

Theology of Marriage

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On October 9th, October 5th, 2019, I married my amazing wife on top of a mountain in front of a cross. And God had given me a word for our two children from my wife's previous marriage and for my wife as well, which I gave to them individually as part of a foot washing ceremony. And what you see here is me kneeling before my bride, delivering to her this word that God had given me. And here's what I said.

I said, "You tell me how I'm to love you as Christ loves me. How could I possibly live up to such a standard?" And see, if my statements in that experience would have ended there, that would have been a heck of a thing to say to a bride on her wedding day. But I know my God. And it's precisely in these places of meekness and humility that he fills me with his grace through the impossible, the things that are only possible in and through him.

And so today I want to talk to you about marriage and this great privilege and responsibility that God has placed into it. But first, just to step back a moment and introduce myself, as Pastor Joel said, my name is Ed Shuty, ordained pastor in the Missionary Church. I get the great privilege of leading this ministry called before it begins just a bit about ourselves. We believe that before it begins, that God wants to usher in a new sexual revolution, one that is aligned with his design for our identity, and the only one that with liberty and the fulfillment that we all seek.

Since we've launched in 2019, we've rescued hundreds of individuals from pornography and over a thousand children from oversexualization and gender confusion. And if you are here today and want to learn more about our ministry and how God is transforming lives through it, I would invite you and refer you to our table to grab some of our materials, sign up on our sign-up sheet, attend the Q&A that we have afterwards. I'll be speaking a little bit at the front end of that about the LGBTQ topic and in particular what it's like being a kid today growing up in this world with a lot going on in that area and then be answering your questions for the majority of the time.

And if you want to know how you can support and be a part of this mission through giving, supporting my wife and I as full-time missionaries as this is our calling, I'm no longer on staff as a pastor, then I'd love to speak with you as well. Oh, and this is my lovely family. On a personal note, this is my amazing wife and the two older kids we now have. God is blessed with two younger kids as well. They send their love and I look forward to seeing them this evening. So let's talk about marriage. Firstly, in order for anything that I say to follow to make sense, you have to understand that when we talk about marriage, we're talking about a metaphor.

Indeed, I say that marriage is the dominant metanarrative allegory of all of Scripture. Scripture begins with a marriage in the garden and ends with a marriage in the new heavens and the new earth. And our earthly marriage is meant to be a picture of Jesus' marriage to the church, as is said in Ephesians 5:31 and 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 is an illustration of the way Christ and the Church are one.

So again, I say each man must love his wife as he loves himself and the wife must respect her husband. You see, marriage is all about God and his people and our witness to the world. In fact, I say that marriage is one of, if not the most powerful witness tool that we have to the world. You see, the world is meant to look at a Christian marriage and say, "Oh, that's what Christ's love for the church looked like." And that's what the church's honor and reverence and submission to Christ looks like.

Here's how I define marriage. Marriage is a unique calling initiated and powered by God for the purposes of putting His covenant love for the Church on display to be experienced and seen by the world. All throughout Scripture, Israel was referred to as God's lover and wife, Ezekiel 16:8, Jeremiah 3:14. The Book of Hosea is an entire book dedicated to this idea. Marriage is a representation of God's covenant love to His people and how we fulfill His covenant promises with us.

2 Corinthians 11:2 says, "We are promised to one husband, Christ, so that we might be presented as a pure virgin to him." Does anyone in here ever heard of Pastor John Piper? Anyone listen to him? Here's what he says about marriage. Marriage is not mainly about being or staying in love. It's mainly about telling the truth with our lives. It's about portraying something true about Jesus Christ and the way He relates to His people. It is about showing in real life the glory of the gospel.

Marriage is meant by God to put that gospel reality on display in the world. You see, I believe God's design for marriage is more beautiful and profound than we ever would know. And being married only six years, boy, I have a whole lot to learn. And I'm sure I can learn quite a lot from many of the godly marriages in this room. But one of the things I've been blessed with and I hope you'll be blessed with today is understanding just a bit more about God's beautiful design for marriage so that our relationship and marriage to him and our spouse would be greater, that the world would know the love of Jesus and that God may be glorified.

