

The Greatest Story (Part 26):

A Marriage Built Around The Mission

Song of Solomon

Memory Verses: Song of Solomon 8:7

MANUSCRIPT

Introduction (Me, We, & the Struggle)

Turn with me to the book of the Song of Solomon. Today is what we have termed Marriage Sunday. We have just celebrated the 50 years of marriage of Becky and Al Smith and now we want to look to scripture and see what this Book has to say about how we can all have an exciting, enduring, and God glorifying marriage like this.

For the past two weeks we've been looking at the books of Solomon which are often called the Books of Wisdom. And the overarching theme of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes is that it is foolish to worship your self or your stuff... but true wisdom is found in worshipping God above all else. Even last week we saw, as Jim spoke in Ecclesiastes, that in giving up a life of vanity and vain things for the cause of Christ's mission we find true wisdom and satisfaction.

But that mission isn't just found on the foreign mission field or in outreach ministries. That mission is to be lived out in our everyday lives so that people can see the wisdom of God on display though us 24/7/365. And for those of us who are married our marriage can be the greatest way we display not only the wisdom of God but the love of God for the world.

And for that very reason, marriage is extremely important to God, is highlighted throughout the Bible, and should be studied, preached on, and talked about frequently. In fact God thinks marriage is so important we have an entire book of the Bible dedicated to that one subject; the Song of Solomon.

And thank God that he cares for marriage so much... cause marriage can be difficult at times. And God knows this. God knows that there are daily struggles that must be worked out in biblical ways if any marriage is to succeed. Today, I'm sure, that some of us are experiencing those struggles. Today, I'm sure, that there are some here who have been a part of a failed marriage and would admit that they've made some pretty big mistakes. And, I'm sure, that there are some here this morning who would say, if they were honest, that their marriage hasn't always reflected the Glory of God.

I know that's true because that would be me. I haven't always loved my wife the way I should. I haven't always treated her as Christ would have me to. I haven't always selflessly put her before myself and

other things. I confess that and I repent of it.... and I stand here today as a husband who is committed to loving my wife the way that she deserves... and in a way that draws others to Christ. That is the main mission isn't it. Loving our spouse is important for today, but ultimately we love because it is a reflection of the love that Christ has shown us. So this morning let us not only seek to learn to love our spouses better, but let us seek God's wisdom to be men and women who build our marriages around the mission of seeing God glorified and the lost saved. Today I want us to look at this book and I want us to see a couple of ways that it shows us how to build our marriages around the mission, and what we will see is... **A Marriage Is Successful When The Love of a Husband and a Wife Points Others to the Love of Christ**

Teaching (Expand on the Problem, God)

The first thing I want you to recognize is this ... **To Build A Marriage For Christ You Should Begin Your Marriage In Christ.** All Marriages Should be Christian but the reality is that most aren't. And this stands in stark contrast to the actual nature of marriage because marriage is a Biblical institution. Marriage was designed in Genesis as a means to glorify God in a special relationship. It is defined as an exclusive union between a man and a woman for the express purpose of reflecting the love of God. Marriage is a Christian institution.

And the idea that marriage is meant to display the Glory of God shouldn't be that foreign to us. I think we would all agree that mankind was created to glorify God. **Isaiah 43:6-7** states that everyone who has been created by God was done so for his glory. So it makes sense that if God created mankind for his glory then the institution of marriage which instantly followed the creation of mankind would also be to glorify God. **Matt 19:4-6** tells us that God created mankind male and female and that they should become one flesh. If individual men and women exist to bring their creator glory then combined into one flesh they exist for the same purpose. And as if that were not enough to convince you that marriage exists for God's glory, **1 Cor 10:31** tells us that everything we do we are to do it for the glory of God. And even more so... and as we will see in greater length later, **Ephesians 5:2** makes it clear that a husband is to love his wife in such a way that it mimics the love Christ has for the church.

So, if marriage is a Christian institution for the primary purpose of bringing God glory then it would stand to reason that a Christian should not marry a non-believer. This could not be made more clear than in **2 Corinthians 6:14** where the Bible explicitly warns us to not be unequally yoked with non-believers. This verse tells us that you cannot have a partnership with someone who is in darkness when you are in light; with someone who is lawless when you are righteous. Meaning those who are in

Christ are so far removed from those who are not that there is no way a partnership can work between the two... and there is no greater partnership than marriage. There is no way that someone who is enthralled with the Glory of God can relate to someone who is indifferent to Christ at best and at worst opposed to Christ. So why shouldn't a believer marry a non-believer? Because it messes up God's plan for marriage to glorify God. And that's why every husband should marry a sister in Christ.

This is exactly how the Song of Solomon describes the marriage relationship. Look with me in **verses 4:9-10** where the husband of Song of Solomon refers to his wife as his sister. Again you see this in **verse 12 & 5:1**. The indication of which is that they are both equally yoked and the implication of this is in direct correlation with the Christian understanding of a sister in Christ or a sister in the family of God. We know that this woman, unlike Solomon's other wives, is not a foreigner or pagan but a Jew who worships the same God as Solomon. Shulamite means woman of Jerusalem.

