



Series: EXTREME MAKEOVER: HOME EDITION
Sermon: "The Master Bedroom – Marriage is Not a Contract"
Scripture: John 15:12-13; Ephesians 5:21-23
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Christian marriage is different than what you see lived out in most of the media and in our culture today. Christian marriage involves two individuals who willingly bind themselves together with the tether of the Holy Spirit so that they will not willingly be broken apart. If you are already married, I hope this is going to be helpful instruction for you. If you plan to get married someday, I hope this will be helpful preparation. If you are not married and do not have any intention of ever being married, then I want you to know that I believe these principles will give depth, strength and integrity to the relationships that you hold in your life.

A story is told of a little girl who heard the tale of Snow White for the first time in her life. She was so excited hearing the story that she went home to tell her Mom the great fairy tale. When she arrived at the part when Prince Charming shows up on his white horse and kisses Snow White back into life, the little girl looked at her mom in wide-eyed wonder and asked, "Mommy, do you know what happened next?" Her mother responded, "Yes, they lived happily ever after." She replied, "No, they got married." In that little innocent voice was a really profound truth – getting married and living happily ever after are not necessarily synonymous terms. My wife, Beth, and I have been married almost 26 years, and I can tell you that I have learned that truth in 26 years of marriage. Getting married is easy, but it takes a great deal of hard work and devotion to stay that way.

I want you to imagine that there is a couple standing in front of me about to be married. As they exchange their vows together – for better or for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death – she is standing here never looking more radiant. She has flowers in one hand and the love of her life in the other. Her heart is pounding in her chest as she recites her vows. This is her fairy tale. The groom has sweaty palms, a racing heart and his voice is quivering as he speaks. He is still trying to catch his breath. He has never seen his bride-to-be look as beautiful. As she walks down the aisle on her Dad's arms, it feels so right. The words trip off their tongues as they recite their vows, they give and receive rings, and light a candle as they turn around and are introduced. They walk down the aisle, ready to go and take on the world together – for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until they are parted by death.

Within a few days, they move into their "love nest." Everything feels so right. He is everything she dreamed of, and she is the apple of his eye. But as the days give way to weeks, and the weeks give way to months, and the months give way to years,

pretty soon they figure out – the honeymoon is over. She has learned that “Price Charming” has a couple of chinks in his armor. He has learned that she is not always “sugar and spice and everything nice.” In that moment, they are faced with three decisions – the first thing they can decide to do is settle for status quo, that this is the best it will ever be. Everyone will watch them live at the same address, but grow farther and farther apart. At the end of the day, they will sit across the living room looking at a stranger because they have grown into an emotional, relational – and even physical – divorce. They have a legal marriage, but an emotional divorce. Do you think that is the way God intends marriage to be?

The second choice is they can change spouses and end their marriage. I was getting my haircut one time by a young lady, whom I knew pretty well, in a town in which I was a pastor. She announced to me, as she was cutting my hair, that she was about to be married in a couple of weeks. I asked her, “Do you love him?” She looked at me and replied, “Well, I guess so.” Then she said, “Oh well, if it doesn’t work out, I will just get a divorce and then try something else.” My heart broke. You know, that response unfortunately is by and large representative of our culture. We choose to get married until something better comes along or as long as we feel like it. Do you think this is the way God intends marriages to be?

The third choice is they can choose to work on the marriage and refuse to settle. They will be two partners choosing, working, sharing, talking, negotiating and compromising together, until the love they have for each other is stronger than they ever thought possible. That is the way God has planned it – two lives bound together in a lifelong relationship wound together by the presence of the Holy Spirit that is forged like steel in the adversities of life, but is soft as velvet because it remembers the passion of youth. What would you decide? What do you want your marriage to be like? Remember, it is really easy to get married – but it takes hard work and devotion to stay that way.

There are two lessons from the scripture passages – the first lesson has to do with the nature of love. Love means many different things to many different people – all the way from the infatuating puppy love that goes away like a mist, to the debilitating lust that can cripple – and everything in between. Some say that love is a “feeling” that we have. A mother was once asked by her daughter, “Mommy, can you tell me when I will know when I have met the one that I will spend the rest of my life with?” She said, “Sweetheart, love is a feeling that you feel like you feel that you’ve never felt before.” How many of you have ever known someone who simply just takes your breath away? Those of us who have fallen in love know that to be true. But is love between a husband and wife that will stand the test of time as tough as steel and as soft as velvet? Is that based on feelings alone?

Tony Campolo is a Christian sociologist who says, “The average adult human being falls in love on a feeling level fifteen times in their adult life. Seven times before we get married and on average seven times after.” If love is based on feelings, what does that say for Christian marriage? What hope is there for Christian marriage? The hope is that two individuals learn to experience the love of Jesus and share the love of Jesus with another individual. Jesus said, “My commandment is this – that you love one another. There is no greater love than this, than to be willing to lay down their life for a friend.” We find in Jesus the model of love. In Jesus, love is not a feeling – love is a choice. It is a decision that we make every day of our lives. We get up in the morning and we choose to love another human being.

