

October 20, 2018

Wedding for Michael and Bekah Kostal

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor:

10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?

12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Paul McCartney wrote a song for the Beatles in 1966 called “Eleanor Rigby.” It speaks of a lonely old lady who dies in anonymity with nobody coming to her funeral except for Father MacKenzie. It was made all the more powerful with the use of orchestra: pieced together in such a way as to move you to compassion for the loneliness that life can bring.

Modern technology is supposed to alleviate some of that loneliness. Facebook was invented, so I’ve heard, to get people to know each other. Yet the irony of it all is that we are so glued to our phones and our connections online that we don’t know how to converse with each other anymore. The more connected we are, the more lonely we are.

God didn’t design us to be connected through a computer screen. God didn’t create us to be alone. Eve was created to be with Adam as a perfect match for him. He didn’t just show Adam an image of her. He brought her to the man in the flesh. Adam exclaimed, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

Now you are choosing to unite in this thing called marriage, which God describes as two becoming one. You are agreeing to be bound together and plow through this thing called life and death. You are agreeing to be a team. Teamwork is important. There is no “I” in team. Solomon talks about the benefit of having someone on your team.

First of all he says, “**they have a good return for their labor.**” You don’t have to pay for two separate places to live, and all the expenses that come with that. Your car insurance will drop. You will have more tax benefits. You’ll have more options with your Social Security. It’s practical from that point of view.

But marriage is more than a good investment. Second of all, “**If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.**” One of the greatest blessings of marriage is when you have each other to help you when you are down. Some of the most memorable moments of my marriage are the times when my wife has been a support to me when I’ve had some really down days in the ministry. Were it not for her I wouldn’t be able to make it. This is how God designed marriage, so that you will help each other when you fall. We live in a fallen world. You are smart enough to know that with marriage you will let your hair down and see the worst in each other. There will be downs. It is inevitable. When you are committed in marriage, it is different than just shacking up for a few months. With a Biblical training in marriage you now both understand that you are entering into a lifelong commitment with less fear that the other will bail when you fall.

The ultimate picture of this is Jesus, who came into this world to pick up a fallen world from the ashes of death and the fires of hell. He came into this world for that express purpose, to suffer and die for our sins. He provided a perfect wedding dress for us in His death and resurrection. He clothed you in it through you baptism. He keeps you in it as He speaks to you and forgives you and takes care of you. He doesn't bail on you after you have a bad day or fall into temptation. Jesus is the ultimate Groom who lifts up the fallen. **The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.** He reaches out His hand to fallen sinners.

Think of when Solomon wrote this. There were no furnaces that you could turn on. They didn't have perfectly insulated buildings or electric blankets. When David his father was old and his circulation was bad, they had a young woman come down and lay with him to keep him warm. This was another benefit of marriage. **Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?** One of the most difficult things to endure in marriage is when an evil spouse waits for you to climb into bed, only to put ice cold feet on your back or your calves when you first get into bed at night. Of course we could apply this to the warmth we feel when we come home as well. It is nice to have someone who wants to see you, who smiles at you, who gives you a peck on the cheek or the lips: a warm hug. We live in a very unloving world. Hugging can be dangerous, but you can still hug each other. And this is even scientific, hugs are good for you. Hugs release oxytocin into your system. Oxytocin calms your nervous system and lowers your blood pressure, especially helpful if you're feeling anxious. It lowers your cortisol (the stress hormone), enabling a higher quality of sleep.

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. Marriage provides a unique bond where you know each other well. You can defend each other against the weaknesses that you have. You can pray for each other. You can help lift each other up with listening, responding, and just being there for one another. You have each other's back in sickness and in health, for better or for worse.

There's an interesting little word that is used throughout this translation. We might overlook it. It's the word "can." One CAN help the other up. Two CAN defend themselves. But the issue always comes down to WILL you? This is what marriage is designed for. When you can, will you? This marriage thing CAN WORK well, or it can also fail miserably. It depends on you, if you want to put the work into making it work. It takes work to help the other up. One of the greatest videos I've seen is in a Special Olympics race, when one contestant falls down. Instead of racing to the finish, the other stops, turns around, and helps the other up. It is a tremendous picture of love and compassion that you would never get from two professional racers who are only focused on getting across the line themselves. You are in this TOGETHER. So you now are bound together to run this race together, even when one is slowing the other down. That means you look at these directives from God, and you realize this is what you are vowing to do - get through this thing TOGETHER. When marriage becomes a competition, and husband and wife are the ones pushing each other down and attacking each other with rude comments and attacks of character, it is the worse thing in the world that can happen.

It seems like such a small little point when you read the text: almost like an afterthought. And unfortunately, it's this last point that is often an afterthought. But this little line at the end of the text is the most important of all. If you forget about this third point, chances are your marriage will fail. It's the third strand. Without the third strand your marriage will be much weaker. **A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.**

Solomon wrote this book in the aftermath of a broken life. He had tried to live much of his life without the third strand. He did about everything imaginable with a ton of riches, but in the process he left the third strand out of the picture. So a major theme of this book is “Meaningless.” So maybe this is written as a reflection on that viewpoint of life - with a quick reminder about the third strand. Maybe it’s written as a teaser for people to ask and want to find out, “What is that third strand? Why is it so important?”

The third strand is the LORD. The third strand is Jesus. God is love. He is the One who binds us to Himself with His sacrificial love and death on the cross. He is the One who gives us hope in the resurrection. He is the One who fills our hearts with a different love towards each other - more than a sexual love - an agape love that is filled with patience, kindness, and sacrifice. This is the only type of love that can really work in this world, where people fall in and out of love like you’d fall in a ditch. That’s not what God calls us to. It’s not what keeps us together. It’s the third strand that is most important - the strong cord - Who is meant to be intertwined with the both of you together - so that He isn’t only a part of your lives here at this wedding, but at home and at work and everywhere you go. He is the immortal strand, the unbreakable strand, bound together and meant to be in the middle of your lives, not on the outside looking in.

Why does Solomon compare marriage to a cord? I don’t know for sure, but cords can be used for different purposes. You pull people out of a ditch with a rope and climb mountains with a rope. You bind things together with cords. Cords tie things together. Cords are useful in life.

Marriage is a useful thing in life. You can be a cord to help tie each other to Christ. You can be a rope to bring others out of the ditch. It’s not an outdated concept. It’s made by God’s design, for a man and a woman to come together for sexual happiness, companionship, and children too. It binds you together, and enables you also to be bound to Jesus as you hear His word together, pray together, sing together, and fight for each other and help each other out when you fall. There is a hymn that sums this text together well -

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The unity of heart and mind
Is like to that above.

We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear.

From sorrow, toil, and pain
And sin we shall be free,
And perfect love and friendship reign
Through all eternity.

God bless you both as you are bound together today. Amen.