

### Part 3: Where Love Leads

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"Joey and Susie sitting in a tree, k-i-s-s-i-n-g. First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes a baby in a baby carriage."

That was the sickest of all burns one could experience on a playground when I was growing up. But I wonder how effective it is today given the current state of marriage in our country. The population of the United States has nearly doubled since 1960, and yet there are less married people in America today than there have been in the last 50 years.

Why is that? I saw a popular social media account ask children of the 90s why they aren't married yet and the summary of the top comments were: "I've never loved someone so much that I turned to them and said, 'Let's get the government involved in this.'"

Is marriage just a legal idea that sucks the love out of people? Another author appealed to watching her parent's marriage fall apart and decide that marriage did more harm than good. She concluded saying, "considering everything we've seen, bearing the weight of our own relationships seems a lot wiser." Is she right? Is marriage the problem? Are you better off relying on your own ability than this stodgy old institution?

We seem to be a world away from the old song, "Love and marriage, love and marriage, they go together like a horse and carriage." But, what exactly is the relationship between love and marriage?

These are the exact themes that our passage in the Song of Songs picks up this morning. You might find it interesting our passage today includes the only use of the word "wedding" in the whole Old Testament. That's what this song is about, it is about love that leads to a wedding and why that is the most wonderful and safest hope we can have for human love. But when we read this book in light of the whole story of scripture, the story of marriage is not just a story of human love but also the story of divine love. The Bible begins with a marriage, and ends with a marriage. It's a story for all of us.

Now it's true that our marriages are often broken and difficult places. It's also true that our hope is not in our human marriage, but that wonderful marriage between Jesus and the church. But, if we want to better approach Jesus and our own lovers—it's best to have a proper view of marriage and that is what we will endeavor to do today. Our main point is: **Love calls some to marriage, but all to Christ.**

I know that there are a myriad of experiences in this room, some good, some painful, some neutral. But this text presents marriage in three perspectives that I promise you, will speak to each of us. Those perspectives are **Marriage for Lovers, Marriage for Others, and Marriage Forever.**

Nearly 30 Million people in the United States woke up at 5:00am to watch the "Royal Wedding" of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Despite our declining practice of marriage, there is still something idyllic and story book like about this. And while the world can't explain the intersection of apathy and attraction—the Bible gives us a compelling reason as to why and what makes marriage so special. This is our first point this morning: **Marriage for Lovers.**

Our passage today is the lead up to the vows at the altar between our lady lover and her shepherd studmuffin. It's split largely into two parts, the first poem (vs. 3-5) describes her inner pursuit of her man which leads to the public pursuit of marriage in the second poem (vs. 6-11).

This inner pursuit is in the form of a dream. Before a presentation, or job application, I'm sure you've had some terrifying dreams which intermix your anxious hope and also your deep fears. But our passage today opens with our lady having such a dream and her fear is that she won't be able to find her lover: **Song 3:1**, "On my bed by night, I sought him who my soul loves; I sought him and found him not."

She looks in her bed, but he's not there. Then in verse two she goes out into the city at night, a risky thing for a woman today and back then. She can't find him there in the streets or in the squares, but she keeps looking. She was found by the watchmen who patrolled the city and asks them if they have seen him, and they don't answer.

But just as she fears all hope is lost--she found him. And she embraces him and won't let him go.

At my house you'll find dozens of ball pumps. It's very common that we will go to play sports, find a ball that needs some air, look for a pump, not find it, give up and then run to Scheels for a replacement. Our world often treats relationships in the same way. When there's a bit of inconvenience, you move on. But here is a picture of a love that embraces the effort. For her, it's worth the risk.

When Sarah and I were dating, there was a moment where it seemed it was going to fall apart. I was scared of rejection, and she felt rejected by me. I knew that to pursue her in light of my offense meant the risk of her rejecting me. It would have been easier to let it die and to see if there was another option which was safer for me to pursue. But I took a leap, and I went for it.

Why? Because in that moment I didn't want another option no matter how easy it was. I had found the one my soul loved. Up until this point the lady had spoken of her man most commonly as, "her beloved," but the phrase, "one my soul loves" is used five times in this book, and four of those times are here in this text.

