

Church & the Mystery of Marriage (2)

Have you ever had a moment in your life where you've been reflecting or doing something over a period of time, and you had sought to understand it better and you were in need of a next step? And then it comes to you, out of the blue. It can come to you early in the morning; it can come to you in a dream; it can come to you in reading God's word; it can come to you in so many different ways. But it comes to you like the next piece of the puzzle. And that's an AHA moment, isn't it? Depending on how much you needed that next piece of the puzzle, you might be jumping for joy, or just having a deep sense of gratefulness or thankfulness that this next step has come that you have needed has come that you have been waiting for. ***And when that AHA moment comes, it not only powerfully touches your life, but it can also powerfully effect the lives of other people around you in ways that you can't even begin to imagine.***

Let's Look at an AHA Moment in Scripture Today!

That's how important those moments are. And as we consider today again the church and the mystery of marriage, I want to reflect with you on what I believe what was an AHA moment for the Apostle Paul in a Scripture that I was reflecting with you actually on last week. A moment where he was under the divine anointing of the Holy Spirit writing God's words in Ephesians and I believe God's words spoke to him in a very powerful way and revealed to him a mystery as he was even writing.

This is a Profound Mystery! Ephesians 5: 31-32

So let me read this scripture again to you as that we focused in on last week, **Ephesians 5: 31-32**, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church." And so here Paul is under the anointing of the Spirit writing and reflecting on again as I share with you the Scripture from Genesis 2:24 about man and woman becoming one flesh under the design of the Creator. And then he goes onto say that this is a profound mystery. But I'm talking about Christ and the Church. And you know so often as I have read that text in Ephesians, and I am sure as you have too in Ephesians 5; what I thought was that Paul was reflecting on marriage and reflecting on that and then he draws this nice metaphor, this nice parallel about Christ and the Church to kind of put the cherry on top of the sundae if you will. But that is not what was going on at all. ***Paul says this is a profound mystery that we're profound in the Greek actually is rendered Great (Mega) which actually means grandeur or importance.*** Also he uses the word **Mystery**; something that was once hidden but is now divinely revealed. ***And the Expositor's Greek New Testament translates Paul's thought in Ephesian's 5:31-32 as follows: "The truth of which I have spoken the relation of husband and wife as one flesh is a revelation of profound importance."*** But let me explain that in speaking as I have done, my meaning is to direct your minds to the higher relation between Christ and the Church in its likeness to which lies its deepest significance. There is a lot in just those few sentences. There is a lot there. But this talks about Paul's AHA moment. What does it mean for you and me?

Are YOU Having an AHA Moment Right Now?

John Piper shares about this saying that marriage is a mystery that is more than meets the eyes. God didn't create the union of Christ and the Church after the pattern of human marriage, just the reverse. He created human marriage on the pattern of Christ's relationship with the Church. When God engaged to create man and woman and ordained the union of marriage (this is Genesis 2:24) He didn't roll the dice or flip a coin about how that was going to look. He patterned marriage very purposely after the relationship between His son and the Church, which He was planning from the begging of eternity.

My mind has been blown for the past few weeks. That may not seem like much to you but I just have to share to you as I have read that weeks ago and as I have been reflecting on meditating on it, it was a huge AHA moment for me. And for me, it has changed my perspective of marriage and for that matter; it has changed my perspective of every human relationship. One of the things for me that was a true AHA moment was that the Creator from the beginning of eternity had a plan. Now to me, I have always believed that. When I look for myself, a creation, I see a design at work, there are things to me that make sense, in terms of the creation, in how things are formed; male & female; seed and egg; the way the whole thing is laid out. It seems to me that it didn't just happen by accident but rather there was a designer involved; there was a creator. And what we are hearing today is that in terms of thought and intention in relationship the Creator had a plan as well. But that one of the most intimate relationships would ever be, the relationship between a man and woman in marriage, a celebration for their love for one another, was to be patterned first and foremost on the relationship of Christ with His Church. And that this was in the mind of God from the very beginning.

The Creator Had a Plan from the Beginning of Eternity

You and I wouldn't realize that, would we? I mean if we look at Genesis 2, our reflection would be, "Well this is what God had in mind. Man and woman getting together in marriage; and this is how it all starts.", and this is true in a sense. And this is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 5 as well, extrapolating and going more in depth about what this relationship looks like. But what we are hearing today is that ***God had something even far more profound in mind from the very beginning of time; and that was Christ and His relationship with the Church. And that it was that relationship that was to be the model; that was to be the ultimate example of relationship, of every other relationship including marriage up to the present day. Christ and his relationship with the Church are the pattern for marriage. Husbands and wives need to imitate the relationship God intended for Christ in His church in surrender in mutual love; there will be great joy; there will be great fulfillment; there will be great union; there will be great spiritual blessing; and anything out of that will be out of God's will.***

Christ's relationship with the Church; Savior; Redeemer; Lover; Servant; Leader; who gave His life on the cross out of love for the world, and in particular out of love for His bride; that His bride would be with Him one day. Husbands that is the model that is the heart that we are to imitate - Christ loving His Church. The Church; the bride of Christ; redeemed; loved; surrendering and submitting to the will of the Father and the Spirit that she might receive the fullness of blessings that God has for her. Union; completion; joy, and celebration; and you know so often as we read this scripture in Ephesians 5, the place where we stumble, a lot of times is, "What does a relationship with husband and wife really look like now in the 21st Century?" I mean, we could really dig the idea of husbands loving their wives but, wives, submit to your husbands? What are you talking about? We've been through the sixties! We've been through the feminist movement! That's done and gone! That stuff is dead! I'm not going back

there! And I don't want you to go back there. I'm taking you to a whole new place. Jesus is taking us to a whole new place! It's not about the sixties. It's not even about the 21st century. It's about the Creator's intention from the beginning of time.

