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SERMON TITLE: "When Did 'Submission' Become Such a Bad Word?"

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 5:21-33

DATE: March 24, 2019

Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

"*The Gift of the Magi*" is a short story by O. Henry first published in 1905. The story tells of a young husband and wife and how they deal with the challenge of buying secret Christmas gifts for each other with very little money. On Christmas night, with only \$1.87 in hand, and desperate to find a gift for Jim, Della sells her hair for \$20 to a nearby hairdresser named Madame Sofronie, and eventually finds a platinum pocket watch fob chain for Jim's watch for \$21 and she was satisfied with the perfect gift she got for Jim. At 7 o'clock, Della sits at a table near the door, waiting for Jim to come home. Unusually late, Jim walks in and immediately stops short at the sight of Della, who had previously prayed that she was still pretty to Jim. Della then admits to Jim that she sold her hair to buy him his present. Jim gives Della her present – an assortment of combs, useless now that her hair is shortened. Della then shows Jim the chain she bought for him, to which Jim says he sold his watch to get the money to buy her ornamental combs. Although Jim and Della are now left with gifts that neither one can use, they realize how far they are willing to go to show their love for each other and how priceless their love really is.

As you might have guessed it, I'll be sharing today on the topic of marital relations.

We've been navigating through the book of Ephesians lately, and it just so happened that the passage on marriage fell on Youth Sunday. I thought to myself, "Lord, why me?" I'm not even married... yet!

But this morning something dawned on me... The Apostle Paul, who wrote this book, wasn't married either. So I thought, "Whew. I'm in good company." And fortunately, he spoke not from experience, but from the perspective of how Christ loved the Church. Biblically, the Church is the Bride of Christ, so that will be our focus today.

Please stand for the reading of God's Word (Eph. 5:21-33 MSG).

We're going to focus today on the ways in which Christ loves the Church.

As I pondered that question, revelation came. Christ loves the Church, His Bride-to-Be, in two main ways:

1. Jealously

Rev. 1:14 – "His eyes were like a flame of fire..."

If the eyes are the window to the soul, then what is the fire in Jesus' soul? I would submit to you all that it is the fire of jealousy for His Bride! If you belong to Christ, that's you and me!

Just a few verses later, Jesus begins to speak to the seven different churches at that time, but the first one He speaks to is the Church of Ephesus. Conveniently, that is the same church we've been studying Paul's letter to lately. Let's take a listen to what Jesus says to His people there.

Rev. 2:2-4 – I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.

Who is the first love King Jesus is referring to? Himself! He is saying to the church there, "You've done many good works in my Name, but where is your devotion to Me? I don't just want your service; I want intimacy. I desire closeness and proximity to you in the secret place. In all your business, you've forgotten what's most important: quality time with Yours truly."

I am becoming increasingly convinced that quality time is Jesus' first love language. Sure, He has others: giving, words of affirmation, etc. In fact, every love language comes from Him by design. But catch the heart of what Jesus is saying here... "Acts of service is LEAST on My list. First and foremost, I desire INTIMACY with you!"

Given that today's topic is marital relations, I'm sure many husbands can relate. God has made men in His likeness & His image, therefore we are no different.

SURVEY: Priorities in Marriage

A study came out recently that polled men & women on the top 15 most important things in a marriage.

The women's list included trust, commitment, and fidelity in the top 3, all with the common theme of security in the relationship. Men, however, prioritized much more physical things. Number 1 on the list was intimacy! You see, us men are not much different from our Maker. We are made in His likeness and image; therefore we desire the things He desires! Just as men demand intimacy from their wives, so does King Jesus demand intimacy from His people, the Church!

2. Relentlessly
What do I mean by that?

The Lord's heart never grows hard towards us. He is only passionate towards us. No matter how many times we may fail Him, still He forgives us, if only we come to Him and ask for it!

1 John 1:9 – "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

So, you see, the Lord's heart is tender towards us. His mercies are made new every morning. He never lets His heart become hardened against us.

Can you imagine if more marriages looked like that? If we as God's people were quick to forgive instead of hardening our hearts towards one another?

1 Cor. 13:7-8 - "Love endures all things, hopes all things, believes all things. Love never fails."

Perhaps marriages are failing so frequently in our society because these things are not being practiced!

Allow me to share with you all some sobering statistics:

- 50% of first marriages end in divorce.
- 67% of second marriages end in divorce.
- 74% of third marriages end in divorce.

Apparently it becomes easier as time goes on!

Now let's look at the leading causes of divorce in our nation. They are as follows: Abuse, Abandonment, Adultery, and Addictions. What if these were replaced by: Affection, Affirmation, Acceptance, and AA Meetings? We have to do whatever is necessary in order to overcome these things!

Submitting to God's priorities for such a relationship could bring the success and longevity that only comes with God's blessing. We have to do things His way to see His results.

Of course, many marriages in this congregation have stood the test of time, so I am preaching to the choir here. But allow me to say this: The next generation NEEDS such examples of faithfulness.

I wonder how many marriages could be salvaged if men would follow God's priority list, honoring Him & cherishing one another in the same ways that Christ loves the Church!

Families are super-important in God's kingdom. Think about it, God's kingdom is made up of families. The Church is simply a family of families. And yet the family unit predates the Church. Family even predates government. In fact, the family is the oldest institution in human history! It goes all the way back to the beginning, a byproduct of Adam & Eve's love-relationship that spawned infinite generations to come.

Family is also the centerpiece of civilization. When families get together, we call that a community. And when communities get together, we call that a society. Furthermore, it has been said there are 7 main mountains, or spheres of influence, in society. They are as follows: Business, Media, Arts & Entertainment, Government, Religion, Education, and Family. But the biggest one of them all, the one that connects all, is the Family!

So let's use our brains here. If an enemy desired to infiltrate and take down a society, what strategy might he use? What 'mountain' would he attack first? If he was smart, he would attack the family. He would seek to bring division & brokenness to the family unit, so that division & brokenness would be reflected upon the entire society. This is not rocket science, people. It is simple logic. A house divided cannot stand, and neither can a nation.

Therefore, let us choose to honor God in our families, submitting to one another in reverent love, laying down our lives for one another as Christ did for the Church. God's heart is for families to stay united, to stick together, and to be a reflection of His kingdom in the earth. With Him, all these things are possible.

AMEN