Her love isn't based on chance, but choice. I'm sure some of you sit under the pressure of finding, "the one." But Biblical love is choosing love—and we see the costly pursuit of that choice. Because there are few things more vulnerable than choosing to love someone romantically—God has designed romantic love to find a safe and durable resting point.

A place where, as we read, "she will never let him go." What follows might seem odd initially but it plays an important role in our understanding of her desires: **Song 3:4b-5**, "I held him, and would not let him go until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her who conceived me. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles or the does of the field, that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

She pursued him as her person, and she pursued the lineage of the marriage bed as the place in which they would enjoy their love. Just as she was brought into a family by marriage, their love would create a new family—just as the Lord designed it.

That's why she cautions us to not stir up or awaken love until it pleases. Biblical love leads to a new life together with someone else. I open up the weddings I officiate with these words: "We are gathered together to join this man and this woman in marriage which is instituted by God, regulated by his commandment, and held in honor among all men. It is therefore to be entered into thoughtfully, reverently, joyfully, and in the fear of God."

I then ask the bride and groom to respond to this statement: "Understanding that God has created, ordered and blessed the covenant of marriage, do you affirm your desire and intention to enter this covenant?" Marriage is a weighty reality—therefore we should not be quick to even begin the dating process if we don't think we are ready for that reality of marriage.

The warning I give at weddings, the warning we should give those wanting to date in our church today, is an echo of this caution in the book. And it's only when the seriousness is understood that the ceremony begins: **Song of Songs 3:6-10**, "What is that coming up from the wilderness like columns of smoke perfumed with myrrh and frankincense with all the fragrant powders of a merchant? Behold, it is the litter of Solomon! Around it are sixty mighty men, some of the mighty men of Israel all of them wearing swords and expert in war, each with his sword at his thigh, against terror by night. King Solomon made himself a carriage from the wood of Lebanon. He made its posts of silver, its back of gold its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love by the daughters of Jerusalem. Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart."

The name of Solomon only shows up a couple of places in this book and for important reasons. Remember, this book is not a literal biography of Solomon's love life and that's important here because Solomon had some 700 wives!

But that's why his mention here is so powerful. Because even though this is just a wedding between a vineyard keeper and a shepherd—it's as if it is between a King and his Queen. Solomon had many weddings, but none as glorious as marriage the way God designed it. The simple love of one man and one woman pursuing marriage as God would have them is a royal wedding beyond comparison. It's the wedding Solomon should have had—but it's the wedding that any of us have when we approach marriage with biblical ideals.

There are lots of hours and dollars spent to make a wedding ceremony beautiful, but if you really want it to be royal—than make the wedding beautiful in God's eyes. Care less about how your guests view your wedding, and more about how you view the marriage.

She directs us to consider marriage in three ways through her song.

**First, marriage is effusive.** We can smell what we read here: myrrh, frankincense, fragrant powders. And it doesn't just smell sweet to the bride and groom—but to the community!

While not everyone enjoys marriage at the same moment in the same way—marriages here are meant to be of benefit to the community. Husbands and wives, in a world of marriages that stink, how does your marriage smell like grace? How is your marriage experienced by your fellow church members?

Biblical marriages won't be perfect. But as you practice displaying even your repentance and restoration in marriage—it becomes a show and smell of grace to the whole church.

**Second, marriage is safe.** In contrast to her risky and individual pursuit at night, here her bridal procession is carried by sixty mighty men, all with swords, all trained in war, all standing guard against terror by night.

Abuse is a grievous evil and the church should be quick to reject it, careful to recognize it, and diligent to call people to repent of it. Abuse is a misuse—and we shouldn't forget that. Abuse doesn't mean something is useless—it assumes that it is being *misused*. Marriage is built for safety, but can sinfully be abused by sinful people.

Because abuse does happen inside of marriages, our world often thinks marriages are the problem. But statistics show that women who cohabit are twice as likely to suffer domestic violence than those in married relationships. And while the unfortunate reality is that abuse does happen inside of marriages, even Christian marriages, it is exactly a Christian view of marriage that should wage war against abuse.

