

The Joy of Marriage

Today In Your Reading...

We read King Solomon's favorite song. While he wrote more than one thousand (*1 Kings 4:32*), he called this one his "song of songs, more wonderful than any other" (*1:1*). The song was written to praise the virtues of marriage, the love between a husband and wife. Solomon described their relationship in three phases — falling in love (*1:1-3:5*), the wedding (*3:6-5:1*), and learning to live together (*5:2-8:14*).

Many connections could be made here regarding Christ (groom) and His Church (bride), for which marriage is certainly a picture. However, today I am going to focus on the importance of marriage as it relates to us practically. **Marriage was God's idea** — one man and one woman for life — **and, though our world is attempting to remake marriage into its own image, it is not ours to redefine**. Instead, marriage, as God designed it, is to be embraced, esteemed, and enjoyed as Solomon did here.

Although Solomon used poetic prose to elaborate on the couple's relationship, there is hidden here some wisdom for us today. The first and most obvious truth is that **sex is for marriage**. A common misconception is that God is anti-sex, a cosmic killjoy who never wants us to have any fun. This claim, of course, could not be further from the truth. **Sex was God's idea. He wants us to enjoy it but in the boundaries for which He designed it — marriage**.

Three times in this song, Solomon's wife charges the women of Jerusalem, "Promise me... not to awaken love until the time is right" (*2:7; 3:5; 8:4*). The world, of course, wants to make its own rules; it has attempted to normalize sex at anytime with anyone. *This blatant disregard for God's intentions dishonors Him and incurs serious consequences*. We cannot expect the blessings of God when we reject the ways of God.

The second truth that stands out in Solomon's song is that **the married couple puts a high priority on their relationship**. Since God desires a deep commitment by both partners in marriage, Satan will do everything in his power to tear the two apart. Therefore, spouses must make time for each other. They must constantly be building new bridges. They must communicate with and confide in one another. They must pay attention to each other's needs, pray for and with each other, and enjoy each other's company.

Finally, it is evident in this song that **couples must learn to battle through difficulties**. *Too many times spouses fight each other instead of fighting together against issues*. We must use words that build up and refuse to use those that tear down. We must learn to work side by side and not toe to toe, to resolve differences, disagreements, and disputes. We must constantly reaffirm our commitment to marriage and reject the easy ways out — neglecting the problems, running away, or divorce. Although marriage is a blessing from God, it involves two imperfect sinners. *It will not always be easy, but with His help, it can be successful*.

Daily Reflection

What other truths did you find in this song? Are you honoring God by honoring marriage? Are you doing your part to embrace it, esteem it, and enjoy it?

Unfortunately, Solomon will neglect these truths (*1 Kings 11:1-3*); and, as he ignored them, he would reap terrible consequences.

Undivided Attention

June 5 — 1 Kings 11:1-43; 2 Chronicles 9:29-31

Today In Your Reading...

King Solomon died, and while he may have had a terrific start to his reign, by the end of his time, the wheels had come off of all he had accomplished. What happened? Simply put, **he got distracted and lost focus** of what was most important — his relationship with the Lord.

We know that Solomon was the wisest man to ever live. However, in his arrogance and neglect, Solomon not only allowed but invited the worship of false gods into Jerusalem (*1 Kings 11:1-6*). Though he was wise, he was not perfect. He made mistakes, foolish mistakes.

As a result of his polygamy (which was a perversion of God's intent for marriage) and his intermarriage, which was in direct disobedience to God's statutes, Solomon was wooed to worship the foreign deities of his wives. Even after divine warning, he chose to ignore the Lord and practice idolatry. *Idolatry was a sin that God would not endure*. Thus, He unleashed His judgment on Solomon and his kingdom, which came in the form of a split in the country.

Again, *Solomon lost his focus*. His attention was divided among his many gods. Therefore, God divided his kingdom. **Too many loves in our life cause us to forget our first love — the Lord** (*Revelation 2:4, 5*).

If we lose focus of what is important, then we lose sight of our purpose. If we don't remember where we started or what the Lord has done for us, then we forget where we are going or what we are supposed to do. **Distraction is one of Satan's most effective strategies to neutralize God's people**. *Distracted Christians disqualify themselves from being effective ambassadors*. With interest in many loves in life, they lose sight of their first love. As a result, He is neglected and His mission is forgotten.

