

Today we are in the 4th week of our summer series entitled, Does IT Matter.

After looking at why humanity matters in week one, why matter matters in week 2, last week we looked at why Jesus matters. And that song Kady just sang (Love Never Fails by Brandon Heath) is a perfect transition between last week's sermon on Jesus, and this week's sermon on: Does marriage matter?

Last Sunday we focused on two primary words with regards to Jesus. Love and life.

We looked at Jesus' unconditional love for us which is simply hard to find in our world today.

No matter how much **we** fail, Jesus' love for us never will. And secondly, we looked at life.

We looked at the biblical Truth that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life...and this is true for both eternal life, but also for life in the here and now.

And one area in our lives today where Jesus serves as a tremendous model for us to mirror, is how we relate to others ... How we love others...

And for our specific topic today, how husband and wife are to love each other within a marital relationship.

In a world that has confused what real love looks like, the marriage relationship that is founded on the principles laid out in the Bible is much bigger than the two individuals involved.

A marriage that includes believers of Jesus reflects back on Jesus Himself...for better or for worse... so yes, when wondering if marriage matters in 2019, the answer is a definitive yes.

Before we dive in, I just want to acknowledge my understanding that a topic like marriage is very hard for some. It can be a painful topic. Maybe you're single, longing to be married, or recovering from the sting of divorce, or still experiencing the pain of the death of your spouse.

Know that you all have been heavy on my heart as I've been working through this topic...

And let me also say, thank you.

Thank you for still coming this morning knowing that this would be our topic.

As we hone in on the marital relationship this morning, the two words I'd like to focus on as to why marriage matters are: model and mirror.

Jesus — as the way the truth and the life — functions as our biblical model that we are to mirror within our marriages.

The model for marriage begins **immediately** in the bible. Shawn spoke to this two weeks ago when preaching on why matter matters. In Genesis 1 we saw the rhythmic pattern of:

'Then God Said', 'Then God Said', 'Then God said,'...

Let there be, Let there be, Let there be...

And there was, And there was, And there was...

And, God saw that it was good — it was good — it was good.

But...It wasn't "very" good until everything was completed, culminating with the creation of man and woman. Now Genesis 2 gives us a zoomed in version of the creation of Adam and Eve...that in fact Adam being left by himself as the lone image bearer of God was not the completed design...

it was in fact, not good.

Then in the end of Genesis 2 we get the detailed narrative of the creation of Eve, culminating with the often used verse in weddings today:

“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.”

Two weeks ago Shawn spoke to the cultural mandate that Adam and Eve had...he focused on their duties as stewards of all that God had created. He was conveniently able to skip over the other part of that cultural mandate...and that was that mankind, starting with Adam and Eve, was to be fruitful and multiply.

Now, with an audience ranging from Kindergarten up, we don't need to go into details...

But, suffice to say there was only one way Adam and Eve could fulfill this cultural mandate.

And in reality, there has only been **one** way of fulfilling this cultural mandate for **every** generation up until very recently when alternate ways of multiplying on this earth has been introduced through medical and technological advances.

Given the very clear creative design of male and female,
the leave and cleave,

and the be fruitful and multiply,

it seems like a reasonable conclusion to draw that God's biblical design for marriage is between a man and a woman.

Now, with that being said, I find it critical to pause and say a couple more things, very briefly, since I know making that statement can be divisive today.

First, and most importantly...I am using this book (the Bible) to establish the ground rules of marriage. And since I am using this book, I cannot expect anyone who does not 'stand under' this book and its teachings to agree with my understanding of what it says about marriage.

Secondly, one thing that this book makes very clear — which was our focus last Sunday —

It makes it very clear that anyone who 'stands under' this book is called to love all people.

Even people that disagree with what it says. Even people that live lives completely opposite of what this book prescribes ... even those people, who are in San Francisco, at this very minute, participating in the pride parade...most, if not all of whom, would argue for a non traditional definition of marriage.

Remember how Jesus lived and loved?

He went out of his way to love those who lived OUTSIDE the parameters of his bible — our current Old Testament — and He came with a full force attack against those who would use their Bible to condemn and judge the “quote unquote sinners” around them.