If you are in a marriage in which you do not feel safe, please come talk to me or one of the other elders. Men, are you safe? When she pursues you, when she opens up emotionally to you, when she opens up physically to you, are you responsible, respectful and self-sacrificial? Do you cultivate her intimacy, or use it for your own benefit?

I want to talk to the brothers who are in this room. I'm a brother of a sister. And I know what it's like to be annoyed. But the way you treat your sisters frames the way she expects men to treat her. If you are constantly name calling, irritating, and fighting with her—she might meet a man someday who does those things but unlike you—does not love her. And she won't be able to properly tell the difference.

Dads, brothers, male friends, when a girl meets an unsafe man we should be the litmus test. My daughters should be able to say: "My brother and my dad would never talk to me that way."

Ladies, be careful to consider men you are potentially interested in. How does he talk? How does he treat others? How does he treat his phone when he's upset? How does he yell at the TV when his team is losing?

Because love is vulnerable, marriage is meant to be safe. And with repentance and mercy, may it be true in our marriages as well.

**Third, marriage is costly.** Did you notice the crafted care and the valuable materials the husband put into the marriage (vs. 9-10). He didn't hoard his treasures for himself, he didn't ask his servants to build the relationship for him. He made it, he made its posts of silver, its back of gold and its seat of purple.

Pornography and dating apps where we can sort people by preference reinforce the false idea that love is cheap and easy. But love is costly, because anything of value is. Marriage will draw out of a husband and wife their most treasured and coveted resources of time, comfort, and privilege. And yet in a supernatural way, it will use it all for the joy of the other and in it, find their joy.

And this wedding day, is the day of his joy. The day of the gladness of his heart. And just how her mother showed the covenant and lineage of her commitment, so too his mother shows up to show the same from his end.

That's what a "wedding" is. A public ceremony celebrating and recognizing the creation of a new relationship and a new family. This is why she pursued him, this was the joy of saying, "till death do us part."

But behind the beauty of marriage is not the thing itself, but the gift giver. The mention of Solomon, the inclusion of Jerusalem and Zion are intentional because they are all signs and symbols of God's promise to redeem and restore his people. When we put our hope in marriage, we aren't actually trusting in marriage. We are trusting the God who stands behind it, the God who is for our joy in all things through Jesus.

And that's helpful because it holds out that whatever joy and hope marriage has, while being unique, it is not exclusive. Anyone can enjoy God, married or not. He is the end of our joy.

This is our second perspective: **Marriage for Others.**

While Solomon was said to do most of the work in the crafting of the wedding carriage, did you see how the women helped him. In verse 10 they assisted his work to inlay the interior with love.

This is significant because remember that the book opens with all the single ladies professing their love for this man. But as they see what God is doing in the lives of this one woman and this one man, their desire for romantic love was swallowed up with the self-less love of friendship.

They actually came to the young, dumb bachelor and helped him bless her. As Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13, "love is not arrogant or rude; it is not irritable or resentful."

Whether you are married or not in the church, you are called to help beautify the marriages that exist, to support the marriages that are about to exist, and to actually help those who are looking for a spouse not to look alone. All of this is costly, but that's the point. To prepare for marriage you don't need to play married with your girlfriend, or even have a girlfriend or boyfriend at all.

The way you care for others in the church in selfless and loving ways is the best way we both care for marriages and prepare for marriages. Remember, part of the role of the church is to carefully caution **Song of Songs 3:5**, "I adjure you...that you not stir up or awaken love until it pleases."

But sometimes the best cautions comes from not just saying "no," but teaching when to say, "maybe, yes!" How can we help one another know that now, now is the time that it might please love?

I'll give you three things to consider.

First, **Conversion**. Is the other person a believer? They might be the best partner on every level, but if they lack Jesus--they lack the one thing that matters. As Christians we know, a few key truths: **1 John 4:9-10**, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

If we haven't seen the love of God in Jesus Christ, then we have not truly seen love. That's not to say non-Christians don't love, or that they don't love well. But that is to say that they haven't seen love to

the fullest degree. They have seen the shadow, but never the sun of love. But if you want love to flourish, you've got to go to the source.

