covenant with the church, His covenant with believers.

Some application....lets look at Ephesians 5:22-33

God has some extra challenging application points for Christian husbands and wives...in these verses...

I believe this is because of how dramatic marriage IS SUPPOSED to be...a dramatic reflection of the love of Christ....22-24

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.

...wives....you are called to submit to your husband according to Gods word....yes....but only if that husband is following Christ!

If that doesn't make sense, let me ask this: If the church is NOT following Christ – should you submit to that church and its teaching? No. In the same way, a wife IS called to submit – IF...her husband is following Jesus.

Which is clearly what God calls husbands to so with....

²⁵Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

HOW does Jesus give Himself up for us.....(read. Phil2:3-8). Guys – how we doin? If we are doing that well we are...26,27

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.

26- guys...if we love our wives like Jesus, she is more important than us, she is to be honored and valued and cherished as a “first fruit” in our lives if....we wash our wives with forgiveness, with grace, with healing, with gentle, loving, with patient correction when something is off....we present the world with an example that is without continuing issue – without “wrinkle” as the scriptures say.

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.

28-30 – guys....God tells you to love your wife like you love your own body, like you love yourself

How well are we doing here? I'm not doing as well as I should! If I love Karalee like I love myself....AND...love her like Christ loves methen....according to Phil2...

Every minute I spend on myself – I would spend more time on her.

Every dollar I spend on myself – I would spend more on her.

Every toy I get for myself – I would get more for her.

Every job I expect her to take care of – I would do it and more.

Every time my wife lets me down – I would continually forgive her.

Every time my wife lets me down – I would continually forgive AND bless her (grace).

Every time my wife brings me conflict – I would respond with patient, compassionate, understanding that gently leads both of us into what is right – while blessing her as much as I can.

Every time my wife brought need, emotional or physical, into our life I would respond with patient, compassion as I work hard to solve the problem as best I can.

If I was being a PERFECT imitator of Christ, that is how I would be....that is what we are called to TRY and do as husbands....

Because that is what Jesus Christ is doing for us 24/7/365. Jesus loves us more than He loves Himself (phil2) Jesus is giving us more than we give Him (constant forgiveness & blessings – both of which we don't deserve.) Jesus is not focusing on Himself, getting stuff for Himself, and leaving us in second place or worse... Jesus puts you first, himself second – do you hear this guys....the God of the entire universe treats you like that and guys.....He is commanding you to love your wives like that.

³¹ *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”*

I try to be a teammate with Karalee that is joined with her as one...I try to keep my finger on merging our time, our money, our faith together.

And I hate how much I fall short. I hate how I easily spend time and money on things I want.....but hesitate to make sure Karalee can do the same...

....but I need to keep repenting....keep changing....keep improving on sacrificially loving her like Christ loves me.

³² *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

This kind of husband is a mystery to the world, even Christians. John Piper said this....in 2007

“There never has been a generation whose view of marriage is high enough. The chasm between the biblical vision of marriage and the human vision is, and has always been, gargantuan. Some cultures in history respect the importance and the permanence of marriage more than others. Some, like our own, have such low, casual, take-it-or-leave-it attitudes toward marriage as to make the biblical vision seem ludicrous to most people.”

The mystery of Christ’s love for the world should be more clear, to ourselves and others when they observe our marriages....

³³ *However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

33 – A summery. A husband is commanded to LEAD by loving his wife like Jesus, which means to LEAD by BEING A SERVANT to her – by loving her in a way that places her FIRST and treats her as MORE IMPORTANT.

God is also commanding wives to respect their husbands...which I believe is another way of saying- SUPPORT your husband in Godly living! To NOT support a husband who is loving you like Christ...is being disrespectful.

Challenge...

But what about solid Christians? How are we doing? Are we doing well or are we allowing some ungodliness to sour the view? That’s a gut check question...because,

I’m just going to be honest here –

Something is present in ALL of our marriages that sours the view...there are bigger and smaller issues, but there is ALWAYS a list of issues (for both the husband, and the wife)...some longer lists, some have shorter... but there is always a list. And those issues always effect our youth.

I'm asking all of us to embrace marriage (and any friendships as well) with an effort to NOT be like Adam and Eve in the garden. Lets NOT loose our trust in God (let's keep getting wise instead of unwise), lets fight the lies of Satan WITH our wives & WITH our family of faith, so that we keep getting better.

BUT – because we ALL FALL SHORT (Rom3:10) and sin....lets NOT – blame shift and deflect responsibility, lets not throw each other under the bus, lets take responsibility and confess our sins, lets take responsibility and fight. Fighting sin is what Jesus requires of us....He says...REPENT and believe (Mk1:15).

Let's be like that. Let's embrace a HIGHER level of devotion to God –so that He is honored and glorified AND we reduce confusion for our youth – married or not! And remember, you cannot do this in your own strength. You can do this, ALL of this, in the power of the Holy Spirit who is given to you by God through faith in Jesus Christ who did all the crucial work for you on the cross.

Husbands – are you loving your wife like Christ loves His church? Or loving her second...

Wives – Are you respecting your husband in a way that helps him honor God – or are you treating him in a way that makes him want to live on the roof?

Lets do better church – lets apply Gods word to our marriages so wonderfully that others look at our marriages and say, "WOW, If that's what the bible says about marriage....well that's the most awesome things I've ever seen...I want to enjoy a married life like that!

I hope we embrace making gains here together, I hope we effect our youth to honor and pursue Gods design of marriage, and I hope we effect a few unbelievers so that the Holy Spirit at work in us, comes into their hearts and brings them into a life of faith with Jesus too! Amen!

Let's Pray

Father I pray that the married couples that hear these words or the people who may embark on marriage in the future, even the singles who hear this, would be strengthened for Christ exalting, God centered, Bible saturated and gospel rooted relationships for the sake of Your name. I pray that marriages of believers would make gains to grow in Christlike desires so that the gospel is both seen and spread into more lives. I pray that Your Godly influence on marriages would provide tangible examples of covenant love for our youth and the unmarried. Please do a work with my words today, I am just a man, a small voice, but take it and do a work. I pray that you would use my effort (and all of us) in ways that we can't begin to imagine or ask for by working in our hearts through Your Holy Spirit. We need you for this kind of effort and effect, so we ask for this in the sovereignty of the Father, within the grace of the Son and by the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.