Do you think that Jesus felt like dying for us? Do you think Jesus woke up on Maundy Thursday and said, “Wow, I think I’d like to get arrested tonight?” Do you think

Jesus woke up on Good Friday and said, "Wow, I am really glad I was whipped last night? I can't wait to be nailed to the cross today." Do you think that Jesus felt like that? No. The King of the universe came into flesh and chose to live and die for us so that we may live. There is a lesson in that for those of us who want to have a marriage that has love that is as tough as steel and as soft as velvet. We choose to live unselfishly, we choose to love daily, we choose to give ourselves sacrificially to the one person that God has led into our life with whom we are going to spend the rest of our days. When we choose to do that, the love we experience grows over time.

One of my favorite movies is "Shenandoah" with Jimmy Stewart. He plays a Virginia farm owner in the middle of the Civil War. He is a widower with six children. He is doing everything he can do to keep his family out of the war, but sure enough – the Union armies are gathered on the north side of his property and the Confederate armies have assembled on the south side of his property; subsequently, his family gets involved. The turning point comes when his daughter falls in love with a Confederate soldier played by Doug McClure. This young man comes walking into Jimmy Stewart's house to ask for his daughter's hand in marriage. Jimmy Stewart scratches his jaw and looks at him and asks, "Do you love her?" The young man replies, "Of course, I love her." He responds, "I used to think that I loved Martha when I married her, but after 25 years of marriage and six kids, I think I just liked her a whole lot." His is a statement that reflects love that is not just a feeling, but one that is a decision. It reflects a love that has been forged over a period of time. It reflects a love that has grown to the place that, the longer you live with the person – when you look back to the wedding day – it makes it seem like you just liked each other a whole lot. What kind of marriage do you want? Do you want one that is based on love that is a feeling or one that will stand the test of time because of a decision? Love is a choice. Choose it wisely.

The second lesson comes from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This is a least favorite passage for most women that I know and will probably be the least favorite passage with the men when I am finished. This passage talks about the nature of marriage. Marriage means many different things to many different people. To some, it is something like trying on a shoe; and, if do not like it, you simply go and get a new pair. To others, it is an institution to which you have been sentenced with no hope of parole. For a blessed few, marriage is two individuals whose lives were lacking and empty; however, upon finding one another, they bind themselves together with Jesus in their lives and find fulfillment. They are willing to walk through all of their days, growing in love, deepening in relationship – the kind of relationship where you can never get enough.

Do you think it is possible to get married and live happily ever after? Yes, it really is possible. It is more likely possible when we understand what the Bible says about marriage. Marriage is not a contract – it is a covenant. A contract is a legal agreement between two individuals that can be broken on a whim or when the circumstances change. Marriage is a covenant – a binding agreement between two individuals and a Person who is more powerful than they are and, in our case, Jesus Christ, where we choose to bind our lives together – for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death. Christian marriage invites Jesus into the center of the relationship and declares that it is more than finding someone who you can live with, that's temporary. Christian marriage is finding someone that you cannot live without and be willing to lay down your life for that person.

Paul holds the key to this in Ephesians 5:21 as he says, "Submit to one another out of reverence to Christ or be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ." What

he is talking about is mutual submission. I know some husbands who are pretty good at demanding this from their wives, and I know some wives who are pretty good at demeaning this out of their husbands. What I am talking about is making your spouse the number one human priority in your life. Husbands, your wives are number one. Wives, your husbands are number one. I can tell you from my own personal experience – when I am very intentional about putting Beth's wants, needs and desires above my own wants, needs and desires – mine get met. When I get that wrong and I mess up that priority, not only are mine not met – there is no joy in her face. One of the goals in my life is for people to look at Beth and see joy on her face. That is when I know I have been successful.

Early in our married life I used to play basketball seven days a week, two to three hours a day. That was the number one priority in my life – even after we were married and started having kids. I noticed there was not much joy in her. In fact, I noticed there was a little bit of anger and sometimes a great deal of anger. It was not until I was willing to die to that game and let her know that – she began to live.

In Genesis, God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. As he slept, God pulled a portion of his rib out, sealed up the place with flesh and then he fashioned that rib into a woman. The woman was designed to be a lifetime companion for the man. Ladies, woman was not taken from man's head to Lord over him. Gentlemen, woman was not taken from man's foot to be trampled on by him; but rather, woman was taken from man's thighs to walk beside him and from under his arm to be protected by him and from next to his heart to be cherished by him. Our problem is that we stopped reading this chapter at verse 24 where it says, "Wives should be subject in everything to their husbands as to the Lord." We pop her in the ribs and say, "See I told you so." But men, continue reading as it says, "Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church." What did Jesus do for the church? He died. He chose to die so that we – the bride of Christ – might live.

This weekend, we see a living, breathing, walking, talking example of this being lived out in front of us in real time. Jon Kraner has chosen to love – and Jon has chosen to make his wife and his children the number one priority in his life. That is more powerful than any sermon that I could ever preach.

What kind of marriage do you want? A contract is based on feelings – or a covenant wound together with choice? I choose covenant.

