

## Gracious Marriage

1 Peter 3: 1-7

- Introduction: Today we get to talk about marriage.
  - To be honest with you, I wasn't really sure what to do with this sermon at first.
    - On the one hand I sort of felt like "What is there to say that hasn't been said?"
    - And on the other hand I thought, "There's so much that could be said, how do I narrow it down? Where do I start?"
  - There are many possible starting points for talking about marriage.
    - You could start with the love requisite for marriage.
    - Or with unconditional commitment.
    - Or with the joy that comes from diligently pursuing a person for years on end.
  - Yet, Peter starts with something that is simultaneously obvious to anyone who has been married, and yet shocking. That is, he starts with slavery.
  
- Look at verses 1 and 7 of chapter three.
  - Both contain the word "Likewise" or the phrase "In the same way" in the instructions to wives and husbands.
  - Like what though? In the same way as who?
  - The answer: like a slave, in the same way as a slave.
  
- Have you ever wondered why the Bible doesn't explicitly condemn slavery?
  - It's not because it's a good thing.
  - In fact, as Dan mentioned last week, the Bible, and Christian theology has been the foundation of anti-slavery movements in the past, and rightfully so.
  - And yet, you would be hard-pressed to find a verse that condemns the institution.
  - Instead the Bible tells slaves how to live within that institution.
  
- Do you know why I think that is?
  - Because as Christians, we are called to be slaves.
  - In the New Testament, one of the most frequent pictures, if not the most frequent picture of what it is to be a Christian, is the picture of a bondservant.
  
- The Bible does not explicitly condemn slavery, because Christians are called to be slaves.
  - Slaves to God as we see in 1 Peter 2:16.
  - And as we will see, slaves to each other for the sake of God and his glory.
  
- So this morning, let us look at marriage, and what it means to serve one another.
  
- But first, let me pray.
  
- vv.3:1-2: Read it. The message of this verse is fairly simple.
  - Peter is calling wives to submit to their husbands.

- In this culture, husbands held all the power in the marriage.
- Like his instruction to servants, Peter is telling wives to accept this, to play into this structure of society, and the household.
  
- However, he does not offer this instruction as a way of avoiding conflict.
  - He's not telling women, "Just submit to your husbands. It'll be easier that way."
  - No, he tells them to submit for a particular purpose: to win their husbands.
  
- This has been the theme of 1 Peter, hasn't it?
  - Just before this we have the example of Jesus.
  - Peter quotes Isaiah saying, "By his wounds you have been healed."
  - And, "You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."
  
- In other words, the difficulty Christ underwent was for the larger purpose of winning people for God.
  - Wives are called to just such a ministry.
  - To voluntarily humble themselves for the sake of attracting their husbands.
  - Not attracting their husbands to themselves, but to God.
  - Which requires a different kind of tactic.
  
- vv.3-4: Look at vv.3-4. Read it. Physical adorning will only get wives so far.
  - Hair, jewelry, and clothing will attract a husband to his wife.
  - But to attract him to the Gospel requires a gentle and quiet spirit.
  - A gentle and quiet spirit manifests itself in what Peter mentioned in v. 2, respectful and pure conduct.
  
- As a husband, I can attest to the truth of these verses.
  - I don't think there is anything more flattering, or edifying for me as a husband, than to have my wife trust me.
  - It's almost disconcerting. Not because my wife is unsubmitive, but because I don't really know what I'm doing.
  - It's not that I don't work hard to make wise decisions, but at 8 years in, I still have a long ways to go in being a good leader for my wife.
  - So to have my wife respect my decisions and trust me gives me a shot of confidence to try new things and grow as a leader.
  - And to have my wife give my grace when I mess everything up, allows me to lead without fear.
  - It not only attracts me to my wife, but also makes me want to be a godly, gracious leader that much more. In other words, it pushes me toward godliness.
  
- Also, wives, while there is nothing inherently wrong with physical beauty, in fact it is a good thing as the Song of Solomon would attest, it will however fade. But a gentle and quiet spirit, as Peter says, is imperishable and will only grow more attractive.