So while the Bible, as the leadership of PBCC understands it, makes it clear, that marriage is between a man and a woman, the Bible is emphatically clear that we are to love those who hold different views.

And it's not like marriages within the Christian Church are doing all that well themselves... We need to focus on the things **we** can control... We need to improve our **own** marriages. Instead of highlighting how **others** are living rebelliously, we need to realize that all Christian heterosexual marriages fall short of the biblical model. We need to recapture our understanding of a biblical marriage... and that's what I hope to do with the remainder of our time.

Returning briefly to the Genesis narrative...

We see, very early on, that the whole, two becoming one flesh thing, is destined for hardship. The first poor decision in recorded history leads to the first game of hide and seek. Shame drives Adam and Eve to hide behind the trees that God had created. And then, in the first marital confrontation, we see the first ever, and often repeated, blame game. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent... neither wanting to take ownership... both wanting to blame the other. Sound like any marriages you know?

This is the model that most of us follow in our marriages.

And it's the **fallen** model... it's the **broken** model...

We forget that there is a completely different model and picture of marriage throughout the Bible, culminating with a wedding at the end of it.

We briefly looked at this wedding last week in Revelation 21.

It's the wedding of Jesus, the groom, and His Bride the church... which consists of all the redeemed, all those, who confess Him to be Lord of all...

So ... looking at the big picture the Bible paints using the marriage of Adam and Eve on the one end and then Jesus and the church on the back end...

Those whom God created in the beginning failed to live according to the way that God had prescribed for them. They thought they knew better... they thought they could go their **own** way based on their **own** truth. And they were wrong. They turned on God, and they turned on each other...

And all mankind since that time has done the same...

In relationships, whether marriage or otherwise... we are drawn to take the selfish route.

Yet God, in his grace and forgiveness, and in his unconditional love for us all is moving history towards this eternal marriage.

But of course there's only one way for the perfect and holy God to spend eternity with a group of fallen immortals... and that's for God to take it into His own hands to prepare us, the church, as His bride.

And so we get, in the middle of history...

Jesus Christ.

If you missed last week's sermon, you can go back and listen to it, but, here is where I would insert the entirety of last week's sermon.

The God of the Bible is the ONLY God, of all religions, to take it upon Himself, to make a way possible for mankind to be with Him.

And this, of course, is in the divine person of Jesus Christ.

And it is His life, death, resurrection, and ascension that makes it possible for us to make it down the aisle to the altar at the eternal wedding.

Ephesians 5 reminds us that Jesus gave Himself up for us so that we, the church, would be presented at the eternal altar "as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Jesus makes it possible for us to enter into this eternal marriage.

This is a source of good news and hope for us all ...

Whether you're in a healthy marriage or a dysfunctional one.

Whether you're divorced or on the brink of divorce.

Whether you're widowed or whether you're single and simply longing to be married ...

this picture of our eternal wedding should be a source of great joy, longing, and hope.

But this cross should also function as the model for our marriages right now...even today.

It is what this cross represents that stands in contrast to the Bible's first marriage of Adam and Eve.

This cross and all it represents gives us the answer key to strong and healthy relationships, and certainly strong and healthy marriages.

Our world tells us that the key to a strong marriage is love...and that isn't wrong...necessarily.

The problem is that our world's definition of love is sooooo self-centered and based almost entirely on feelings. What used to be an **implicit** encouragement is becoming more and more **explicit** it seems:

"Find someone that will make **me** happy ..." ... we're encouraged

"find someone that will meet **my** needs ... find someone that checks off all the boxes that **I** want in a spouse...and then, if that person, either while dating, or while married, fails to meet **my** standard, just simply move on to the next person that **does** check all the boxes ... until, of course, they no longer do."

Tim Keller, in his book "The meaning of marriage," —which I **highly** recommend and have included in your worship guide—traces the origins of this self centered focus to the Enlightenment, when much of the focus of life shifted from a communal sense to an individualistic one.

He writes:

“Instead of finding meaning through self denial, through giving up one’s freedoms, and binding oneself to the duties of marriage and family, marriage was redefined as finding emotional and physical fulfillment and self-actualization.”

