

Matthew 5:27-37

Strengthen Your Marriage

Today we get to look at this important truth: You were made for an eternal relationship with Jesus Christ. You were made for a forever with God! Is there anything better than that? That forever has come under attack by our own doing as we choose to walk away from the God who came walking with us.

We were made for fellowship with God and so God has put within us a longing for relationship. Everyone has a desire for relationships, and these bonds that we form that show the fellowship that we were intended to have with God. The most intimate of human relationships that pictures the forever that we will one day have with God is Holy Matrimony - when a man and woman become one flesh. Because it is the best picture we have of the forever that we will have with God, it is the most attacked and must be vehemently defended. But we aren't just talking about upholding the institution of marriage, that is well and good, we are talking about upholding your own marriage as what it is intended to be - a picture, however fleeting, of the forever that we will spend with God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We have been looking at the Sermon on the Mount rather closely at Oxford over these past few months, and today I want to ensure that we are not losing the force of what Jesus is saying by missing the context. So lets read the text and see what Jesus is saying and the implications we can draw about Marriage.

READ TEXT

Why does divorce get only 2 verses? I believe that Jesus' short sayings on divorce are a part of a larger unit. Directly surrounding this unit are two words: Lust and Lies. Do lust and lies have anything to do with divorce? Of course. But that is not taking what Jesus is saying far enough. Even marriage is a part of a much larger truth Jesus is after. We find what Jesus is after as we look at the whole Sermon.

Don't forget the purpose of the sermon., The sermon is an exposition of the life that Jesus has come to bring. Jesus has come into a shattered relationship - between us and God - to put us back together again. He has come into the midst of unfaithfulness to restore faithfulness. To do this, Jesus highlights the most intimate of human

relationships, the most vulnerable of human relationships - marriage, and seeks to shore up what has been drifting in a sea of lostness.

Why is marriage important? Listen to what arguable one of the most influential presidents of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, said about marriage. Speaking in the early part of the 20th Century, Roosevelt said, "The transformation of the family is one of the greatest sociological phenomenons of our times. It is a social question of the first importance of far greater importance than any political or economic question can be." That took guts for a politician to say. Far from capitulating to the spirit of the age and simply going with the flow, Roosevelt saw it his duty as a man of influence to speak truth into society.

Roosevelt was representing the biblical principle of subsidiarity - the smallest unit has to take the greatest responsibility. Al Mohler helps us understand this principle: "Marriage and family bears the greatest responsibility for the entire holding together of civilization. There are responsibilities that pertain after that to community and neighborhood and government but they can never replace, if broken what is lost in marriage and family.": (*Veritas*, Issue 4, 22)

This is why Jesus has come to speak a word to us about Marriage. Marriage is the bedrock of society. Society rises and falls with the family. So, today I want to give you three truths to strengthen your marriage. Each one of these truths will rise from these three sayings of Jesus.

1. Find Satisfaction in Christ (27-30)

Jesus says don't look with lust. Why? Because we are prone to wander, and have wandered far from seeing beauty. We have never known what it was like to see anything like as it was meant to be seen. I am not talking about with just our eyes, I am referring to seeing not just looking. Remember the Garden of Eden? Adam and Eve were seeing things one way one day and another thing the next day. They were unclothed, ate of the forbidden fruit, and then desired to clothe themselves because they saw their nakedness. They were without clothes before and there was no bother, what was the difference? The difference was their sight. Once Adam and Eve saw that the fruit was desirable to make one wise, their vision changed. They went from seeing to having their eyes opened to see a new reality that now existed - they were naked and ashamed. They became blind to beauty.

They were seeing before they decided to disobey God, but once they disobeyed God a new reality existed for them to see, to desire. What looked like beauty ended up being the most heinous and hideous of human affections - turning from God. As a result we who were made to know beauty, made to enjoy beauty, desire things that are not beautiful. The shame, because we have lost our sight, is that things that are ugly we now see as beautiful, and things that are beautiful are beyond our sight. Until Jesus comes and shows us true beauty. And now that he has come we can sing songs like this:

It is a thing most wonderful,
almost too wonderful to be,
that God's own Son should come from heaven,
and die to save a child like me.

And yet I know that it is true:
he chose a poor and humble lot,
and wept and toiled and mourned and died
for love of those who loved him not.

I cannot tell how he could love
a child so weak and full of sin;
his love must be most wonderful,
if he could die my love to win.

I sometimes think about the cross,
and shut my eyes, and try to see
the cruel nails and crown of thorns,
and Jesus crucified for me.

But even could I see him die,
I could but see a little part
of that great love which, like a fire,
is always burning in his heart.

It is most wonderful to know
his love for me so free and sure;
but 'tis more wonderful to see

my love for him so faint and poor.

And yet I want to love thee, Lord;
O light the flame within my heart,
and I will love thee more and more,
until I see thee as thou art.

(It Is A Thing Most Wonderful, William How)

If a married couple is satisfied in Christ, they will be secure with one another. If a married couple has found satisfaction in Christ, they will enjoy one another and not be in search for satisfaction in another place. They have found the satisfaction for their souls, and their soul mate is the icing on the cake, the extra pour that makes the whole cup run over with satisfaction.

When satisfaction starts to drift, it will always begin to drift from satisfaction in Christ. When satisfaction starts to drift, you must find what it is that is competing for your satisfaction and cut it off - take drastic measures to not lose your soul through desiring thing that will never bring you satisfaction. By the way, if marriage is a picture of forever, then the first thing to suffer from misplaced satisfaction is your closest of relationships, in this case your marriage.