And so with that kind of introduction to this message, let's explore what marriage is biblically. Now, any Bible teacher will tell you that in order to properly interpret and apply Scripture to your lives, you have to first assess what the original author was trying to communicate to the original audience. Then from that perspective, we can properly interpret and apply the timeless truths to our life. So when we see and read, as I will in just a moment, these verses on marriage, you have to understand what that meant to an ancient Israelite.

To put simply, let me just say to you right now, forget everything that you know about the marriage ceremony and what marriage looks like today. Because it is very far from what it was in ancient Israel times. So I'm going to take a moment and bring this to light to you what it was like for an ancient Israelite and then I'm going to overlay and overlap that with a deeper understanding of our marriage and relationship to Jesus and to our spouse for those who are married. The first thing you have to understand is that in ancient Israelite tradition there was no wedding ceremony.

There were three distinct stages to an ancient Israelite wedding and those three stages are contract, consummation, and celebration. And I want to talk about each of the three individually. The first stage being contract or ketuba or in the English betrothal, which is a word, of course, that we've seen in Scripture, but we definitely don't use today. So let me ask you this question. Were Joseph and Mary married? Matthew 1: 18 to 19 says, "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows.

When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found to be with child by the Holy Spirit. And Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man and not wanting to disgrace her, planned to divorce her away secretly. Well, there's a whole lot there. But the simple thing I want to say is, or highlight, is before they came together, of course referring to the consummation, they were betrothed, says Scripture. So again, what does betrothed mean? So the way this worked in ancient Israel times is the groom to be and a bride to be who wanted to get married.

The first step would be this betrothal step where the groom to be would primarily approach the father of the bride to negotiate and set in place certain things. The first of which is a dowry price was made. Genesis 24:51 to 53, among other places, we see Abraham sending his servant to find a wife for Isaac who says the servant brought out articles of silver and articles of gold and garments and gave them to Rebecca. He also gave precious things to her brother and her mother.

What you see going on here is this dowry being paid, among other places, in Scripture. Now, what was the significance of this? What was the purpose of this? Because this is a very foreign idea. In fact, in some lights, it might be seen as offensive even, a bridal fee. So I want to share with you and comfort you that the heart behind this custom was as a down payment to protect the wife in the event that the husband was unfaithful and left her. So you see it was actually a very beautiful thing.

So this dowry fee was paid, and then what would happen next is the groom to be would go and prepare a place for the wife and their future family. Now, this process could take years. Mind you, before the wedding is consummated, in the case of Jacob and Levin and Rachel, we know it was a number of years before there was this blessing from the Father affirming that the contracts of the Katuba betrothal had been completed and the place has been prepared.

And once the Father says, "I bless this now, all has been done," the consummation date is set and the bridal bed and the virginity cloth is prepared, which leads us to the second stage, consummation, or pooppa. Can we pick that picture up please? Has anyone ever been to a Jewish wedding? I apologize in advance for what I'm about to tell you and reveal to you what exactly is going on with this cloth, this sheet that is above the bride and groom.

You see, in one sense it's true, and this is a more sterile explanation, it represents the covering of God over this marriage, the blessing of God, and surely there's a beauty behind that. But in ancient Israelite tradition, what's being represented here is the virginity cloth. In Old Testament times, wives who were proven to not be a virgin on their wedding day were stoned to death. Deuteronomy chapter 22, beginning in verse 21, the context here is a woman who was proven to be not a virgin on her wedding day. Here's what it says in verse 21, chapter 22.

"The woman must be taken to the door of her father's home, and there the men of the town must stone her to death, for she has committed a disgraceful crime in Israel by being promiscuous while living in her parents' home. In this way, you will purge this evil from among you." It's quite intense, huh? Do you think purity is important to God? I'll be talking more about purity as we go. For now, let me just say that you're looking at someone who did not live up to these standards in my past life. So while it was such a serious consequence, there must be a process by which to determine if this charge was true or not.

So what is that process? How does Israel know that the bride was not a virgin? Well, this same chapter of Deuteronomy 22 tells us just a bit earlier, beginning in verse 15. "Then the woman's father and mother must bring the proof of her virginity to the elders as they hold court at the town gate. Her father must say to them, "I gave my daughter to this man to be his wife, and now he has turned against her." He has accused her of shameful conduct, saying, "I discovered that your daughter was not a virgin. But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity."