Richard Foster, who wrote the book Celebration of Discipline 40 years ago has recently written a short reflection on that book in light of what has transpired the past 4 decades. One of the primary changes he says he sees is that the spirit of the age today is narcissism.

In his short booklet, when addressing this new ‘spirit of the age’ Foster writes that, narcissism “is in the very air we breathe...this extreme self-centeredness; this total self-absorption; this exaggerated sense of entitlement; this utter self-obsession.”

Now while Foster in this booklet was reflecting on the dangers of narcissism within pastoral ministry, there is absolutely **no** doubt that this narcissistic way of thinking has flooded our relationships...it has drowned far too many marriages and will continue to do so ... unless, of course ... unless we begin to shift our eyes away from our culture ...and back onto the cross.

For the cross, and all it represents, is our model for healthy marriages.

When our culture tells us that we should look for someone who will meet all our needs ... the cross tells us to sacrificially meet the needs of our spouse.

When our world tells us that when wronged, get revenge, or at least just move on...the cross stands in contrast and says, “no ... extend grace, forgiveness and unconditional love.”

When our world tells us that our words of commitment that we exchange in our vows are not binding...that in fact with a few signatures and thousands of dollars, the words of commitment can be erased and filed in the ‘oopsie daisy’ category ...

Jesus, from the cross, looks down upon us and says, “it is finished.”

For it was on the cross that God’s covenantal love was forever sealed.

Never has one’s commitment to upholding a covenant been more evident than on that day that Jesus hung on the cross.

Imagine with me for a minute. Imagine if God held to his commitment and covenant as loosely as many of us do today. Imagine, if Jesus, before He uttered those final words and breathed his last, looked down on us ... and began to ask the questions many of us wrestle with, when the going gets tough in our marriages.

I found myself entering into this mental exercise the past few weeks. What if Jesus rightfully declared from the cross, “Ryan won’t remain faithful to me. He’ll pursue other loves...”

What if Jesus thought... “What am **I** going to get out of this relationship with Ryan?” ... “is Ryan worth this whole cross thing?”

if Jesus held our level of commitment ...He would have, without question, come down off that cross.

But He didn’t...He didn’t step down off that cross.He stayed on that cross...He hung on that cross... and He died on that cross... Why?

Because that’s what TRUE love looks like.

Because that's what commitment looks like.

That's what a faithful God looks like when He keeps His promise, when He keeps His covenant... when He loves unconditionally.

And this is what we hear when we read Scriptures like 1 John 4 that Bob read for us earlier.

Real love, not the sentimental and fake 'happily ever after' love...true love, is seen in Jesus selflessly and sacrificially hanging on the cross.

And this cross, and all it represents, is the model of love God wants us to mirror. This is the model of love we are called to mirror in our marriages.

A marriage is the closest relationship available to mankind to mirror this kind of love...because a marriage is the most intimate relationship available to us. Basically, marriage is the place where we **will** feel the sting of betrayal and loneliness, and still be faced with the choice to love counter culturally...or not. We can choose to mirror the love of Jesus...or not.

I should probably add here, to avoid any ambiguity, that in situations of abuse, Jesus is not calling you to stay in that relationship and bear **that** cross.

Our discussion today is focusing on the common, every day, every marriage, life is hard, marriage is hard, sort of struggles.

And now I'd like to look at some of the implications of all this to our own marriages, whether current or future. All of this "Jesus loves me talk" at a high elevation is very uplifting...I know. But, I also know, that as soon as the call to love as Jesus loves leaves the realm of the hypothetical and lands in the living room, or bedroom, of our own homes...it can get a bit uncomfortable.

But you know what, being a bit uncomfortable is an OK thing from time to time.

Maybe even right now, you're in a marriage that is struggling.

You may be in here, sitting next to your spouse, the same spouse you stood along-side in front of family and friends and made a lifelong commitment to love and care for, to nurture and support... for better or for worse. But, back on that day, your wedding day, you never imagined what 'worse' could actually look like...you never imagined that 'worse' could ever look like the marriage you're currently living in.

