

## 24.03.2012 LOVE STORIES

***The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3***

This week's lesson deals with the love that is found in marriage. The relationship between Christian husband and wife is to be a reflection of the love of God. Their wills are to be in unity with God's will and out of that will flow a love to each other that is *agape'* love – unconditional, self-giving and unchanging.

Marriage is a witness to the world of the CHARACTER of the Godhead. In Christian marriage, both husband and wife must demonstrate to the world the unconditional, unfailing, self-giving love of God. They must demonstrate the unity that lies within the Godhead, 3 persons united in purpose and love. Every Christian marriage has 3 persons in it – the husband, wife and Holy Spirit; a three-fold cord that is not easily broken. When children are born, there must be a demonstration of the fatherhood of God.

This is what God desires Christian marriage to be: firstly, a relationship that is based not on human love which is conditional, capricious and selfish, but on an understanding of the love of God. Secondly, it is a covenant between 3 persons – God, the husband and the wife. In always seeking to do God's will, there will be a unity of purpose. Thirdly, since we live in a fallen world, if there is unfaithfulness, the injured party must remain faithful and forgiving (as God is faithful to us in our unfaithfulness). Finally, God seeks godly offspring in a Christian marriage.

None of this is possible in human nature; this relationship only survives as it is Spirit-led.

As husband and wife reveal to society such a love, it will also be a witness to society of the love of God. He is the great Lover, who has loved us with an everlasting, unchanging, unconditional and self-giving love; the Lover who remains faithful to us even in our unfaithfulness.

There are wonderful examples in the Bible of the tenderness, intimacy, faithfulness and love found in marriage. Here are a few:

Isaac and Rebekah:

*Now Isaac came from the way of Beer Lahai Roi, for he dwelt in the South. And Isaac went out to meditate in the field in the evening; and he lifted his eyes and looked, and there, the camels were coming. Then Rebekah lifted her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from her camel; for she had said to the servant, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" The servant said, "It is my master." So she took a veil and covered herself. And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent; and he took Rebekah and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death. Genesis 24:62-67*

Jacob and Rachel:

*And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up*

his voice and wept...Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance. Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." Genesis 29:10, 11, 17, 18.

Elkanah and Hannah:

And whenever the time came for Elkanah to make an offering, he would give portions to Peninnah his wife and to all her sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup> But to Hannah he would give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, although the LORD had closed her womb... Then Elkanah her husband said to her, "Hannah, why do you weep? Why do you not eat? And why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" I Samuel 1:4, 5, 8.

Hosea and Gomer:

Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans."

So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you." Hosea 3:1-3

Ezekiel:

This is a little known story, but it is very poignant. It also was a message of doom to God's unfaithful people if they persisted in their unfaithfulness.

Also the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, behold, I take away from you the desire of your eyes with one stroke; yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow."

So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded. Ezekiel 24:15-18

### **The first marriage:**

In the story of Adam and Eve are found the great foundational truths of Christian marriage.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him"... And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And Adam said:

**"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."**

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. Genesis 2:18, 21-25.

Marriage was instituted by God for the benefit of Mankind:

1. Man needs companionship vs 18 ...it is not good for him to be alone (he is a social being).
2. God Himself meets man's need by providing a bride vs 18-22

Look at how the bride (Eve) was created. Also in God's image, but NOT out of nothing, NOT out of the dust, but OUT OF ADAM.

*"Out of the undifferentiated humanity of Adam, male and female emerged. And Adam awoke to see a reflection of himself, a complement to himself, indeed, a very part of himself..." from John Stott. 'Issues facing Christians Today'*

3. The Resulting Institution of Marriage  
 verse 22 God brought her to the man...Verse 23 She is 'flesh of his flesh' ...verse 24  
 Therefore 'a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife...'

Leaving the dependency and nurture of childhood into the maturity of partnership (so also God wants our relationship with Him to grow and mature into partnership and intimacy (1Cor13:11; 2Cor 6:1; Heb 5:13,14- 6:1; Song of Sol 2:16; 8:6,7).

Verse 24 .... they shall be one flesh...

In Genesis 2, we are told that marriage was instituted because of the human need for companionship, and God's provision of a suitable partner to meet this need.