Then they must spread her bedsheet before the elders." Have you figured out what the proof of virginity is? Have you figured out what the both represents here? If not, you can ask your name. So that brings us to the third and final stage. Celebration. Did you know that celebration is a spiritual discipline? If you look up in the Strong's dictionary, the word Sabbath Shabbat, you'll see there, among other things, the word celebrate. We're commanded to remember and celebrate. We are to be a party people in the church. We're to be a celebratory people. And so in marriage, picture this, return to this picture.

The marriage is consummated in a tent while all the bridal party awaits. The marriage is consummated and they march out and they walk right into the wedding feast, where the whole community celebrates this marriage's

wedding now being complete. Wow, this is a bit different than our traditions, huh? Thankfully. Okay, so what does this have to do with the church's marriage to Christ? If what I said is true, and it's this dominant men in narrative, well, where do we see these three stages with Jesus?

2 Corinthians 11:2, "I have a divine jealousy for you since I betrothed you to one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ." Who is Paul speaking to there? He's speaking to those who follow Jesus. So upon the confession of your faith, upon your salvation, you have been betrothed to Jesus. Step one. Remember, if it's not clear, we are His bride, which is especially hard for us men, but we are the bride of Christ and He is our bride groom.

But wait, what about our dowry? That's the next step, right? We're betrothed, okay. The dowry, what price has been paid for us? The blood of Jesus? How much does God want you as His bride that He sends His Son pays the most valuable thing that their wife was? The blood of Jesus to have us. Praise You, Lord. You have paid the great bridal price. 1 Corinthians 6:19 to 20 says, "We've been bought with a high price, so we must honor God with our body." 1 Peter 1:18 to 19 says that this price was not mere gold or silver, which loses value.

It was the precious blood of Jesus, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. Okay, what happens next in the process? Remember, the groom goes to prepare a place. Does that remind you of a Bible verse? John 14:2, "In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." How amazing is that? He's preparing a place for us right now. And by the way, not us. He's preparing a place for you that looks different than the place he's preparing for me. How amazing is that place going to be?

You all are welcome to my place. We'll be the party people. We'll be camping. We'll be fishing and we'll be wrestling. Okay, when will our marriage to Christ be consummated? It's consummated when he returns, for he's returning for a spotless bride. But uh-oh, what about our proof of virginity? Because we are not pure. Apart from Christ, we are spiritual harlots and therefore are destined to death. God says unfaithful is a prostitute to foreign gods.

See it for yourself, Ezekiel 16:15 to 34, Jeremiah 3:1 to 3 and 31 to 32, Hosea 2:2 to 5, and Ezekiel 23. Who will save us for us being destined to death? Praise be to the Lord that His blood washes us, white as snow, that we might be presented back to Him as a pure and spotless virgin. Praise God. Now it's at this time I want to do a little brief aside and just really hit this point home about the power of this washing.

And I say this both to release grace in this room for those of you who like me are far from perfect to say the least in terms of even specifically in the area of sexual sin and some of the things that I've done in my past. I also say this to provoke or maybe offend religious people, which I like doing maybe a little too much. But here it is. The prostitute who just made Jesus Lord of their life is more pure than the virgin who does not yet know Him. The prostitute, the fornicator, the adulterer, porn addict who just made Jesus Lord of their life is more pure than the virgin who does not yet know Him.

And as much as on your face that could be, nothing more biblical could be said. Indeed, that is the gospel. Now, I feel compelled to also say the following, something deeply personal to me. This has affected my family and people in it and people who are very dear to me. The world is filled with people who use the name of God for whatever selfish means they have. Perhaps they to convince a spouse of something such as I follow Jesus now to avoid something they don't want, but God sees people's hearts and heaven on mercy for anybody who mocks God, but for those who that's genuinely true for, then those are more pure than the virgin who does not yet know Him.

Praise You, Jesus, our bridegroom. We've been betrothed to you. You're coming back to consummate the marriage for a spotless bride made pure not by our deeds but by your blood. And so when is the celebration? The celebration is with Jesus in heaven at the marriage of the supper of the Lamb. Revelations 19:9, "Blessed are

those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Praise God. What a celebration that will be. So with that, I want to transition a bit. I want to say some words and I'll pray as well for some groups.