- This is essential to realize for a healthy marriage.
  - So focus your efforts there.
- vv.5-6: Next Peter gives an example of the humble submission he has in mind. Read it.
- Three things to notice: hope in God, servant-like submission, and freedom from fear.
  - It will become apparent why hope in God is needed, but first let's look at servant-like submission, and freedom from fear.
- The specific example Peter gives is that of Sarah calling Abraham "lord".
- Another way to translate "lord" is "master".
  - Once again, Peter alludes to the servant-like submission to which he is calling wives.
- This is obviously counter-cultural to us.
- Chances are some of you are uncomfortable with that idea.
  - The truth is, I'm a little bit uncomfortable talking about it.
- In our culture submission is viewed as synonymous with inequality.
- The reality is that women have had to fight for rights, particularly the right to be viewed as equals to men.
  - Because of this, submission is viewed as giving in to male superiority.
  - A superiority that has often been abused.
- And so, the fear is that by submitting wives open themselves up to being viewed as "less than".  
By submitting, wives risk being abused.
- This would have been even more true for the wives to whom Peter wrote.
  - The fact that these wives were Christians when their husbands weren't, would potentially have been scandalous, and offensive to the husband.
  - Again, in that culture husbands had far more power, and therefore, there was far more potential for abuse without repercussion.
  - This is why wives are called to be fearless.
- And how are these wives supposed to be fearless? By hoping in God.
- By hoping that God will use their willing submission to show their husbands that they are not rebellious, but rather, have come to a true belief in Jesus.
  - By hoping that God will use that witness to bring their husbands to faith, thereby laying the foundation for the God-honoring give-and-take of marriage.
  - Peter completes the picture of what that marriage looks like in the next verse.
- v.7: Read it. Husbands are called to understand and honor the complementary equality of their wives in a servant-like manner, lest they impede their relationship to God.
- You know why I think submission is so hard for wives? Because husbands are selfish.

- You see, God's idea of a perfect marriage is not wives being slaves to their husbands, it's husbands and wives being slaves to one another.
- I have a feeling that if the average husband used his leadership role to selflessly seek the good of his wife, submission would not be perceived as such a bad thing.
- But husbands, I'm not sure that is the average. And that's on us.

-Did you notice the shift in tone?

-All of a sudden Peter gets terse.

-As if to say, "Husbands, stop being sinfully domineering and serve your wife."

-Oh, and in case anyone was wondering if God cares about the plight of wives, Peter says that if men don't listen to their wives, God isn't going to listen to them.

-Peter tells husbands to serve their wives in two ways for one reason.

-First, the reason for husbands serving their wives: they are equals.

-They are co-heirs.

-Heirs is a term normally reserved for the first son.

-This is Peter saying, "You are equal in the eyes of God as his children."

-And God's children equally inherit the grace of life.

-This is the ultimate fundamental.

-God has given life to both men and women.

-And how did God make them: in his image. Both men and women equally.

-The reality is that to have an accurate picture of who God is requires that we understand what it means that both men and women are equally made in his image.

-The two ways husbands are called to serve their wives will show them that image.

-First, husbands are to serve their wives by seeking to understand them.

-It's no secret men and women are different.

-And the sad caricature of husbands is one in which they do not seek to understand their wives, but simply declare that women will always be a mystery.

-Men, you are restricting your ability to know, view, and worship God accurately. You are neglecting half of his image that he has placed on this earth.

-Second, husbands are to serve their wives by honoring them as the weaker vessel.

-There's a lot of speculation as to what "weaker vessel" refers to here, but I'm not sure it's overly important to know exactly what Peter is referring to.

-I think Peter is simply calling husbands to appreciate the quality of that “gentle and quiet spirit” that he called wives to have.

-Husbands, do you know what you have to do to understand your wife?

-You have to listen. Really listen.

-Listen to understand, not to answer.

-Listen until your wife is done talking, not until you’re ready to respond.

-By this you honor her unique manifestation of the image of God.

-And remember, Peter says here that the quality of your relationship to God depends on the quality of your service to your wife.

-If you don’t listen and honor her, why should he listen or honor you?

-By neglecting your wife, you have neglected the image of God.

-If I were to pick a verse to summarize this section it would be 1 Peter 2:16. Read it.

-You see, serving our spouses is not about serving our spouses, it’s about serving God.

-We serve God by serving each other. And that is true in marriage and outside of it.

-Two closing thoughts.

-One: I like to remind myself of the end of a successful marriage.

-Do you know what that looks like?

-It looks like service.

-It looks like hospital visits. It looks like feeding your spouse when they no longer have the strength to feed themselves. It looks like bathing them. It looks like changing their bedpan.

-If that is the destination of a successful marriage, if that’s what we’re heading for as husbands and wives, we better learn to love serving our spouse.

-And finally, let me remind us that there is joy in service.

-When we look at our ultimate example, Jesus, what do we see?

-What motivated that ultimate act of love and service?

-Was it not for the joy that was set before Him?

-The joy of relationship?

-It was, and marriage is the same. Joy is before you, as it was for Christ. Serve each other and you will have it, as He does now.