This passage tells us that the sexual relationship in marriage is not merely a union; it is a reunion. *'It is the union of two persons who were originally one, then separated from each other, and now in the sexual encounter of marriage come together again.'*

Paul refers to this passage in Eph 5:25-33 and likens it to Christ's relationship to the Church. Where the First Man Adam, failed, the Second Man Christ Jesus, became flesh and reconciled a separated people unto God by His death. And from His body, through His sleeping and awaking has been created a Bride; a Bride who is loved and kept and perfected by her Heavenly Spouse. In Eph 5, Paul tells redeemed men and women that their marriages must bear the likeness of the heavenly.

*For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Eph 5:30-32.*

4. Marriage is a Covenantal union.  
 'What God hath joined together, let man not separate' Mark 10:4-9. Again there are echoes of the Covenant which the heavenly Bridegroom has made with his Bride...'Nothing shall separate us from the Love of God...' (Rom 8:39) God is the God who hates divorce (Mal 2:16) yet who has permitted it because of the hardness of fallen men's hearts (Matt 19:8).

All who enter into a Christian marriage covenant are standing on holy ground. They are covenanting with God to be a witness to the world of His unconditional love and faithfulness.

## **God the Lover:**

God is the greater Lover of Mankind. He often uses the language of marriage to describe His love for us:

*The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3*

*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. Isaiah 61:10*

*"Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; for you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name; and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. For the LORD has called you like a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, like a youthful wife when you were refused," says your God. Isaiah 54:4-6*

*"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' Yes, I said to you in your blood, 'Live!' I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare.*

*"When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD.*

*"Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendour which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 16:6-14*

## **God, the faithful Lover**

In all our unfaithfulness to Him, God remains faithful to us. His heart is grieved by our hard-heartedness, but He never leaves us or forsakes us. He has given us the power to turn Him away.

He is also the Prodigal Lover. He is prodigal in His gifts to us, His love to us, His desire for us, who are more often than not, His unfaithful people. We see this in the parable of the Prodigal Son. We also see this in the ointment that Mary poured out on Christ. 'Why this wastefulness?' Judas asked. It is a question asked by all who do not want to receive the abundant gift of salvation and eternal life provided by God in Christ Jesus.

***If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself. 2 Timothy 2:13***

*I will mention the loving kindnesses of the LORD and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses. For*

*He said, "Surely they are My people, children who will not lie." So He became their Saviour. In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore them and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit. Isaiah 63:7-10*

*"I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned away from him. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon. Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall be revived like grain, and grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*

*"Ephraim shall say, 'What have I to do anymore with idols?' Hosea 14:4-8*

*The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love. Zephaniah 3:17*

***For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38, 39***

'Arise and go to your Father. He will meet you a great way off. If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love. His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it. Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul.

Your heavenly Father will take from you the garments defiled by sin. In the beautiful parabolic prophecy of Zechariah, the high priest Joshua, standing clothed in filthy garments before the angel of the Lord, represents the sinner. And the word is spoken by the Lord, "Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him He said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment. . . . So they set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments." Zech. 3:4, 5. Even so God will clothe you with "the garments of salvation," and cover you with "the robe of righteousness." Isa. 61:10. "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Ps. 68:13.

He will bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love. (Cant. 2:4) "If thou wilt walk in My ways," He declares, "I will give you places to walk among these that stand by"—even among the holy angels that surround His throne. (Zech. 3:7.)

"As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." Isa. 62:5. "He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love; He will joy over thee with singing." Zeph. 3:17. And heaven and earth shall unite in the Father's song of rejoicing: "For this My son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." EGW – Christ's Object Lessons. *Lost and Found.*

### **Christ the Bridegroom**

Christ is portrayed in the Bible as the Bridegroom. His Bride is the Church, His Body. In the Old Testament, this relationship is foreshadowed in the Song of Solomon – the relationship between Solomon and the Shulamite.

*He brought me to the banqueting house,  
And his banner over me was love. Song of Solomon 2:4*

*My beloved is mine, and I am his. 2:16*

*You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you. 4:7*

*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised. 8:6, 7*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.** So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25-32*

*And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Revelation 19:7, 8*

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#### **Additional Notes:**

##### **1. The Husband as Head**

We must go back to our Bibles. The husband is the head of the wife just in so far as he is to her what Christ is to the Church. He is to love her as Christ loved the Church - read on - and gave his life for her (Eph. v, 25). This headship, then, is most fully embodied not in the husband we should all wish to be, but in him whose marriage is most like a crucifixion; whose wife receives most and gives least, is most unworthy of him, is – in her own mere nature - least lovable. For the Church has no beauty but what the Bridegroom gives her; he does not find, but makes her, lovely. The chrism of this terrible coronation is to be seen not in the joys of any man's marriage but in its sorrows, in the sickness and sufferings of a good wife or the faults of a bad one, in his unwearying (never paraded) care or his inexhaustible forgiveness: forgiveness, not acquiescence. As Christ sees in the flawed, proud, fanatical or lukewarm Church on earth that Bride who will one day be without spot or wrinkle, and labours to produce the latter, so the husband whose headship is Christ-like (and he is allowed no other sort) never despairs. He is a King Cophetua who after twenty years still hopes that the beggar-girl will one day learn to speak the truth and wash behind her ears.