So the point here is simple. In order to bring the most Glory to God through your marriage and to point others towards Christ through your marriage, you must marry a believer. Begin your marriage in Christ.

I want you to see what **John Pipers** says about marriage as a means to glorify God; **We need to let this sink in. Once there was God, and only God. The universe is his creation. It is not coeternal with God. It is not God. All things. All that is not God was made by God. So once there was only God. Therefore God is absolute Reality. We are not. The universe is not. Marriage is not. We are derivative... God is the one ultimate absolute in existence. Everything else is from him and through him and for him. That is the starting place for understanding marriage. If we get this wrong, everything goes wrong. And if we get it right — really right, in our heads and in our hearts — then marriage will be transformed by it. Marriage will become what it was created by God to be — a display of the truth and worth and beauty and greatness of God.** It sounds like a marriage that begins in Christ puts Christ front and center.

So you should know that your spouse is a believer before you marry them. Not that they claim to be, many people claim to be but are far from God. No, you need to know that they are fully dedicated to Christ in their worship, actions, and lifestyle and if they are not then they are not equally yoked and a marriage with them will not be glorifying to God.

Secondly, you should disciple your spouse during courtship. The courtship and engagement period should be used to sharpen one another in your walk with Christ. Song of Solomon chapters 1-3 are all about courtship and how the two long to be together. They find each other attractive, they admire the person that they are, and look at this; they

spend time together preparing for marriage by disciplining one another. Look at **2:15** – catch the foxes that spoil the vineyard. Many theologians believe that this a poetic way of saying that they are clearing out anything that would hinder their marriage from succeeding. They are removing sin, and obstacles from their marriage that may hinder their marriage from being God glorifying. So begin your marriage in discipleship. Start your marriage with God at the Center. Because **a marriage that starts with Christ stays with Christ**.

Okay, that's great for people who are looking to get married, but what about those of us who are already married... and maybe our marriages weren't built on the foundation of Christ, and maybe our marriages don't necessarily glorify Christ. Well then I would suggest this, rather than beginning your marriage in Christ I would seek to reignite your marriage in Christ. Perhaps you are an un-believer. Then today is the day of salvation. It is never too late to being a relationship with Christ and seek to be a godly spouse. Perhaps your spouse is an un-believer. Then be a witness to your spouse and draw them to Christ by showing them the love of Christ. I think too many people give up on their spouses too easily, but here's what I know. God desires your marriage to glorify him and he desires that your spouse would be saved. So don't give up... keep loving, and disciplining and trusting in the saving power of Christ.

Okay, but what about those of us who love Jesus and have been married for 50 years like Al and Becky. How does this apply to us? Well, my suggestion would be this... instead of beginning your marriage in Christ or reigniting your marriage in Christ; how about you seek to maintain your marriage in Christ. You do this in two ways. First, individually you keep your eyes on the glory of Christ. The greater you worship God individually the greater your marriage will glorify God. And second, you keep disciplining one another. **Mark Dever gives this wisdom; "The greatest way God speaks to you is the Bible. The second is through your spouse"** It's so true. So you seek to grow in Christ as an individual and you seek to grow in Christ as a couple. The greater you worship God as a couple the greater your marriage will glorify God. The bottom line is this... **When Christ is the most important thing to you and your spouse then the Glory of Christ will be evident in your marriage. A Marriage Is Successful When The Love of a Husband and a Wife Points Others to the Love of Christ**.

The second thing I want you to know is that... **To Build A Marriage For Christ You Should Celebrate Sex God's Way**. Let's face it... Song of Solomon is all about Sex; how we long for sex before marriage, how we celebrate sex at the beginning of marriage, and how sex is pivotal for maintaining a good marriage. And here's what I want to make clear from the start... Sex is not a bad thing. Sex is not a bad word. In fact, sex was created by God to glorify God. Think about it. Whatever we enjoy we thank

the one who gave it to us because they have given us a good gift. Well I've heard that some people enjoy sex. And, when we enjoy sex we thank the one who created sex. Yes, sex is enjoyable, it's fun, and it's not just about procreation. I know that there are some who teach that sex is merely for procreation and that you shouldn't enjoy it. Well, I'm here to let you know that kids aren't mentioned in Song of Solomon. What we get instead is a clear picture of the pleasure of sex within the confines of marriage. So, yes, sex within marriage is a form of worship; as we celebrate sex we celebrate God. And so sex isn't bad. Sex is good. Sex is very good.

And sex is a wonderful tool to show our love for Christ. You see... **Sexual discipline shows spiritual devotion**. There is a limitation put upon sex which shows our obedience and faithfulness to God. We are to only have sex within the confines of marriage. Yes, God says we must wait for marriage. And this is a major theme of Song of Solomon. In verses **2:7, 3:5, & 8:4** – we see the phrase; **“do not stir up or awaken love until it pleases”**. And what this simply means is that there is a time for love to please – marriage.... so don't start going desiring your spouse until you know you are going to be married soon. This is echoed again in the New Testament in **1 Corinthians 7:9** where Paul says it is better to marry than burn with passion. The idea being that humans lust for sex and the only proper way to quench that lust is marriage. And... if you wait too long to quench it in marriage sinful sexual conduct will ensue.

