

Marriage on the Rock

Matthew 7:24-27

Introduction

The offer almost sounded too good to be true. Listen to how Coastal Constructors Southwest Ventures described their plan to build the “highest structure of luxury living in the Rio Grande.” Dubbed the Ocean Tower Condominium in South Padre Island, Coastal Constructors described their project with these words:

We see this as a great opportunity to get a bargain right now on what will become the finest quality built tower – in the best location – on South Padre Island. The views and amenities are unmatched, and the units are some of the largest on the Island.

Other marketing material noted,

The 134-unit skyscraper on a narrow strip of sand just close to the Mexican border began as an ambitious project to create 31 stories of unprecedented views over the ocean. Amenities included with each condo were “Italian marble floors, granite countertops, stainless steel appliances, custom cabinets, stainless steel fixtures, over-sized Jacuzzi tub, and stand-up showers.”

Construction began, but in May 2008, the developers started to notice issues with the foundation of the building. **<Foundation Failure 1> wait about 6 seconds, then display <Foundation Failure 2>** Massive cracks started to appear in the supporting columns and exterior walls of the building.

<Begin playing the 59-second video of the implosion>

As you can imagine, construction ceased, and the building sat vacant until September 2009, when the only option was to bring down the building. According to engineers, “The expansive soil beneath the tower began to compact, causing the building to sink and lean.” Some estimate that with the implosion of the building, \$65 million of the \$75 million bank loan “evaporated into the rubble.”

Despite all the good intentions and dreams of luxury living, the investors’ plans, and the retirees’ hope of holidaying by the sea, the excitement was not enough to sustain the weight of the great 55,000-ton structure. The foundation was faulty. And the results were devastating for the builders.

The story of the Ocean Tower Condominiums in South Padre Island provides a vivid picture of what Jesus taught us in Matthew 7:24-27 regarding the importance of a robust and unshakeable foundation.

Matthew 7:24-27

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Whether you realize it or not, each of us who are married, who plan to get married at some point in the future, or who hoping to get married is building something far more valuable than an ocean-side condominium. Marriage, as God's idea, is infinitely more valuable than buildings that house luxury getaways. And, as you can imagine, the foundation of marriage, the rock upon which it is built, must be strong and unshakable. It must be able to withstand the storms of life that we will doubtless encounter. And my hope this morning is to point us to this foundation, the rock upon which our marriages must be built if they are to last. <Prayer>

Body

The words we read in Matthew 7:24-27 conclude Jesus' famous, Sermon on the Mount. We studied the entire Sermon on the Mount back in 2019 when I began my pastorate here at Copperfield, so we are not going to repeat everything that we covered in that series, but I would point out that the entire series is available on our website for anyone interested in a deep dive into the sermon. For this morning, however, I intend to go back and briefly review the key principles that Jesus taught in that sermon that will provide the foundation, the rock beneath a strong marriage that lasts.

In Matthew 5:3-11, which are often referred to as the Beatitudes, Jesus extols the importance of being a humble, God-dependent disciple, which is to say, "a follower of Christ." Those who follow Christ are marked by meekness, mercy, peace, and joy, even in the hardest and most difficult of situations. There is a God-given calm that Jesus grants to those who place their trust in Him.

Interestingly enough, after teaching his disciples about the attitudes, the characteristics that mark his disciples, he addresses marriage. In that instruction about marriage, found in Matthew 5:27-32, we see the importance of guarding our lives against the lusts of the world that rob us of the joy and satisfaction that God intended for marital intimacy. Specifically, we see that Jesus intends for our sexual affections to be reserved for our spouse alone.

Furthermore, we are to be faithful to the vows that we made to our spouse before God and others. We should not walk in and out of marriage as if it were nothing. We are to be committed to our spouses. Husbands, the only person that you should love more than your wife is God. Wives, the same is true for you. God above all, then your husband. And yes, that means you have a responsibility to love your spouse more than your children.

For, one day, your children will leave you and cleave to another, as God intended from the very beginning. But your spouse? God intends for you to love them until death does you part. You are to be faithful. Loving them above all other people in this world. Loving them more than your children, for nothing will provide a more stable, nourishing environment for children to flourish than a marriage where husband and wife love and care for each other.