We could stop there, but our Lord desires to give us more support from the bartering waves that assail against our marriage. Look at what the Lord says next. He deals with the danger that even the best of marriages faces - divorce

2. Commit Your Marriage to Eternity (31-32)

So many people concern themselves with divorce before they ask what is marriage for. I want us to look at a passage of Scripture that shows us the intention that God has for marriage in light of Christ. Listen to Ephesians 5:31-33: "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" *This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.*

A married couple who has found their satisfaction in Christ, who understands that their marriage is a picture of the forever that we will have with God, a picture of grace and redemption, will be a couple whose love will last forever. Don't you want your love to last forever? No one ever comes to the marriage altar with divorce papers in hand (we will save comments on pre-nuptial agreements for another day).

Marriage is a picture of the forever that we will have with God. Think about that for just a moment. How does God give us a forever with himself? Through grace, through reconciliation, through forgiveness. He gives us forever by sacrifice, the sacrifice of the Eternal Son for sinners, for adulterers, like me and you. We had left our first love, had fallen from grace, had sought satisfaction elsewhere, but just as God came walking in the cool of the day to go after Adam and Eve, so he came seeking and saving us through the Son who took on flesh so that he could bring us into fellowship with himself.

A church that I was very close to was riveted with some news that the former associate pastor had been having an adulterous affair with a woman in the church. This man was a picture of the grace of God, saved radically, called graciously to pastor, and given the gift of a beautiful wife and three beautiful children. Twenty years of marriage, twenty years of togetherness, jeopardized in a series of instances as the decision was made to have an affair. I watched this man come with his wife and family before the church and admit through tears his moral failure, and the most amazing picture of grace was the wife of this man holding his hand standing beside him. We all wondered what would happen to them, Would she divorce him? Surely she had legal grounds.

I ran into them the other day. The scars are still there but healing is occurring in their marriage. They are staying together. Why? They understand and have made it a point for their family, for everyone that knows them to declare that our marriages this side of heaven are pictures of the forever that we will have with God, A forever that he has secured for us through the self giving of himself no mater what. Marriages that understand this are not living on the exception clause, they are living by saying, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Galatians 2:20)

Some may say, that sound like a bunch of hard work. Sure it does! The most valuable things usually do take the hardest work. I cannot think of anything better than working at

getting my marriage to picture the forever that we will have with God. You have to start somewhere.

When you get married, you start with words. Words are important because nothing reveals your heart like what you say. Two people standing before the church in the presence of God desiring to be wed do so with words. Perhaps you had some words like this read at your wedding. "For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death alone shall part you."

Number three this AM. To strengthen your marriage:

3. Mean What You Say and Say What You Mean (33-37)

Words are important because words reveal your heart. Jesus said, *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks* (Matthew 12:34). It is a sad thing to watch, let alone the kids to watch, a couple who said the sweet vows of "I do" turn their frustration towards one another with what they say to each other as they lash out with their tongue. I have seen some couples that talk nasty to one another and then they someone assures the onlookers by saying, that is just the way that they are and it works for them. I heard a story of a very well known preacher who had a nasty relationship with his wife. There was a student that went to pick him up to take him to the airport who arrived to the preacher and his wife fussing. The student didn't say a word but picked up the bags and loaded them to the car. The preacher came out, said hello to the student with a smile, got into the car and before he closed the door, he said, "I'll be right back." He went back to the house, hollered something inside, slammed the screen door, came back to the car, and said to the student with a smile, "Now we can go."

Some have come so accustomed to the way that things are that they get into some rut that prevents them from seeing what life is meant to be. Jesus has come to show us. He has come saying, you have heard that it was said, but I say to you. What is he saying? He is saying, the way you currently understand things is not the way that things are intended to be. And so he comes to not just show us the way, but himself to be the way! What a glorious way! God coming to his creation being made like us in every way except sin, and then taking all that separated us from him upon himself and carrying it away by dying on a Cross and then coming back to life to give us his life!

There are so many implications of this new life. The life that Jesus doesn't just touch every area of your life, it reforms your life and gives you new life. For example, listen to how James, the brother of Jesus, applies these truths after Jesus coming. He specifically mentions the way we speak:

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water. (James 3:6-12)

We can't talk to one another in just any way, we have to talk to one another and with one another as those who have been formed, fashioned, as those who are being formed and fashioned, into the forever likeness of Christ. We speak beautifully to one another because Christ is beautiful and he has made us his very own. What does this mean? It means that we will work real hard to say what we mean and mean what we say. We will do our best not to lash out. We will not say things in the heat of the moment but will take a moment and remember Christ. It means that we will be honest with one another, not hide those purchases from your husband or wife. It means that we will speak words that edify and build up.

If we are going to strengthen our marriages, if our marriages are going to be the best picture of the world that is coming, of the forever that we will have with God, we will find our satisfaction in Christ, commit our marriages to eternity, and in our every day dealings with one another we will live a life of integrity that say what we mean and mean what we say. To strengthen our marriages we will pray along with Bernard of Clairvaux:

**O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.**

Can you pray that prayer? Will you pray that for your husband, will you pray it for your wife, will you pray it with one another?

If you do not know Jesus Christ, you do not know love. But love has come to find you. Today, whoever you are, wherever you are, no matter how far you have been, love is here. You can know Jesus today, call upon him!