First group is married couples. Married couples, you have this great privilege of demonstrating this witness to the world as I've described. And you have this great privilege with your spouse to go on what my wife and I call this journey of oneness. The two becoming one as he is one is a very central part of this witness. What does that look like? My wife and I are very different people and yet we're called to be one in unity, not in uniformity, unity in our diversity, just as Father Son, Holy Spirit.

Boy, I don't know exactly what that looks like, but that is our conviction in the direction that we want to head. And so too, I charge you with that. I call you to higher grounds. At the same time, I want to tell you a story. See, one time I gave this message and I could see this older lady in the back just weeping. After the service, she motioned me to sit down with her and she told me the story of how her husband of 50-plus years just passed. I can't imagine how scary that would be. And the first question I asked is your church caring for you? And she said, "Oh, they are." I said, "Oh, thank you, Jesus." I said, "What's going on?" And she said, "I didn't know.

You didn't know what." I didn't know that all this was meant to point to him. I didn't know that there was no marriage in heaven. Part of the reason this has been so hard to me is that I just assumed, and you might laugh, it's kind of funny, but it's a rational conclusion if you didn't know this. She said, I just assumed that he was in heaven, remarried, with kids, and he's moved on with his life. And I show up and I'm like, I didn't know that. You have eased this grieving widow's soul. Wow, thank you. That's amazing. Praise God. Why are you crying? She said, I have 50 years. I missed it.

This whole time it was about him and us. And I made it about my marriage. More specifically, I made it about him. I've made an idol out of my marriage, my husband and my family. What you see before you is someone deeply convicted and repentant for what I've done. And so just as I'm calling us to these higher grounds, this higher understanding, I'm also reminding us that this is all just temporary, these things that I'm talking about, and pointing to an eternal reality. That's the real point. An idol isn't bad things.

An idol is anything that we place in greater supremacy, value, and cherishness in our heart greater than God. So you can make an idol out of anything. Please don't make an idol out of your marriage or your family. That woman has asked me to share that story as part of her convictions, and I honor that. The second group I want to speak to is single people. That's right, the people who thought they were going to get out of the message today. I told you, if you listen, I got married not too long ago. So you're looking at someone who lived into it, spent the majority of his thirties as a single person.

So I know firsthand how unintentional it may be, how single people can feel like second-class citizens in the church. Indeed, even something in like a message that I just gave, where I'm talking largely about the beauty of marriage can feel like yet another example where I don't see myself. So it's important for me that I say the following. First, if you resonate with what I just said as a single person and you've experienced that, first I want to say I'm sorry. Whether it was intentional or unintentional, I'm sorry.

I furthermore want to call you to higher grounds and be very clear when I say that we need you. You see, just as married people have this unique privilege to represent something that no non-married could, so too, do you. And in fact, in some ways, it's a different message entirely, but in some ways it's more beautiful and profound from what I just described, and that is, number one, you get to demonstrate the all-sufficiency of Christ.

You see, it is not good for man and woman to be alone, but you are not alone because you are married to Christ, and this is your family. And you have a privilege of showing that in ways that I can't as a married person, not in the ways you can. So live up to that. And number two, you demonstrate to the church and to the world what eternity looks like. Hear me, church. Singleness is not the temporary state before marriage. Rather, marriage is the temporary state before eternity. Singleness is not the temporary state before marriage.

Rather, marriage is the temporary state before eternity. Your life right now, completely dependent on Jesus and God's family, is what all of eternity will look like. So singles live up to that calling and church be the family and esteem and help them live up to that high calling. We're going to close our time with a time of prayer and ministry. I'm going to ask these groups in just a moment, just to stand as all. And even that is optional, but just to let you know and to comfort you.

There's nothing else going on other than I'll ask you to stand. I just want to see who I'm speaking to and praying for if you would like to be a part of that. And so the first group that I want to ask to stand is married couples. And then yes, thank you so much, brother. With the married couples, please stand. Obviously with a group of this size, we have every experience here. What you've been through, what you're going through. Maybe marriage is as strong as they've ever been. Maybe marriage is not so much. Maybe some as hard as they've ever been. I hope I've challenged you today to see the bigger picture.

