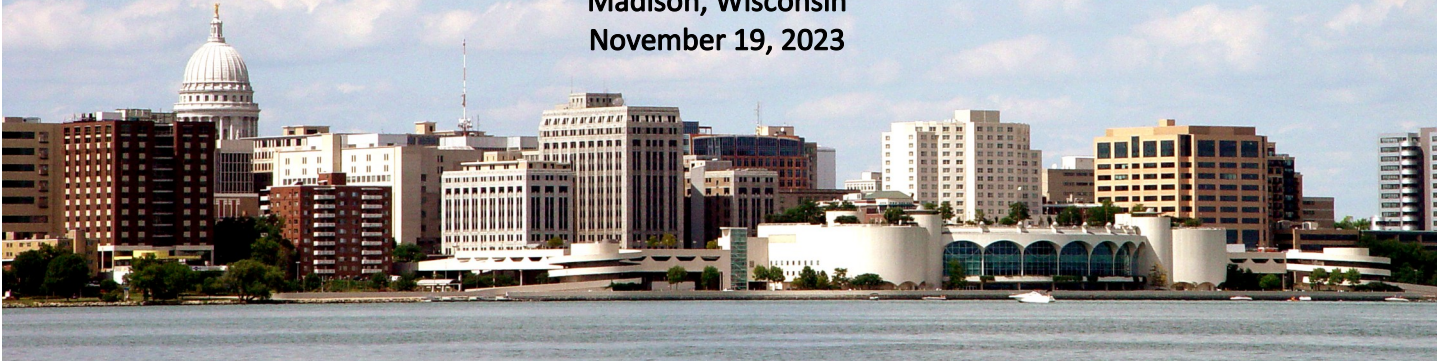


Marriage

Hebrews 13:4

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
November 19, 2023



Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation! If you are visiting this morning, we are glad to have you with us. We'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card online if you can, or you can use one of the cards from the pew in front of you. Whatever works for you, we would love to hear from you, and we invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns.

As our tradition has been for several years now, we'd like to start this morning by sharing the good news that God so loves the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. He came to this earth and lived a perfect life, he died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up alive on the first day of the week. We respond to this good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And we have several examples to share this morning, starting with an update from the Warners Chapel congregation in Clemmons, North Carolina. They say that "Tracy Phillips was baptized this afternoon by North Carolina School of Biblical Studies student Jacque following several weeks of Bible studies with Mike."

And then we have an update from Brandon Houchen from the Franklin Church of Christ, and I'm not sure which Franklin (perhaps Tennessee), but I'm sharing it anyway, because they say that "The sermon was unique. The whole sermon only consisted of reading scriptures on baptism with no commentary. Because of the power of God's word, someone responded." That is awesome!

And then we have an interesting update from Cuba, where a gospel preacher reports that a mission team sent there five months ago have baptized 38 people since they arrived, and this past Sunday they had a total attendance of 65. They explain that this is almost unheard of in Cuba, and they are asking for our prayers, as this will not go unnoticed by the authorities. And this post really got my attention because it ended with the hashtag "baxterbaptisms." The Baxter Institute has been around for over 50 years, they are located in Honduras, and their goal is to train preachers, and teachers, and missionaries to the Spanish-speaking world. And I believe they were named for Batsell Barrett Baxter, the same man I was named after (also just over 50 years ago). But I am thankful for the "Baxter baptisms" this week!

We have an update from the Lord's church in Sandpoint, Idaho. I looked it up, and these people are pretty close to the Canadian border. They posted this week and they say that "Kathy put on Christ in baptism last night! We look forward to growing in God's Word with her, serving with her and reaching more souls together." And then they quote Acts 2:47, which says that, **"...the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."**

There are several others that we just don't have time to share, so I'll wrap it up with one more, where the post says, "Praise God! Another baptism in Ukraine. Christ's Church is growing. AMEN!!! Welcome Tamara Andreevna to the Family of God. She is 85 years old." As always, we share these examples to emphasize the good news, and if you would like to know more, please get in touch.