Daily Reflection

Solomon was guilty of neglecting the first two commandments of God. "Do not worship any other gods besides Me. Do not make idols of any kind... You must never worship or bow down to them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, who will not share your affection with any other god" (*Exodus 20:1-5*). Why do you think idolatry is so offensive to God?

When Christ was warning the Church in Ephesus, He said this, "I have this complaint against you. You don't love Me as you did at first. Look how you have fallen from your first love. Turn back to me again and do what you did at first" (*Revelation 2:4, 5*). **Many loves tend to crowd out your first love**. How do you avoid repeating Solomon's sins and losing sight of what is most important in life?

Does God have your undivided attention? How are you doing with staying focused on Him and what He has for you to do here?

Life Under the Sun

June 6 — *Ecclesiastes 1:12-6:12*

Day 157 — 208 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We covered the first half of Solomon's book of *Ecclesiastes*, which is filled with the results of his efforts to understand the meaning of life. What he recorded here may depress you. "I discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race," he wrote. "Everything under the sun is meaningless" (1:13, 14).

He continued, "I said to myself, 'Come now, let's give pleasure a try. Let's look for the good things in life.' But I found that this too was meaningless. It was like chasing after the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere" (2:1, 11). "So then I decided to compare wisdom and folly... but I saw that wise and foolish people share the same fate. Both of them die. Then I said to myself, 'This is all meaningless...' So now I hate life because everything done here under the sun is irrational" (2:14-18).

While Solomon's observations might seem to be correct, at first glance, there are some flaws in his reasoning. I realize that might sound arrogant to say, but Solomon was just a man. **While he may have been the wisest man to live, he was still fallen and flawed.** Therefore, we must take everything he wrote and filter it through the truth of his depravity.

But wait, isn't *Ecclesiastes* part of God's Word? Didn't Solomon write these things under the inspiration of His Spirit? Yes, but we must recognize the context in which Solomon lived and balance his wisdom with the rest of Scripture. What do I mean?

Solomon lived 900 years before Christ. **His understanding of the purposes of God and of the Messiah were limited.** Since we live on the other side of Christ, knowing what He did on earth in His ministry and why He came, we have a much better understanding of God's picture

than Solomon ever did. The other truth to note here is that **we have the rest of God's Word to rely upon.** The revelation that Solomon had in his day was very limited. He had the books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, and David, and not much else. You and I have the books of the New Testament.

What's my point? Solomon wrote an accurate depiction of human life but with a limited view of the world. First, God has not dealt a tragic existence to the human race. When He created everything, it was all good. **It was mankind that ruined everything with his sin. We are to blame for the futility of life, not God.** Second, Solomon wrote from his perspective which was from "under the sun." When we view life from man's perspective, we will depress ourselves. **It is only when we view life from above the sun, from God's perspective, that life makes sense.** He has redeemed our time through Jesus Christ and given us lives filled with meaning and purpose in Him.

Daily Reflection

Perhaps you are like Solomon and have allowed life to beat you down, even depress you. But are you viewing life as he did or as God does, from "under the sun" or from "above the sun"?

What is the meaning of life from above the sun?

Truth in the Tragedy

Today In Your Reading...

Solomon's book of *Ecclesiastes* has been called "the Black Sheep" of the Old Testament because its message does not seem to align with the theme of the other books. With thoughts like "Everything is meaningless," and "Just have fun because death is coming," and "It is all decided by chance," there is no wonder why some might make this claim. However, one must remember that Solomon is making these statements from his limited perspective, from "under the sun."

Still, whatever our thoughts are of *Ecclesiastes*, there are some wonderful truths to note. For example, **prosperity is not always good and adversity is not always bad**. Having money to buy or do whatever you want sounds nice but it can lead to greed, self-reliance, and a false sense of security. It is also very difficult for wealthy people to grow spiritually; easy living does not provide many opportunities for God to work. While we may not be fond of adversity, it has its advantages. **That which stretches us causes us to grow**. Adversity brings us to the end of our own strength and wisdom and causes us, instead, to rely upon God for help. That's why James wrote, "Count it all joy when you encounter various trials..." (1:2, 3).