To say this is not to say that there is any virtue or wisdom in making a marriage that involves such misery. There is no wisdom or virtue in seeking unnecessary martyrdom or deliberately courting persecution; yet it is, none the less, the persecuted or martyred Christian in whom the pattern of the

Master is most unambiguously realised. So, in these terrible marriages, once they have come about, the "headship" of the husband, if only he can sustain it, is most Christ-like.

*CS Lewis – the Four Loves*

## 2. What about Celibacy?

*'I will never leave you or forsake you...'* Joshua 1:5

Celibacy is difficult. For Christians it is primarily difficult because of the fear of loneliness and lack of intimacy that is implied if one is not married.

Nevertheless, if we choose to live by God's Word, celibacy is the lot of the unmarried, the widowed, the divorced and the person with homosexual tendencies. This last category is very important. Heterosexual Christians have failed homosexuals who desire to become Christians (Paul converted many of them – see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11) because they expect homosexuals to practice celibacy while unmarried heterosexuals do not.

God has wonderful promises for those who are celibate through circumstances or by choice. Doing things for others often relieves loneliness. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7 that those who are unmarried or have no families to care for, can devote themselves to the things of God, helping fellow members who need assistance, or using the gifts the Spirit gives them for ministry in the church.

But the most wonderful blessing the lonely can enjoy is intimacy with God. Many of us who fall into the above categories want human intimacy rather than intimacy with God. But, if we are willing, He will become our Friend (Song of Sol 5:16) our Husband (Isa 54:15), our Reward (Gen 15:1). One day, like David, we will say, *'Who have I on earth but Thee? And there is none on earth that I desire before Thee. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my Portion forever'*. Psalm 73:25, 26

Such a relationship with God is more fulfilling than any human relationship. Those who have such absolute devotion to God are described in Revelation 14:4 as those who will have the privilege of 'following the Lamb wherever He goes'.

## 3. **God is Love: do not believe or live by the principle that 'Love is God'.**

The real danger is to me not that lovers will idolise each other but that they will idolise Love. I do not of course mean that they will build altars or say prayers to him. The idolatry I speak of can be seen in the popular misinterpretation of Our Lord's words ***"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much"*** (Luke 7: 47).

From the context, and especially from the preceding parable of the debtors, it is clear that this must mean: "The greatness of her love for Me is evidence of the greatness of the sins I have forgiven her." But thousands of people take it quite differently. They assume that her sins were sins against chastity. And they then take Our Lord to be saying, "I forgive her unchastity because she was so much in love." The implication is that a great love extenuates - almost sanctions - almost sanctifies - any actions it leads to.

When lovers say of some act that we might blame, "Love made us do it," notice the tone. A man saying, "I did it because I was frightened," or "I did it because I was angry," speaks quite differently. He is putting forward an excuse for what he feels to require excusing. But lovers are seldom doing quite that. Notice how tremulously, almost how devoutly, they say the word *love*, not so much pleading an "extenuating circumstance" as appealing to an authority. The confession can be almost a Boast. There can be a shade of defiance in it. They "feel like martyrs". In extreme cases what their words really express is a demure yet unshakable allegiance to the god of love.

"These reasons in love's law have passed for good," says Milton's Dalila. That is the point; *in love's law*. "*In love*", we have our own "law", a religion of our own, our own god. What are really (by the Christian standard) temptations speak with the voice of duties - quasi-religious duties, acts of pious zeal to Love. It seems to sanction all sorts of actions they would not otherwise have dared. I do not mean solely, or chiefly, acts that violate chastity. They are just as likely to be acts of injustice or uncharity against the outer world. The pair can say to one another in an almost sacrificial spirit, "It is for love's sake that I have neglected my parents - left my children - cheated my partner - failed my friend at his greatest need." These reasons in love's law have passed for good. The followers may even come to feel a particular merit in such sacrifices; *what costlier offering can be laid on love's altar than one's conscience?*

*Paraphrased from CS Lewis: the Four Loves*