This morning, we continue in the very last chapter in our study of Hebrews! And today, we come to one of the most counter-cultural passages anywhere in the New Testament. The theme of the book, of course, is "Jesus is Better," and in this last chapter we come to a series of very practical applications. Last week, we looked at how important it is to love the brethren, to practice hospitality toward strangers, and to remember those in prison. All of that, of course, can be a challenge, but today we come to a passage that if we obey it will truly and significantly set us apart from the world. It's a passage about intimacy in marriage. The author, in fact, uses a word in this passage that we would recognize today in English in the word COITUS. If I am not 100% sure as to the pronunciation or etymology (the background) of a word, I will sometimes look it up online and hit the little speaker where the online dictionary will pronounce it for you. Just a little advice here: If you do this on a Friday morning in your favorite crowded coffee shop, make sure your volume is set at an acceptable level before hitting that button! But this is the word that we will come to in just a moment, translated in the NASB as the "marriage bed." That's what we're dealing with here. In the NASB, "marriage bed" is something of a euphemism for sex.

So, going into this, I think we realize that we are surrounded by it – on the web, in the movies, at school, at work, in our music, and in the news – almost constantly. It is important, then, that we make sure we check in with God on this subject on a regular basis, because the culture around us has a way of affecting us. I think of traveling or moving to another part of the United States, and I think of how easy it is for us to pick up an accent. Most of you know that our daughter moved to Tennessee a few months ago. At any moment, I expect to call her and hear her use the word "y'all." I know it's coming! It's just a matter of time, because we tend to be influenced by the people around us. And it's no different with our views on human sexuality.

The word of God calls us to be different, and we might think that the contrast between what God expects and what the world is doing has never been more extreme. And yet, there was some weird stuff going on back in the First Century. Sometimes we forget this. Those who heard this message from Hebrews for the very first time lived in a culture where people did pretty much whatever they wanted, with no moral restraint whatsoever. Men would often have both wives and concubines. Many of the Roman temples were full of prostitutes (you worshiped your god by visiting a prostitute inside the temple). Roman leaders would often have young boys on the side. But the Christian faith was different, and we have records from the first few centuries where God's people were called out and publicly ridiculed for promoting sexual purity. We think of what Peter warned about in 1 Peter 4:4-5 (our scripture reading this morning) when he spoke of those in the world as **"having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries."** And then he said that **"In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you."** The early Christians were different, and they were abused for it. So also today, we as God's people are called to be different. And this verse from Hebrews is one of those passages that call us to be completely counter-cultural, even outrageously pure in this area, even to the point where the world is shocked when they learn what we really believe.

This morning, then, let's take a look at this passage that calls us to be different. This is Hebrews 13:4, where the author of Hebrews says that,

Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.

This morning, let's learn what God wants us to learn from this passage...

I. **...and let's start with the opening line, where we have the reminder that MARRIAGE IS TO BE HELD IN HONOR AMONG ALL.**

And to help us understand what's being said here, I'm including several of the more popular translations down below (along with the last one which is not a translation, but a paraphrase). But the word translated "**honor**" is a word that refers to something being extremely valuable or "precious." In fact, the word is used to describe "**precious**" stones (in 1 Corinthians 3:12), and it's used to describe the "**precious blood**" of Jesus (in 1 Peter 1:19). Marriage, then, is to be treated as something that is extremely valuable or precious, it is to be "**held in honor.**"