We must love our spouses more than our careers, no matter how much money we make or how many benefits we enjoy. And this is a particularly deceitful plow used by our enemy, the Devil. One of the greatest lies that we have bought into in the West is that it is okay to sacrifice the health of our marriages as long as we are making a good living for our families. Men, we are particularly good at rationalizing this point. We tell ourselves, "I'm doing it for them. If I stopped doing this job, what would we do as a family." But deep down, I think we know that we aren't just "doing it for them," we are doing it for ourselves. We are doing it for the affirmation, the glory, the "attaboys."

Brothers and sisters, if your career makes you pick between it and your marriage, always pick your marriage. You can find another job. Your company can replace you. Your spouse and your family shouldn't have to! "But what will I do? How will I provide for my family if I leave this career because it is destroying my marriage?" you respond! Well, as Jesus tells us later in Matthew 6:19-34, you just have to trust that God is whom He says He is and that He will do what He says He will do, which is "provide for His people." He's going to take care of you and your family. You don't have to disobey God and destroy your marriage in order to provide. Not if God is God!

Are there exceptional cases when marital infidelity in the form of adultery, abandonment, or abuse may impact this dynamic? Yes. Certainly. Marriage in a fallen, broken, sin-sick world will not always work out how we hoped or even how God originally intended prior to sin's entrance into the world. Sometimes divorce will occur, and when it does, it will be hard. It will be tragic. It will be painful. It will likely have lifelong consequences, even consequences that you have little to no control over. When sinners get together, you can be sure that there will be sin in their midst. But our default, as Christians, ought never be to take marriage lightly or embrace divorce joyfully, as if sin in this world has somehow altered God's ideal for marriage. God's ideal for marriage is between one man and one woman for a lifetime. And regardless of how our society might promote divorce as a neutral or even good thing, as Christians, we are called to view marriage in light of what God has revealed for us.

Obviously, this has tremendous implications for so much of the public debate that swirls around marriage in the United States. Governments might try to "redefine" what marriage is, but marriage does not belong to the government but to God. It is his idea. This means that so-called homosexual or same-sex "marriages" are not marriages in God's eyes, nor should they be regarded as such in the eyes of those who claim to know God and respect his design and ideal for marriage. These things are not up for debate and discussion. God is the maker of marriage, and as such, He gets to decide how it will be designed and how we are to respect it.

In addition to teaching us the importance of faithfulness in our marriages, Jesus teaches us the importance of generosity, particularly as it relates to the way we treat others. In Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus corrects the misapplication of an Old Testament law regarding retribution in our personal relationships. People were taking the principles of *lex talionis*, "eye for an eye," and instead of interpreting it primarily in its civic context, it became a personal matter. So, when one person has been disrespected by another person, which is the most likely meaning of "being slapped on the cheek," the disrespected person would respond with disrespect. According to Jesus, this ought not be the case.

How incredibly practical is this principle for our marriages?!? Your spouse says something hurtful to you, and how do you want to respond to them? You want to respond with something hurtful as well! We think, "Oh, you're gonna hurt my feelings; well then, I'm just going to hurt your feelings." And the sad thing is that the longer you are married, and the better you get to know your spouse the more effective you become at hurting their feelings. You know just the amount of silence to employ to shun them. You know how to use the tone of your voice to hurt or cause doubt. You know how to stoke jealousy. But this is not the generous spirit that Christ has called us to.

Furthermore, we are called to be loving! Oh my, how our spouses ought to know how much we love them! This comes from Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:43-48, where, originally, he is instructing his disciples on loving their enemies. Now, I'm not suggesting that your spouses are your enemies.

Instead, I'm saying that if we are called to love our enemies, how much more ought we to love those to whom we have committed our lives to before God and others?

Now, you may be thinking, "How does this really work with a marriage?" Let me give you a personal example that, quite frankly, I'm a little ashamed to share with you. In my marriage, Hannah and I are very communicative. We communicate well and often, but sometimes, I take out my frustrations with other people on her in our marriage. So, here's that embarrassing example, say, for instance, I have a church member (which is exceedingly rare at Copperfield) or someone from the community come into my office or send me a letter, venting their issues with the church or me. Believe it or not, this happens! It comes with the territory of leading an organization. And with leading an organization, you simply are not going to make everyone happy. As Ed Stetzer once said, "If you want to make everyone happy, go sell ice cream, but don't venture to be a leader."

