

“This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” (Eph 5:32)

Friends and loved ones, I am humbled and honored to stand before you to speak on this most wonderful and joyous occasion. I thank you for humoring me and bearing with me through a few minutes. I know we are all eager and excited to embrace our young friends and express our joy to them over this union, but I must ask your indulgence to give me just a little bit of your time so we may discuss this blessed and great mystery.

We are gathered here today in the only church we know of that can call itself a house of God, an institution He established, to address another institution that God Himself established. We aren't here just for the logistics of the matter, so Stephen and Rebekah can say 'I do'. You don't need some formalized ceremony with music and new suits and flowers to make that vow before God, quite frankly. No spiritually minded person is going to look at today's events and think 'goin' to the chapel and gonna get married'. A spiritually minded person looks at this and sees something greater than an economic advantage or a rom-com outcome or even the proper connection between two people.

When I think about how the world treats marriage today, it makes me sad. To see how this world has perverted, twisted and done all it can to destroy this thing that existed from the very, very beginning, a thing that God created in the same fashion and manner He created the rest of our existence, it is vexing, enraging, and saddening all at the same time. It is increasingly so as I come to appreciate more and more the importance of this simple and beautiful institution. This vexation should never cause us to shy away from delving into the topic or from examining it closely. It should cause us to draw closer to it and embrace it all the more heartily. The world's treatment of marriage should put no boundaries on us or cause us to unscripturally attempt to restrain entrance into it.

This is the first thing I hope you remember from today:

Marriage is an institution of God, not of Man. The vows taken today are before God and Man's views of them are utterly irrelevant.

Never forget that this construct of marriage is not a man-made thing. I know you all know this, I've talked about it before, others have talked about it from this pulpit, but it's important to make this point whenever we can. The world watches what we do and what we say. It might not always be obvious, but they do. And when we have an opportunity to discuss the importance of this in its context, well, we should take it and make sure we're all on the same page.

Let's look quickly at the creation of marriage itself from Genesis 2:

“And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” (Gen 2:18-24)

The LORD looked upon the Man that He created and determined it was not good that he should be alone as a creature. That’s His prerogative, and it was a merciful thing God did here. And you see right away that there was no appropriate or ‘meet’ help to be found amongst the current creation. No bird, or four-footed beast, or creature of the sea was ‘meet’ as Adam’s companion. We’re not talking about Man’s best friend here. A help that is meet, that is a proper counterpart for a thinking, spiritual being must be of a thinking, spiritual nature as well. We see here a prime example of the orderliness of God’s creation that should make us thankful.

The standard here is forever set, the plumb line is dropped, and it is set in such a clear, plain and loving fashion that it is maddening to see all the ways this world tries to make that nice, straight, easy to follow line turn into some kind of a twisted spaghetti mess. God made the help that was meet for Adam out of his bone and his flesh, imbued with all the abilities given to Adam for thought, rationality, communication, understanding, etc., and ‘brought her unto man’.

This is what Jesus reminds us of

“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mar 10:9)

God established this union of a man and wife, and it isn’t our place to alter it, modify it or disregard it.

That leads to the second thing to consider

Husbands and wives are helps for each other, and just like everything in our lives, the husband or wife you have is brought to you by your God for His purposes, and you should be thankful for that every day from now until you die.

This isn't about 'wuv, twue wuv'. This isn't about the 'man of your dreams' or starry-eyed romance. This is a spiritual thing we are witnessing here and that these two young people are embarking upon.

Of course these two love one another, but how you frame up that love between a husband and wife is important. Times get tough, and people go through dark places where that simplistic Hollywood 'love of my life' talk ain't gonna cut it if that's all you have and if that's where your focus is.

You have to think about your help meet in a spiritual way, and be thankful for the help God has given you as you walk through this life. You should look at each other every day and thank God for that person across the breakfast table from you. Not in Hallmark card platitudes, but genuinely down to the core of your marrow be thankful – and let each other know it in words and deeds. You can live together for 23 years and not know the depths of help you can get from each other. Think about that and let it frame your thoughts every day. Look at your wife spiritually Stephen. Look at your husband spiritually Rebekah. If you do that, your life will be fuller and more blessed than people who are just 'happy' together.

And that leads me to the third thing to remember

This is a mystery of God, just like the mystery of the Gospel, but we are privileged to be given understanding of it and we must embrace it and be standard bearers for it.

We are in a unique position amongst all mankind. We can't abuse that or look at it as anything other than the gift and privilege that it is.