Back in April of this year, when we were studying the fact that those who are spiritually mature are able to discern good from evil (in Hebrews 5), I made the comment that "...not everybody believes that a commitment to a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman is good." Some of you might have wondered: Who's saying that a lifelong marriage between a man and a woman is not good? In my mind, those who are most guilty of saying this are married people who refuse to honor their vows, where actions speak louder than words. I know a number of married people who say that marriage is not good. Beyond this, we have many voices in the world around us, devaluing the Biblical definition of a family. We had a social justice organization that (for a time) had language on their website explaining that one of their goals was to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure." I would also encourage you to look up Marxism on marriage. I believe that Marx himself actually had a long and successful marriage; however, I also believe that he viewed traditional marriage as making capitalism possible; traditional marriage got in the way of what he wanted to accomplish. There are others in this world who have compared marriage to slavery – and I have seen this from the feminist side but also from the man's point of view. I was doing some reading this week where someone was comparing marriage to the feudal system back in the middle ages – just as a man bows before a king to be knighted, so also a man kneels before his future wife with an engagement ring. And the author was making the point that marriage is slavery for men, that even the concept of chivalry is slavery. I think most of us have heard the old "ball and chain" references. And there are many others, of course, who have devalued the Biblical concept of marriage by prohibiting marriage, by demanding that certain church leaders abstain from marriage completely. And then, on top of this, our culture dishonors marriage by putting it off as long as possible and replacing it with sexual sin and pornography. I'm just saying that marriage is not always as honored as it should be.

But I hope we notice that marriage is to be held in honor "**among all.**" And it's interesting to me that honoring marriage is not limited to those who are married. We might expect the author to say that husbands and wives are to honor marriage, but he says that "**marriage is to be held in honor among all,**" among men, among women, among the elderly, among children, among those who are married, and among those who are single. Marriage is to be honored. Marriage is good.

Now, this doesn't mean that marriage is for everybody. Paul addresses this in 1 Corinthians 7. There are some good and honorable reasons not to be married. There are some situations, in fact, where it would be a sin to

get married (addressed by Jesus in Matthew 19 and by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7). One of the articles in the cubbyholes today, by the way, comes from a fairly new Christian out in Idaho. This man called to check on a church here in Madison where he could send his loved ones who live in the area if they were ever interested. And he asked me what we taught about divorce. We seemed to agree, and he asked if he could write up his thoughts and ask for my input. I had a few very small suggestions, but what he wrote is pretty straightforward, so I asked and he gave me permission to pass it along to all of you. Let me know if you have any suggestions or questions of your own. But I'm just saying that honoring marriage doesn't mean that everybody needs to be married.

Marriage itself, though, is good and is to be honored. Marriage was created by God (described for us in Genesis 2). God knew what he was doing when he made a woman for the man – not multiple women and not another man. Men and women were literally made for each other. Marriage is designed to bring children into the world and to give those children a stable, loving home. Marriage is designed to satisfy our need for intimacy. For more on that, I would encourage you to read Proverbs 5 as well as the Song of Solomon. Marriage gives us some unique opportunities for spiritual growth. Under ideal circumstances, we are accountable to one another, we encourage each other. But we also learn something about sacrifice and submission. Marriage contributes to the stability of society as a whole. These are some of the benefits of marriage.

So how can all of us honor marriage as we should? I would give just a few practical suggestions. First of all, I'd suggest that we celebrate weddings and anniversaries. Jesus honored marriage by attending a celebration and ultimately turning water into wine, his first miracle. And then, remember anniversaries. We don't have to be married ourselves to say "congrats" to a husband and wife who have made it many years. Some of you have been married for decades with never a harsh word being said. Congrats, that is awesome! Others here today are just barely sticking together, and it's been rough, but congrats to you as well for sticking with it!

But probably the greatest way to honor marriage applies to those of us who are married: We can commit to making our marriage a good one! We honor marriage by staying committed and working through difficulties. It may take work, it takes sacrifice and submission (Paul says that it does), but we honor marriage by being good at it. I would encourage you to try to find a copy of your wedding vows if you can, and look at those. Go back and look at the pictures, watch the video if you can, pull up the certificate, and remember those promises. I remember my grandparents (my mom's parents) always had a copy of their marriage certificate over their bed. I haven't thought about that for a long time, but it was probably a reminder to them that they made some promises. My other grandfather (my dad's dad) gave us some good advice before we got married. He suggested never using the word "divorce" – not even jokingly, and especially not in an argument, and that has been good advice. We honor marriage by renewing our commitment. Someone has said that, "Marriage is a lifetime responsibility of learning to share oneself with somebody, of living with hurts received and hurts directed, of forgiveness, joy and reunion. Marriage is a long, sometimes awkward dance in which two people who are selfish and in need of forgiveness learn slowly, by the grace of God, to build something beautiful and lasting, raise children and establish a home." I love that, because it speaks of how those of us who are married can honor marriage.

