

Reflections on the message by Mike and Marion Kerry, 7th February 2010

“A Divine Paradigm” Ephesians 5: 21-33

Mike

We have a statement of faith which says that Jesus is coming back.

This message is about marriage within the Christian Church. It is a message for everyone. Marriage and family are the bedrock of society. Couples living together outside of a covenant marriage is unsatisfactory and is not the model of the Bible. Despite everything that is said, marriage remains popular. According to one survey, 90% of young people want to be married at some point. 87% of young people believe the Bible has something to teach about sex and relationships. If a couple love one another and want to live together in a relationship then it should be within the bounds of marriage.

Marriages can go through difficult times. Parenting can leave little time for relationships. Money worries and troubles with the in-laws of the top two problems. Others are redundancy, a lack of intimacy, caring for elderly relatives, the pressure of bringing up children and the allure of the affair. These can all put pressure on the marriage.

We have a five-week marriage preparation course for couples who want to get married. We can put courses on marriage on, but while some embrace the teaching others, don't put it into practice. Difficulties are not addressed and their marriages do not improve. Many say that it is 'old hat' and will do what they want. It is like those at the time of the Old Testament judges when everyone "did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25). It is time to say that it is wrong. We have a holy God who demands holy living. At BFC we will support and promote marriage as a basis for our society.

Genesis 2:22-25 speaks of "leaving and cleaving" (in the Authorised Version) to describe marriage. It is the Bible model for life. It is a vital part of God's plan. It is a solemn promise or covenant made before God.

The Bible respects people more than political correctness does, so read this section carefully. As a church submits to Christ so should the wife submit to her husband. The covenant of marriage is bound not by a set of rules but by love. The husband has to exercise loving leadership, not despotism. The husband is given more responsibilities than the wife in this passage. John Stott said, "Christianity is not a credible concept if love is not displayed in the home". Holiness is not for display on Sundays, but is a way of life. Submission does not mean subservience. We are encouraged to be filled with the Holy Spirit and out of that overflow of the Spirit we are able to conduct Spirit led relationships and of course this applies to marriage.

Submission is voluntarily placing oneself under another. We should all submit to Jesus. When the marriage is working properly there should be no problem submitting to the husband, if he is submitted to Jesus Christ. This is love: the husband shall be totally committed to the spiritual welfare of his wife.

Marion

God has chosen to use marriage to mirror the relationship between Christ and the church. No other relationship so represents God's purposes. It's a paradigm. Christ and the church is a model, or pattern, for our relationships; especially for marriage, but also for other relationships. Those who have had no example have this model to follow.

Not everyone is happily married. God can repair things but the key is submission. We have to submit to God's loving leadership.

Jeremiah 29:11. At this time Judah must have thought that God had deserted them and thought that God not love them anymore. Yet Jeremiah says that God has plans for them. The word 'good' or 'welfare' is a translation of the Hebrew word 'shalom'. This is a rich word with many meanings. If you feel broken and damaged God has plans for your peace, soundness, prosperity, health, and so on.

Loved and chosen! Marriage is about love and not slushy romance. It is saying, I will love you no matter what happens. God loved and chose us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). In Jewish custom, the bride was chosen by the groom's father. He will agree the purchase price with the bride's father. Have we not been loved and chosen by God? The purchase price for us was the precious blood of Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39).

The marriage covenant is a covenant agreement; not just a legal document, but solemn and binding vows. The Jewish bridegroom would draw up a covenant between himself and the bride, which the bride accepted by drinking a cup of wine. This is like a cup of wine of the Last Supper that Jesus had with His disciples. We see the covenant agreement that Jesus made. No one has paid a higher price for a bride. Have you accepted his covenant?

When proposal of marriage is accepted the plans start being made. There's lots to do in our culture. The length of engagement will vary. A Mexican couple were engaged at 15 years old and not married until they were 82.! Some weddings are casual, some like a military operation. But they don't just happen. Jesus is making plans for an unending marriage with great precision. When a near-eastern bride is betrothed she is said to be set apart for her groom. She has a total immersion then to be made wholly clean, free of spot or wrinkle (Ephesians 5: 26-27). This washing is not baptism, it is a different word. Paul uses this image from the marriage customs.

The groom would make a speech saying that he was going to go away to make everything ready for the marriage. He would then return at a time known only to his father. When the father was satisfied that all the preparations were complete, then he would say, now is the time, and the groom would return for his bride. The bride did not know when this would be so slept with her trousseau by her bed. The bridesmaids also had to be ready for this unknown time. Are you ready to for the return of the heavenly bridegroom? Do you know that He is coming again? (Matthew 25:1-13). Then we will drink wine new with Jesus Christ (Matthew 26:29). What a love story! An unending, indescribable, undeserved love. What a model we have for our relationships!