Well let me encourage you this morning. Do not give up hope! The same God that sent His Son to the cross on your behalf, and raised Him from the dead through His Spirit ...has filled you with that same spirit. The Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, is within you if are His follower...

That same Spirit is in your spouse if he or she is His follower...

And if that spirit can raise a dead man, He can resurrect your marriage! Take heart!

Have hope in the resurrected Jesus and the power of His spirit!!

But of course...this will take hard work. And this 'hard work' exhortation is for all in the room.

Whether you're in a struggling marriage, a thriving marriage, or a "one day hope to be married" mindset ... Hard work is required with marriage.

Remember that our world subtly plants in our subconscious that if we have to work too hard at a relationship it simply must not be right.

Listen ... when we talk marriage, we are talking about two sinful and broken people two people who will have days, or SEASONS, of selfishness, trying to live in this world ... together ... as one flesh... ya think that marriage **isn't** gonna be hard work!?!?

I mean, C'mon ... out of all the lies the world tries to sell us, we can't be foolish enough to buy into the lie that because loving our spouse is hard it means we married the wrong person.

That's just ridiculous...

Our world has turned us into consumers of all things, we always look for what a certain thing or a certain person can bring to us...can provide for us...can do for us. No no no ... this is NOT the biblical picture of marriage, as much as some of us might want it to be ... it simply isn't it.

So, what are we left to do, you may be wondering.

Well, when in doubt, we look to Jesus. He's our model.

We look to Him so we can more accurately mirror His love...

And the best way to begin to change how we love our spouses and mirror Christ's love... is by simply looking in the mirror.

We embrace humility, and we look in the mirror.

We identify our **own** areas of selfishness.

We bring them before the Lord, and we bring them before our spouse...and we repent.

I understand this is hard. I understand that if you have years, perhaps decades, of callousness built up towards your spouse that this seems like an impossible task.

I have a friend who recently realized that after several years of a critical heart, he had built up callouses towards his wife to the point that despite being blessed with a very gifted and talented and caring wife, he wasn't able to appreciate any of the good things about her! It's scary what callouses on our hearts will do and the places they'll take us!

And I understand that you want to see your spouse change before you consider actually making changes...I get it. My friend was waiting for his wife to make the first move towards change.

But this isn't some trivial staring contest to see who can go the longest without blinking ... this is marriage. This is God's most grand relationship that He wrote into creation. This is the relationship that God uses to display what our eternal reality will look like. The way we live within our marriages, is a mirror to the world, of how our God loves the world. This is not the right grounds for some kind of contest to see who can outlast the other in stubbornness. If you're in here right now and your heart has been calloused toward your spouse.

You take the first step, this morning ... don't wait for them ...

You say I'm sorry ... and **you** say, I love you.

It may have taken decades to build the callouses, but with the help of the Spirit of God, it doesn't have to take decades to soften them. There is hope.

When the Spirit of the Lord is involved, there's **always** hope.

Maybe you're more recently married, or, maybe you can tell you're in the early phases of your heart callousing. In the early phases of wondering, did I make a mistake?

Do I actually still like this person?

Is this person meeting the needs he or she promised on our wedding day??

You're asking the wrong questions...

Again, I challenge you to look in the mirror.

You made vows. You made a commitment. You entered a covenant.

Your wedding day was not an exercise in conditionality...

When we get married, our vows are promises that no matter the situation, we endure.

We endure because Christ endured.

We persevere, because Christ persevered.

We lean on the Lord and rely on His Spirit.

And we trust that no matter how alone we might feel, that God is always present...He will always be faithful to His promise to be with us. And this promise of God's presence is applicable to all of us, whether happily married or happily single, or whether unhappily married or unhappily single.

As I've been studying this topic of marriage, both biblically and culturally, in recent weeks, I have become convinced of one reason in particular why biblical marriage, matters, and matters greatly for those of us who identify as Christ followers.

It is my strong belief that over the next few decades, as relationships shift and definitions of things like marriage continue to change, a strong Christian marriage may become one of our best evangelistic tools.