And if you are not married, you may be able to support the marriages around you. When your friends have trouble, encourage them to stick with it, even when it's not easy. If you have children who are married, BUTT OUT! I'm not talking about intervening in a case of physical violence, but as a parent, I don't need to be taking sides. This is something you two need to work out. There's a reason why God said that a man is to ***"leave his father and mother"*** and he is to ***"cleave to his wife"*** (back in Genesis 2).

But the point here in the first part of this verse is that ***“marriage is to be held in honor among all.”*** And we can do this by celebrating weddings and anniversaries, by being good at marriage ourselves, and by encouraging those around us who are married. Again, some of you have been married for decades, and it’s been pure bliss the whole time. That’s awesome. Others have had some hard times here and there, but there’s a value in sticking with it even when it’s difficult, and we honor you for that as well.

II. As we move to the middle of verse 4, we find that THE MARRIAGE BED IS TO BE UNDEFILED.

The writer uses a word that refers to being “without stain,” so it’s the idea of being pure. And as I mentioned earlier, the ***“bed”*** part of this is the word that we would recognize in English as “coitus.” The word ***“marriage”*** isn’t actually in this phrase, but in the context of marriage, the bed is to be pure. So we realize that the ***“bed”*** (so to speak), or what happens in the marriage bed, is a gift from God, and it is reserved for those who are married.

Paul addresses this in 1 Thessalonians 4 (p. 1849). In 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, Paul says,

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

As I understand this passage, Paul is addressing those who are not yet married. As opposed to how people in the world treat each other, we as God’s people are commanded to treat others in ***“sanctification and honor”*** (particularly with reference to sexual immorality), because if we don’t, if we treat each other with ***“lustful passion,”*** we are actually defrauding our brother. When we commit sexual sin outside of marriage we are actually taking something that is not ours. So, this is one part of the bed being undefiled.

The other part of the marriage bed being undefiled obviously applies within the marriage relationship itself, and Paul lays it out in 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. It seems that the people in Corinth were getting the impression that it wasn’t good for a man to touch a woman (and vice versa), but Paul clarifies and says that that’s not the case at all. In fact, he says that this is why ***“each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband,”*** and he continues by saying that,

The husband must fulfill his duty to his wife, and likewise also the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does; and likewise also the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

So, instead of committing sexual immorality, we get married, and then we have freedom, and we give ourselves to each other. We don’t demand our rights, we don’t take what we’re owed, but we spend the rest of our lives outdoing one another in honor, by giving ourselves to this other person. However, like many other

gifts from God, this intimacy between husbands and wives can be abused or neglected. And if it's neglected, Paul says that depriving each other puts us at risk of temptation. If this is a challenge in your marriage, I would encourage you to read through those opening verses of 1 Corinthians 7 together and ask each other: What's our plan for following through with this? How do we make it a priority to give ourselves to each other? And if you feel like it's too far gone, if there's sexual trauma or sin in the past (or even ongoing), I would encourage you to pray about it (like Paul suggests), but I would also encourage you to get help. Let me know, and I can try to connect you with some therapists either here in Madison or online. But don't give up.

Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews gives the reminder that the marriage bed is to be *"undefiled."*

III. **As we come to the end of this passage, let's close today by noting the reason for everything we've learned up to this point: FOR FORNICATORS AND ADULTERERS GOD WILL JUDGE.**

As we discussed a few weeks ago, *"fornication"* is a more general term for sexual sin in general (sex before marriage, homosexuality, bestiality, and so on), while *"adultery"* is a particular kind of sexual sin, where someone commits sexual sin in a way that causes them to be unfaithful to a spouse (many today would describe this as "cheating" on a spouse). There are many situations where entering into another marriage after a divorce is considered *"adultery"* – it's not just the one time act of getting married (this sin isn't just the act of signing on a dotted line in front of a minister or a judge), but the real sin is the ongoing relationship. And according to Luke 16:18, anyone who marries someone who is divorced also commits adultery, and this has some far-reaching and serious implications. So here at the end of the verse, the author reminds us that *"fornicators and adulterers God will judge."* God sees, God is concerned about our behavior, and God will judge. God takes this seriously.

As with any other sin we don't repent of and turn away from, sexual sin (like all others) will cause us to be lost, separated from God for eternity. However, forgiveness is available, and that's the good news! Sexual sin is not the unforgivable sin. And I am so thankful, because some of us are guilty of it. As we come near the end of today's study, I want to invite you to be turning with me to a passage in 1 Corinthians 6 (p. 1788). And while we're making our way to 1 Corinthians 6, let's also make sure we don't make the mistake of saying that certain sins are worse than others. That may be true in a sense, in that some sins have worse consequences than others here in this life. But any sin has the ability to separate us from God if we continue in it. But the good news is: We don't have to continue in sin. This brings us to 1 Corinthians 6, and we'll start with verses 9-10, where Paul says, *"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God."* That's quite the list! And we may try to rank these on a scale of "that's not too bad" on up there to "wow, that's absolutely terrible," but Paul makes no such distinction. Instead, these sins (including fornication and adultery, as we have studied in Hebrews 13:4), all of these sins, any of these sins will keep us out of God's eternal kingdom. That's the bad news. The good news comes in verse 11, where Paul continues and says, *"Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."* These people in the city of Corinth had lived in some of these sins. They didn't just commit adultery; they were *"adulterers."* They didn't just commit an isolated act of homosexuality; no, they were *"homosexuals."* They didn't just steal something when they were five years old; no, they were *"thieves."* This was their identity. They identified themselves by these sins. But something happened, and these people were *"washed,"* they were *"sanctified,"* they were *"justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ."* These people had a change of heart resulting in a change in behavior, and these people obeyed the gospel and became an active part of the Lord's church in Corinth. They heard the warning that God judges sin, so they turned away from it, and they turned to Jesus. Have you sinned? Are you sinning right now? Obey the

gospel! Years ago, we got regular reports from friends of ours who were missionaries in Brazil, and something that happened quite often down there is that couples would live together before being married. And often, they would report on these people turning to the Lord. They would have a wedding ceremony (as part of their repentance), and the wedding would be immediately followed by the new husband and wife being baptized. This is how God forgives sexual sin. On the other hand, are you already a Christian? Confess your sin to God in prayer and turn to your Christian family for help and encouragement.

Conclusion:

When we started this morning, I said that this passage, if we obey it, will make us so different from the world around us. Do we see that? I also mentioned how easy it is to pick up an accent when we visit in some far off place. I hope we realize both the danger and the blessing here. The danger is that we blend in with the world on this. But the blessing is that we have a chance to be light in a very dark place – not by yelling at people on street corners, but by honoring marriage, by making sure we keep our own marriage bed pure, and by remembering that God will judge these things. We have a message of hope and forgiveness, because Jesus is better!

Let's go to God in prayer and then Jim will lead us in a song as we think about what we've learned this morning:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you so much for marriage, and thank you for giving us your word this morning. We ask for your wisdom as we honor the marriage relationship. We pray for pure hearts, and we we ask a special blessing on those who are married this morning. Keep us from temptation. We also pray for those who are not married, that you would protect them from temptation as well. Protect all of us from the deceitfulness of sin.

We love you, Father, and we come to you today through Jesus, our Savior and King. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com