Now, my typical response to receiving criticism is to "smile, nod, affirm that I hear the complaint and that I appreciate their perspective and willingness to share it with me," even when I don't find their complaint compelling or true. On my best days, I resolve to pray for God to bless these people. But some days, I don't really care for it. Somedays, it leaves me depressed, even despairing, and other days, it leaves me mad, upset, and defensive. But do you know what? I rarely ever respond to these people with anger or defensiveness. I just take it. I want peace. I'm not a fan of conflict.

But, then, imagine, later that evening, when Hannah and I are having a conversation about our monthly budget or my travel schedule or the dishes or yard work, and she raises a perfectly reasonable point or concern, how do you think I respond? Do you think I respond with a "smile, a nod, an affirmation and appreciation for her willingness to share this with me?" Oh, how I wish I could tell you that my response is one of calm joy and peace, but more often than I would like to admit, I respond with defensiveness and argument. And on more than one occasion, Hannah has rightly pointed out that I "would never respond that way to others." And sadly, she's right. In other words, there have been times in my marriage when I have treated others, even enemies, with more patience and care than my own wife. This is not what God has called me to. My wife deserves my best. If there is anyone worthy of a smile, a nod, a "thank you," and affirmation, it's the wife that God blessed me with.

Now, this is obviously not to say that I should be harsh to others and kind to my wife, but rather, that above all, my wife should be the recipient of my most thoughtful and grace-filled responses. Jesus calls us to this!

"But," you and I protest, "They've sinned against me. They don't deserve grace." But don't you see, that's the key to building a marriage on the rock, building a marriage on Christ. Demonstrating grace and forgiveness was never about who deserves it! If God were only gracious to those who deserved it, it wouldn't be grace, but instead, it would be a payment. Grace is a gift. It is never earned by those who receive it. Jesus draws this out in Matthew 6:9-13, when he teaches his disciples how to pray, reminding them to ask forgiveness daily "as we also forgive those who have sinned against us."

Now, in the weeks ahead, we are going to look at this dynamic of what it means to forgive in a relationship and how to be peacemakers in our marriage, but for now, at least, I want us to see that there is an undeniable relationship between the grace that we want from God and the grace that we extend to others.

If we really get the magnitude of God's gracious forgiveness of our sins, how could we not be people filled with forgiveness and grace toward others? It is an incredibly unhealthy place to be to believe you deserve grace and forgiveness, but somehow, others do not. This is not a Christian perspective. For, as we are told elsewhere in God's Word, we are called to "forgive others as God in Christ has forgiven us."

At times, this may mean that we are left in a position of offering and being willing to forgive while those who have sinned against us do not believe they have done anything wrong. Admittedly, this is a tough spot to be in, and there is more to be said about it, but we never have to live with bitterness that refuses to forgive. What God has done in Christ for us empowers us to forgive and be reconciled in our conflicts in supernatural ways that confound the conventional wisdom of this world.

Conclusion

In summary, then, the teachings of God's Word, as expressed and explained by Jesus, are the rock upon which we must build our marriages.

If our marriages will be lived and enjoyed for the glory of God, then they must be marked by meekness, mercy, peace, joy, faithfulness, generosity, love, and forgiveness. These principles, which characterize the Christian life, are the bedrock of a strong marriage. And they are A tall order! Who is sufficient for these things? Such fruit in a person's life is beyond our natural ability and strength! Who among us feels adequate to live this way in their own wisdom? What husband or wife here today or listening online believes they can perfectly embody such a life?

Oh, brothers and sisters, friends of Copperfield Church, such questions drive us back to Jesus, the One who called us to such a life. But He gave us more than principles to follow. He has given us Himself. As John 15:5 tells us, Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

In other words, Jesus knew that the life that He was calling us to was a life that fully depends upon Him working within us. We don't have the strength, the resolve, the brain power, or anything else from within ourselves that will enable us to live with such meekness, mercy, peace, joy, faithfulness, generosity, love, and forgiveness in our marriages. If our marriages would be built on the rock, the unshakable foundation of Jesus' words, then our most desperate need in the world is to abide in Him. To trust Him. To look to Him. To be filled with His meekness, His mercy, His peace, His joy, His faithfulness, His generosity, His love, and His forgiveness.

But what about the marriages that are already crumbling because the foundations have been broken for so long? You see, that's the beautiful thing about the gospel, the good news of God's grace! Unlike the condominiums that have to be imploded, the gospel of Jesus Christ is powerful enough to repair, rebuild, and renew the brokenness by making us new! There is hope for your marriage this morning because of Jesus!