You know, life just pulls us in. Married life, especially if you have kids, but even it's just tough enough as is. I mean, just the rat wheel of life, right? We can miss the bigger picture. I want to charge you and call you to higher grounds and participate in this great witness experience that God has created called marriage. If not just for the sake of yourself and for your marriage, but also for the world. And so, Father, I just want to pray for this group.

Lord, for any marriages that may sound like a final lifeline in this really tough place, Lord. You can seem like, Jesus, where are you? Show yourself to them, Lord. Show them where you're at. Show them what you're doing. Shine bright in both of their eyes so that they can see you and come alongside you, regardless of what's going on in life. Because whatever you're doing is the most important thing for us to do. Strengthen them, Lord. Comfort them.

Show them hope for marriages that may just be in a good place for now a better place, Lord, strengthen them. Let them lead. Let them support. I just declare a blessing over marriages in this church as an evangelical vehicle. Let many people come to the Lord, even come to this, join this local church family as a result of seeing why are you here? It wasn't because of pastor so-and-so, or it wasn't because of this. Praise God when those happen.

It was because I looked at this marriage and I said, "Whatever is in this marriage and whatever this is and looks like someone told me that that's how Jesus loves me, and I want in. I just released that blessing over this church, over these married people. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. You maybe see them. Okay, well, the non-married people stand up, please. Non-married, those who are not married, please stand. Single women, you want to say, you are worth pursuing, being pursued.

You are worth because you are worth the precious blood of Jesus. I exhort you to lay down a sentiment of a desire to control, to reject the lie that says if only I had a boyfriend, if only I was married like so-and-so and so-and-so and then all will be well. Take advantage of this blessed time of singleness, that God may make you the woman that he wants you to be.

So that one day, for those who desire to be married, Jan will look at you and say, "My daughter, this is my most amazing son, and he is worthy of you." And to the men, similarly leveraging this time of singleness, I want to call you to deeper levels of holiness and purity. I have a ministry, and one of the main things we do is helping people who struggle with pornography.

And can I just tell you how much of an honor it's been to be a part of a church who's already doing things in that area, just to make a little impact and be a part of your story. Thank you for that. And women struggle with pornography too, but men more so, statistically. And some of you may be struggling a little, a lot, or not at all. We can all grow in holiness though, and this is your appointed time, a single before life gets a whole lot more complicated to become that person that God wants you to be. You see, can I tell you from my experience?

One of the greatest lies I hear from single people is that this struggle of mine will go away once I'm married, once I have biblical place to fulfill these desires and temptations. Can I tell you that's alive in the pit of hell? You know

why? Because it's a spiritual problem. Spiritual problems just like spiritual blessings are by definition not circumstantial. Please don't bring this struggle into your marriage. That will only make it harder.

Bring a testimony into your marriage. Get help. I'm here and your church is here and grow in holiness in this time. Okay, you may be seated. If you are a part of the family of God, if you are the church, would you please stand? If you haven't connected the dots yet, if marriage is a temporary institution, well then guess what? So is our biological families.

And of course it's true that our biological families have a special place in our heart and yet all that will fade away in eternity. And it boggles my mind that all the familiar relationships I have, strongest of which of course is my wife and my kids, that they will be called brothers and sisters by me before our Heavenly Father and our bridegroom. Boy, that's amazing. Now I have four kids. Nobody wants them. No one walking this earth desires my children to know the Lord more than me.

They have agency. They can choose to accept or reject as us all. But I am their head in their covering. And I walk in that responsibility in fear and trembling. And I am conspiring with God that the deck is stacked at them knowing Him. And that responsibility lays on me and each and every parent here for their children. And it's on behalf of them that I say to you the following. I and them parents cannot do that without you.

My kids and the kids in here need you, the church. So is this your family or is this a place you just go to on Sundays? I pray it's your family. I'm just going to launch into prayer right now. Father, I pray that you raise up spiritual fathers, spiritual mothers, aunts and uncles, because our kids need it. Our spiritual kids need it. We all need it, Lord.

I pray for a deepening understanding that this is the eternal family of God. Let's start that now. For many people here, let that be done now. Let relationships form never forced, never forced. Always organic and blessed by the Spirit. Raise up spiritual fathers, mothers, aunts and uncles in this church.

Brothers, sisters, because we need you, Lord, and we need the church to encourage, equip, and edify one another in Jesus' name.