As selfishness and narcissism will more than likely continue to rule our days, examples of selfless loving and living between a husband and wife, who make the conscious choice to live lives of selflessness and sacrifice, —**out of a response to Jesus' life and love**—this approach to our marriages may end up becoming one of our easiest onramps to talk about Jesus' sacrificial and unconditional love with other people.

As we live out 1 John 4 and John 15 within our marriages...we mirror the love that Jesus showed us as culminated in His work on the cross. It will be hard to do, but, we must remember that there are bigger things in this life than simply having all our own selfish needs and desires met ... our marriages **matter** because of the eternal love and commitment they reflect.

And we ... **by the grace of God**, and **ONLY** by the grace of God, become a model for non believers, of what Jesus' selfless and unconditional love looks like.

So yes ... marriage matters greatly... if you are married, your marriage matters.

If you're engaged to be married, your future marriage matters.

And if you hope to one day get married or remarry ... your marriage will matter.

In closing, I'd like us all to return in our minds to a wedding we've attended.

If you're married, return in your mind's eye to your wedding day.

If you're not married, return in your mind's eye to a recent wedding you've attended.

Everyone is gathering around and taking their seats.

The family gets seated...

the groom and his groomsmen take their places...

and then everyone begins to look to the back of the venue...

everyone is anxiously awaiting that first glimpse of the bride...

and soon enough she appears off in the distance...beautiful and beaming.

then everyone stands to honor the bride,

At some point, the bride and groom lock eyes...

I want to pause at this point for a second.

If you're married...sit in this moment in your mind.

Sit in the moment where you first locked eyes on your spouse...

whether you're the groom looking up the aisle or the bride looking down it...recapture that moment...

Do you remember that moment?

Do all you can to block out the months, years, or even decades of hardship that have followed...

there you are...locking eyes with your spouse on your wedding day.

Wasn't that a cool moment!?...Now I wanna ask, with that picture in mind...

How are you doing with upholding your wedding vows from that day??

I ask this not to convict you, yet, I understand some of you may feel convicted.

I ask it more to remind you that on that day you made a covenant before your family, friends, God, and each other ... **that** commitment was centered on loving each other just as Jesus loves you.

Can you leave here today with a renewed sense of commitment to your vows?

Can you leave here understanding that God, through His Spirit, wants to help you strengthen your marriage. **God has a significant interest in your marriage because your marriage reflects His love for us all!?**

It has been my prayer that every married person in this room this morning can leave here with a renewed understanding of the love and commitment they are reflecting in and through their marriage.

But returning now to the wedding we were picturing in our minds...

Return in your mind to that moment when you saw the bride.

As all brides are on their wedding day, the most beautiful woman in the world ...

But now I wonder ... did you happen to catch a glimpse of the groom?

Did you see him with a huge smile on his face, full of pride and joy?

That picture — that full picture — is the picture the Bible gives us for how we are viewed in God's eyes as His bride. The biblical metaphor of this wedding in the book of Revelation is of Jesus and His people, the church...**all** believers.

But just to be sure you understand God's deep love for you, I'd like you to picture yourself in this scene...

As the band comes up, I'd like to ask you to close your eyes for a minute and hold that picture in your mind's eye of the bride and groom locking eyes.

Only, in this case...it's just you and God...locking eyes.

Can you see it? God, the eternal groom, is looking up the aisle ... and He's locking eyes with you ...!!

And He's smiling ... not just smiling...he's beaming with joy...

The God of the Universe is locking eyes with you and He's smiling.

He has chosen you.

He sent His Son to die on your behalf, for this very moment.

When He sees you, He sees who you are in Christ...

...you are pure...

...you are holy...

...you are eternally loved...

You can open your eyes ...

This, my friends, ... this wedding day awaits us all ... it doesn't matter if you are married or single ... divorced or widowed...there is coming a day when all who are in Christ, as the Global church, will live in the presence of the almighty God, because of the selfless and sacrificial gift of His Son ... and until **that** wedding day, we love.

Whether single or married, we love all others with the love of Jesus ...

and for those who are married or will be married, we are to reflect His love by loving our spouse in a way that is completely countercultural...we love selflessly and sacrificially.

For **this** is the biblical model of marriage...and this model matters...

For this, is what real love looks like... ... Amen