This is a clear teaching on how we should abstain from sexual pleasure until marriage. And why does the Bible give us this stipulation. **Abstinence before marriages shows that we are willing to deny our bodies their natural desires for the sake of obeying God's desires!** Did you get that? When we abstain from sex until marriage we worship God by obeying him more than sex. And then God rewards us with sex within marriage. And in a world that pretty much revolves around sex... abstinence stands out. Waiting for marriage glorifies God because it shows the world that there is something more valuable than sex; namely Jesus Christ.

But we aren't just to have sexual self-control before marriage. We are to be faithful to our spouses within marriage. You see... we are faithful to our spouses not only because we love them, but because we love God and desire to bring him glory rather than defaming him through sinful adultery. God's glory. This is why we don't sleep around. God has given us the privilege of sex to one person; our spouse and our testimony of sexual self-control shows the world that we have a higher authority. **A Marriage Is Successful When The Love of a Husband and a Wife Points Others to the Love of Christ**

And thirdly, the Song of Solomon shows us that ... **To Build A**

Marriage For Christ You Should Demonstrate The Eternality of Love.

This is a big one. Nothing can separate us from Christ's love. Look at **Ro 8:38-39**. You see... Christ's love for the Church is the ultimate love and this love should be displayed through marriage. In fact, this is the primary purpose of marriage. Look with me at **Ephesians 5:22-32**. The love of a husband and a wife is a direct symbol of the love Christ has for his church. Husbands, if you don't love your spouse it shows the world that you a) don't love Christ and to a lesser extent b) that Christ doesn't love the church. This is not good or God glorifying.

And we see this exact principle in **Song of Solomon 8:6**... which states; “set me as a seal upon your heart.” A seal in those days was something that was seen as unbreakable. Here that unbreakable seal is the love of these two in marriage. But it goes even further; it was on their heart and arm. It was an unbreakable seal that shows ownership inside and outside. The love is unmistakable to the spouse and unmistakable to those who saw them.

The next thing we see is that it is a “love as strong as death, jealousy as strong as the grave”. This love is only broken by death. It is reminiscent of “til death do us part.” This means that a love from a husband and a wife must be enduring. Why? Because Christ's love lasts forever... and marriage reflects the love of Christ. Enduring and everlasting to display the everlasting love of Christ.

And then we see that “It's flames are like the flame of the Lord.” And this shows us that the way your love endures for your spouse is a representation of the flame of Christ's love that burns for you. Our flames of love should burn like the flame of the Lord's love. So, we can't miss this point – **the Bible specifically uses marriage as the primary metaphor for the love of Christ**. And.. this is why we dislike divorce. Because divorce shows that our love is not enduring and metaphorically symbolizes that the love of Christ is not enduring. And... this is why we fight for our marriages. Because to fight for love everlasting is to display the everlasting love of Christ for us.

Application (Resolution, You)

So what does the Song of Solomon teach us about having a marriage that is built around the mission of bringing God Glory? **First, Start Your Marriage With Christ at the Center. Second, Save Yourself for Marriage With Christ as Your Constraint. Third, Celebrate Sex Within Marriage With Christ as Your Creator. And Fourth, Stay Faithful To Your Marriage With Christ as Your Conviction.**

If you can do these you will have a marriage that displays the Glory of God and draws others to Christ through your testimony.

Conclusion

The love we have for one another in our marriages is very important. Look at our memory verse; the key verse for this book; **Song of Solomon 8:7**. This is real love. This is a love that reflects the truth that God is love and that the greatest love ever shown was Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. Marriage reflects this love and brings Glory to Christ.

I want you to hear the rest of what John Piper says about a marriage that glorifies Christ. He says; **There are two levels at which the glory of God may shine forth from a Christian marriage: One is at the structural level when both spouses fulfill the roles God intended for them — the man as leader like Christ, the wife as advocate and follower of that leadership. When those roles are lived out, the glory of God's love and wisdom in Christ is displayed to the world. But there is another deeper, more foundational level where the glory of God must shine if these roles are to be sustained as God designed. The power and impulse to carry through the self-denial and daily, monthly, yearly dying that will be required in loving an imperfect wife and loving an imperfect husband must come from a hope-giving, soul-sustaining, superior satisfaction in God. I don't think that our love for our wives or theirs for us will glorify God until it flows from a heart that delights in God more than marriage. Marriage will be preserved for the glory of God and shaped for the glory of God when the glory of God is more precious to us than marriage. When we can say with the apostle Paul (in Philippians 3:8), "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (NASB) — when we can say that about marriage — about our husband or wife — then that marriage will be lived to the glory of God.**