I know this might be the most unpopular and touchy subject in a church with a thriving college ministry—but we have members here who have or have had unbelieving spouses and while there is a real and genuine love between them—they would be the first to tell you that it's an incredibly difficult and painful reality

To spend the rest of your life with someone who can care for you physically is to spend your life with someone who only cares for half of you! Marriage is where a man and a woman care for one another most deeply by helping them follow Jesus—loving them like Jesus loves you.

This is the second fruit to consider, **Discipleship**. While husband and wives have differing responsibilities, the end goal is that we help one another follow Jesus. Eve as to serve as Adam's helper in the field, and Jesus as the ultimate husband is said to wash the church with the water of the word.

If you want to know if you're ready for marriage, consider how you're making other people ready to meet Jesus! There are some things which you can only learn inside of marriage, but discipleship shouldn't be one of them. If you don't know what discipleship looks like, ask someone for help! Come to Church Essentials, join a Bible Study, attend our classes later this fall.

The last fruit is, **Affirmation**. Have you submitted your intentions and the potential person of interest to the broader community? We are here to help one another have confidence in the vulnerability of marriage! Run, pursue this person! But because of marriage's vulnerability, we should be vulnerable ourselves to say to a friend, "Have you considered this about that person?"

These kind of moments might cause someone to feel like you're taking something away from them, but that's where we remind one another that singleness is not a curse and marriage is not a savior.

That's the wonderful tension this passage presents where in one breath she says, "Do not stir," but in another she says, "Come and see." **Song of Songs 3:11**, "Go out, O daughters of Zion, and look upon King Solomon, with the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart."

Here our eyes are redirected—look here. Look here at the beauty of marriage properly practiced! But from a redemptive level this is a call to gaze at the promise of a different kind of marriage. Solomon was God's king who served as a terrible example of marriage, but he's pointing to God's ultimate king who is the perfect example of marriage. A marriage not between one man and one woman, but between one savior and his church.

Let us not forget that it is Jesus himself who says in Luke 11:31, "something greater than Solomon is here."

This is our last point this morning: **Marriage Forever**.

The desire to be married is good, and I hope you have it in a proper way. And yet none of us will be married to our spouses forever. Jesus makes this clear in Luke 20. When Jesus comes back, our human marriages will dissolve, but our new marriage will begin forever.

While the images of this text are a show and smell for the wedding ceremony of this couple, it's also the show and tell illustration of that one great wedding.

It is God who called his people out of the wilderness, leading her with a pillar of cloud and fire. It was the very presence of God which came to dwell with is people, showing his union with them by descending on the tabernacle in a cloud. The images of union used here of a human marriage are images of union meant to point us to the one marriage we all need. The one marriage that is exclusive in its source but not its subjects.

All who come to Jesus, all who are brought up out of our sin by faith, all of us are promised and await the joy of *his heart*. If you want to be a blessing. If you want to know you are safe. If you want to know that your costly sacrifice will not be wasted, then come to Jesus.

He wraps us in his love, he destroys the penalty of our sin, and his sacrifice for us reminds us that we can lose everything and yet lose nothing.

That's why the return of Jesus is described this way in **Revelation 19:6-9a**, "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Marriage matters. But this one matters most. Love leads some to marriage, but it calls all of us to Jesus.

My hope is that my wife speaks of our wedding day like the Song does here: "It was sweet, it was beautiful. All our friends were there. Your dad was there, and I knew he loved me, and I loved him. And he promised to love me and to care for me till death, and I believed him. But that day is nothing compared to when Jesus comes back. As much as your dad loved me--Jesus loves me more. As much as your dad promised to give his life for me--your dad's life couldn't save me. But Jesus's life could and he died for me so that me, your dad, and any who believe in him might now the love of loves in the embrace of the king of kings."

May we rightly desire and defend marriage so that we might point to the surpassing beauty of that perfect marriage.