Another truth that is readily seen on the pages of *Ecclesiastes* is the fact that **life is not fair**. Whether you are rich or poor, wise or foolish, difficulty comes to all. **While wisdom may give us an advantage in life, it does not give us immunity from life**. Bad things happen to good people, though Solomon rightly points out that "not a single person in all the earth is always good and never sins" (7:20). "Good people are often treated as though they were wicked, and wicked people are often treated as though they were good. This is so meaningless!" (8:14).

Finally, Solomon majors on the end of life on earth. He said many times in many ways, "The same destiny awaits everyone, whether they are righteous, wicked, good or bad..." (9:2). While he is right in one way, he is short-sighted in another way. **From man's perspective, death is the end. From God's perspective, death is the beginning**. Solomon was not aware of the promise of eternal life for the followers of Christ. A barrier must exist between this life and the next, and that barrier is death. Therefore, earthly death is not final for God's people; rather it is a transition.

Daily Reflection

If God strengthens our faith more in times of adversity, then why do we pray more for blessing and prosperity? Which one do you pray for?

Have you discovered that life is not fair? How have you reasoned through this truth biblically?

If death is a transition from this flawed life to the flawless life that awaits us, then is there really any reason to fear it?

Divide and Conquer

Today In Your Reading...

We concluded the book of *Ecclesiastes*. After all of Solomon's searching for the meaning of life, he ended up with a simple truth and some good advice. "It's a wonderful thing to be young! Enjoy every minute of it. Do everything you want to do; take it all in. But remember that you must give an account to God for everything you do... My final conclusion is to *fear God* and *obey His commands*, for that is the duty of every person. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing..." (*11:9; 12:13, 14*).

After finishing *Ecclesiastes*, we read what happened after Solomon's death. Remember, because of his worship of idols, the Lord promised to tear his kingdom apart (*1 Kings 11:11, 12*). This prophecy was fulfilled immediately when Solomon's son, Rehoboam, took over. Instead of listening to the people and relieving their burden, he swore to increase their work and taxes. As a result, the people rebelled against him and crowned Jeroboam as king instead. Thus, we have the beginning of the Divided Kingdom, with ten tribes comprising the nation of Israel in the north (under Jeroboam) and two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) comprising the nation of Judah in the south (under Rehoboam).

Neither king steered the people in the right direction. In fact, Jeroboam immediately led the people into gross idolatry, abandoning the sacrificial system at the Temple in Jerusalem and, instead, setting up golden calves in Bethel and instituting a new priesthood, new festivals, and new sacrifices. Thus, Jeroboam and the people had desecrated a place that was sacred to their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Of course, this huge rift in the nation, particularly in regards to the pagan worship of idols, forced the people to make a decision of where they would go and whom they would support.

"The Levites abandoned their homes and property and moved to Judah and Jerusalem. From all over Israel, those who sincerely wanted to worship the Lord, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem, where they could offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of their ancestors" (*2 Chronicles 11:14-17*).

Daily Reflection

To divide and conquer has been one of Satan's most effective strategies against God's people since the beginning. Remember Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, the rebellion against Moses during the Exodus, and Saul and David. What about the history of Christians since Bible times. What are some ways that Satan has effectively divided them?

Why is the strategy of dividing to conquer so effective?

How can God's people prevent further division and quarreling? How can God use you?

Who's on the Lord's Side?

Today In Your Reading...

We began to follow the complicated history of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. So far, the kings in Israel were Jeroboam, Nadab, and Baasha; and in Judah, the kings were Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa. Not only were these kings at war with foreign nations, they were constantly at war with each other.

While following the history of these nations and their kings will be challenging, if not confusing, one principle surfaces immediately and remains true to the end — **covenant-keepers win and covenant-breakers lose**. Those kings who honor and obey the Lord are secure and blessed, while those kings that disobey and dishonor the Lord are recipients of His wrath. Take for example the following verses:

“Jeroboam did not turn from his evil ways...

This became a great sin and resulted in the destruction of his kingdom and the death of all his family” (1 Kings 13:33, 34).