In Surrender & Love, There Can Be Great Joy!

Christ and His relationship with the Church. Can you begin to surrender to that? Can you begin to be open to that? Can you begin to love that? Before this chapter in Ephesians 5, Paul is talking about the relationship of believers even within the Church. He's talking about our relationship with one another be it married; single; divorced; whatever your situation might be; he's talking about the relationship within the bride; within the beloved of God. And it's something very simple that he says there, a very simple sentence, something very simple that we have yet to work out. It's very simple, he says, "Submit to one another out of love. Count one another's needs more important than your own." We really haven't gone there yet. No, no, no, no, no....we have not gone there yet. Count somebody else's needs more important than my own? I don't think so. But you see that's one of the reasons why the Church in the west is so anemic. That's one of the reasons why the Church in the west is so spiritually dead compared to the Church in the Middle East and other places that really have to sacrifice for their faith and just rejoice that there is another brother or sister who has lived another day that they can talk to.

Submit to one another out of the love of Christ. So you see beloved this is the Creator's plan from the beginning of time. And this has been my AHA moment for the past weeks, and I hope for you it is an AHA moment as well, that at the center of our intellect will and emotions, that at the center of our being the way we begin to live out our life with one another from now on, should no longer be based and rooted in our culture; should no longer be determined by our own self will and determination; but rather should be rooted in the vision of the Creator from the beginning of time. For how things were always meant to work, and for how things were meant to work out for the best and that is Christ's loving relationship with His bride, Church, and one another.

And this is a clear choice that needs to be made and I would say to you very simply you have no further to look than the fruit of hatred that is being expressed right now between people groups in certain parts of the world right now; it is leveling cities and countries. Do you want that for your life? Do you want that for your family? Or do you want this kingdom of love, the King of Love My Shepherd Is! I love that opening hymn, how timely that would be this weekend. Do you want a kingdom of forgiveness? Do you want a kingdom of redemption? Do you want a kingdom where there is no longer Shia or Shiite? No longer Jew or Greek? Male or Female? But one new man and one new woman rooted in the person, the redeeming presence of the living Christ; who by His grace and by His love and by His sacrifice can make one of all humanity; but it will only be through Him. That's where I'm going because that is our hope. And you watch; you wait; you see; but more and more in our world today, the choice is going to be as clear as day. It'll be like darkness and light. It'll be a very clear choice. And we need to hear that today. And surrender to love and the presence of Jesus in this moment.

I've Seen Christ's love for His Bride Reflected in a Marriage... Unforgettable!

In closing, I remember a particular Holy Thursday here at St. John's during Holy Week. A variety of people were coming up to have their feet washed by myself and the Sr. Warden at that time. Or the other thing that you could do at that time, is that you could come up as a couple or maybe with a friend, whoever and wash one another's feet. Very beautiful evening, as usual there were not a lot of people there; people don't get excited about washing people's feet. But you know what; there were a few people here. Well, one couple that was there that night were the Kinneys, Bob & Jeanne. They were long time St. John's members and they came up to wash one another's feet. Thankfully, I wasn't washing anybody's feet at that time, and I was given the grace to watch them wash each other's feet.

Jeanne sat down first and Bob began to wash her feet. And then Jeanne got up and began to wash Bob's feet. And as they were washing one another's feet, they were both smiling at each other, and they were crying, and they were sobbing as well. It was one of the most tremendous and wonderful expressions of love between two human beings, and a husband and wife I have ever seen in my life. And the thing that made it even more powerful for me is that Jeanne had been having a running battle with cancer as many of you knew. And she would be dead within a year from that time; which made the moment even more special. That moment of their love for one another, they shared with all of us, is a moment that for me, will live forever.

So beloved, what I want to say to you here today is that I've seen Christ's love for His bride. I've seen it in so many different ways. But one of the most profound ways that I saw it was that Holy Thursday night when a husband and a wife knelt before one another right there and washed one another's feet as she was dying; and did it with joy; did it with tears; and did it with hearts that were full of grateful love. It was an unforgettable moment.

And beloved that is Christ's call to us in this moment in the world, as parts of our world are busy literally blowing each other to pieces; it is time for the bride of Jesus to walk unforgettably. In the midst of the hatred; in the midst of the violence; in the midst of the gossip; in the midst of the deceit; in the midst of the lies; in the midst of even our own darkness, Jesus is saying, "Will you be open to My love? Will you be open to My transformation? And will you be open, even in the most troubling times in your life, that I would move through you, and be a witness of what love is; of what My kingdom of love looks like; that your Redeemer is alive; that your Redeemer lives? And He is not about hatred. He is not about violence. He is not about destroying cities. He is not about beheading children. He is about setting the captives free. He is about lifting up those that are downcast. He is about establishing the kingdom of love."

Beloved of God, make your choice. Make your choice in this moment in a way like you never have before. And I encourage you... to me it is as clear as day, there really is only one choice. May you and I have the grace to follow Him in the days; in the weeks; in the months; in the years that will come... to be a witness; an unforgettable witness to the kingdom of love.