"And he said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables."
(Mar 4:11)

Friends, marriage is part of the mystery of the kingdom that is given to us to understand. Look at how the world looks at marriage and the absolute disdain they have for the simple rule of the standard – one man, one woman, for a lifetime. It is important that if we are going to call ourselves a Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, that we maintain this standard and speak to it at every opportunity, because it has been given to us.

The mystery here that we are given is not that you might find your 'soulmate' or some kind of silly notion of the flesh like that.

The mystery is how multiple parts, if you will, can become one. In the symbol that is marriage, two become one flesh, which is a simplified example of the many becoming one body in Christ's bride, and becoming one body with Him.

This is part of the mystery of the kingdom we are given to understand, and it isn't just a simple concept of having some extra knowledge. We're given to understand this mystery so we understand the importance, indeed the criticality of it; we are provided insight into the necessity of following the standard and taking seriously our responsibilities in it so we can communicate these realities to the world.

“For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.” (Mal 2:16)

He hates putting away because it is a direct affront on His faithfulness toward His Elect and to act in such a fashion demonstrates a lack of understanding and a lack of belief. There are billions of people in the world who are married, but look at how they treat the institution. The mystery isn't in the ceremony, or the drawing of two people together, it is in the construction of the body.

To be plain, there isn't any real mystery in how two people are brought together, I don't think. God does it, just like He did for Adam:

*“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, **and brought her unto the man.**” (Gen 2:22)*

God brings you together, is my point, just like He brings to you all other resources you need. I don't think that's particularly mysterious. It might in some cases seem miraculous, but that's not the same thing.

The mystery is in this

*“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: **and they shall be one flesh.**” (Gen 2:24)*

How do two distinct and separate entities, each with their own minds, spirits and souls, become one entity? THAT is the real mystery. It only happens through spiritual work and an agreed upon agenda to come together to serve God.

This is similar to the body of Christ. When considering human nature, it is a great and terrific mystery how it is that so many disparate individuals can come together to form this body. How much more amazing is it to consider then the entire body, the bride of Christ that will come together over the great chasm of time that is human history? Add to that the mystery of how the Gentile church is grafted into that tree, and you have an

amazing mystery indeed. This is a mystery that can only be explained in the same way the mystery of the Gospel itself is explained – God has willed it to be so. He has ordained this human experience to be so. We aren't just flotsam in the universe floating about with no purpose.

You two have work to do together to form this new union, this new creation in the world. Stephen, you must learn what it means to be the head of a body, and Rebekah, you must learn how to move from under your father's authority and under another's. Neither of those things is necessarily easy; while not easy, they are as necessary to your service to God as air is necessary to your living. These are symbols of the work this body has to do to prepare ourselves as Christ's Bride.

Marriage is not about this ceremony. It is about this standing symbol of Christ and His Church. It is about understanding this mystery to your fullest extent and working the spiritual work it requires to fulfill the symbolism of it.

And part of that work is understanding this most important point

“And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously.” (Mal 2:15-16)

Notice how twice we are told to take heed to our spirit not to deal treacherously. This goes right to the heart of the matter that this is spiritual work, not just the adjustment to a new domestic reality. The admonishment is to put the spiritual work into this because that spiritual work leads us away from dealing treacherously in any way. There's lots of ways to deal treacherously; it doesn't just mean committing adultery. You can do all kinds of things to your wife that is dealing treacherously with her, first and foremost not taking seriously this duty to be the head of the new union and doing what is necessary to establish your house.

Take especial note of this, you young people who are entertaining this path. The time you spend together now ought not be spent with conversations about how to be married and figuring out each other's favorite color. The work you need to do before you get to the place Stephen and Rebekah are now is the heart work. You have to reconcile losing your individual will and desires in favor of what it means to be the head of a new body, and what it will mean to live in subjection to that head. You must come to complete terms with no longer being twain, but with being one spiritual body. That is a major adjustment that no piece of advice can prepare you for, so make sure you're ready to take that journey before you can't back away from it.

Doing that self-investigative work, that deep heart work that is informed from Scripture and aided by prayer helps us to avoid treachery and live truly as one united flesh. Likewise, we as a body must do the work to insure we stay faithful and commit no treachery against our head, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I could say a lot more about this, but time would fail to say everything that could be said, and I don't pretend to understand everything there is to say. When we finally reach the marriage supper of the Lamb, I am fully confident we will have a complete understanding, and that will fill us with unspeakable joy. Until then, though, I want to encourage everyone, especially these two newly married young people, to spend earnest time meditating on our head and how we can be better joined. You are now one flesh, and no longer twain. Take that very seriously and your lives together will be fruitful and filled with joy.