“When Rehoboam was firmly established and strong, **he abandoned the law of the Lord** and all Israel followed him in this sin. Because they were unfaithful to the Lord, King Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem... But, *when Rehoboam humbled himself*, the Lord’s anger was turned aside and he did not destroy him completely; and, there was still goodness in the land of Judah” (2 Chronicles 12:1, 2, 12).

“Asa did what was pleasing in God’s sight, as his ancestor David had done... **He remained faithful to the Lord throughout his life...** So the Lord defeated the Ethiopians in the presence of Asa and the army of Judah and the enemy fled” (1 Kings 15:11-15; 2 Chronicles 14:9-12).

Listen to this message that the prophet Azariah gave to King Asa, **“The Lord will stay with**

you as long as you stay with Him. Whenever you seek Him, you will find Him. But if you abandon Him, He will abandon you...” Asa challenged the people to renew their covenant with God, “to seek the Lord, the God of their ancestors with all their heart and soul... Eagerly they sought after God and they found Him; and the Lord gave them rest from their enemies on every side” (2 Chronicles 15:2, 12-15).

Daily Reflection

Covenant-keepers win and covenant-breakers lose. This principle does not imply that those who follow the Lord will never have difficulties in their lives or that somehow life will be all sunshine and rainbows. However, it does affirm that God is faithful, and He does honor those who honor Him. **His side is the winning side, and He rewards those who are with Him**, perhaps not in this lifetime but in the next.

Have you seen evidence of the fact that God rewards those you are faithful to Him? How so?

President Abraham Lincoln was once asked during the Civil War if God was on the side of the Northern states. He responded, “We should not ask if God is on our side but rather we should ask if we are on God’s side.” Have you been faithful to the Lord? Are you seeking to know Him, to love Him, and to obey Him?

Fit For a King

Today In Your Reading...

We followed a few more of the kings of Israel — Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and Ahab. Ahab will be the most wicked and rebellious of the kings of Israel, doing more than any other king to provoke the anger of the Lord (1 Kings 16:30). Meanwhile, Judah was blessed to have just one king that whole time — Asa (41 years). When Asa passed away, his son Jehoshaphat took over, another righteous king who honored God.

I'd like to point out three things from our passage today, in case you missed them. First, did you catch that the ancient city of Jericho was rebuilt by a man named Hiel? We are not told if Hiel knew about the curse that Joshua had placed on Jericho (6:26), but when he rebuilt the city, both of his sons died, just as Joshua had prophesied (1 Kings 16:34).

Second, we witnessed with King Asa how easy it is for us to forget or neglect the Lord and rely upon our own wisdom or strength. When Asa saw that King Baasha was attacking him, he turned to another king for help, instead of relying upon the Lord, who had helped him before with the Ethiopian army (2 Chronicles 16:7-10).

God wants to be our first resort in all things, not our last resort or even our second resort. Seeking wisdom, guidance, hope, or strength in anything or anyone else is to place another god before Him.

Finally, though there were so many major events that took place in our passage today, my attention was drawn to an order that King Jehoshaphat gave after succeeding his father Asa. "In the third year of his reign, Jehoshaphat sent out his officials to teach in all the towns of Judah... They took copies of the Book of the Law of the Lord and traveled around through all the towns of Judah, teaching the people" (17:7-9).

Here is a king who understood the covenant-keeping principle. *God honors those who honor Him*, but for people to honor Him, they must worship and obey Him; to obey Him, they must know what He says, and to know what He says, the people must hear what He says. In other words, Jehoshaphat understood the importance of the education or discipleship of God's people and the value of God's Word in that process.

Scripture intake, whether that comes by reading or hearing, was and still is a vital discipline in our spiritual development.

Daily Reflection

Obviously, you place a high priority on Scripture intake or you would not be reading the Bible in a year. However, what will you do when you are finished? Has Scripture intake always been important to you and will it be after this year?

Regarding Asa's neglectfulness to consult the Lord in the war against Baasha, how easy is it for you to do the same? Why is it that there are times when you faithfully seek the Lord and other times that you forget to ask for His help?

While it may seem that these events are disconnected, they are not. **Scripture intake is a way to remind ourselves of the Lord's wisdom and ways and to keep before us His desire to be our first and only resort.**