

Honoring Marriage in the Midst of Trials and Persecutions

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Date: 22 November 2020

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[0 : 00] You can be turning with me to Hebrews chapter 13. It's where we'll be reading this morning.

Hebrews 13. While you're turning there, let me just go through a bit of the review. I tend to give an extended review because the reason for what we're going to apply today is built on the doctrine of the passage.

So let me just mention, the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who were suffering because of their faith. Since the Roman Empire was not persecuting Jews at that time, the suffering Jewish Christians were facing, what the suffering Jewish Christians were facing caused them to consider returning to the Old Covenant Jewish ways.

The book of Hebrews was like a sermon written to warn Christians not to return to the Old Covenant ways. In writing to those persecuted Christians, the writer to the Hebrews teaches us the superiority and wonder of what we have in Christ and also warns us not to turn from Christ in the midst of suffering and persecution.

That's something we'll see that's important for us today. The writer of Hebrews has been building a case to show that the New Covenant is better than the Old Covenant and that the Old Covenant has been pointing to the absolute necessity of the New Covenant for salvation.

[1 : 42] When we got to chapter 12, we were exhorted to see to it that we did not refuse him who was speaking. And it points us to that picture back in Exodus at Mount Sinai where God, as he's speaking, his voice shook the earth.

But he promised later in the Old Testament that his voice would not only shake the heavens, but would shake the earth and heavens.

And this time his voice speaking will remove the things that are shaken so that only the things that cannot be shaken will remain. And because of that, because God's voice will shake everything and only the things that won't remain, we as Christians should be very careful to be people to be warned not to turn from God.

And again, this was in the midst of the situation of great persecution. These people, as they were being persecuted and suffering through these trials, were tempted to turn back. And he's saying, that God that scared you in the Old Testament, he's greater than you think.

And you need to be wary of turning from him even if you face some trials. As the writer of Hebrews finishes his argument in chapter 12, we begin to look at how our response to the God who has made us part of that unshakable kingdom, what our response should be.

[3 : 09] It should be a response of worship, with reverence and fear, because our God is a consuming fire. So we reviewed, in a very quick flash, 12 chapters.

And we're now at verse 1 of chapter 13. Last time I preached, I preached from chapter 13, verses 1 through 3. I'm again going to read verses 1 through 6 of chapter 13.

And we are going to center on part of that passage. Please follow along as I read Hebrews 13, 1 to 6. Let brotherly love continue.

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember those who are in prison as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

[4 : 19] Let's pray together.

Father, I thank you for this passage. I thank you that your word is living and powerful. It can affect us and work in us in ways that you send it to do. And we thank you that that is what you choose to do this morning.

We ask that you would bless it. Father, I also thank you that even though we're reading a book that was written thousands of years ago to a people in the Roman Empire who were facing all kinds of trials and temptations, I thank you that we don't look at it as literature to learn about that time.

I thank you that your word is living and powerful, also in the sense that it is just as relevant to us today as it was to them then. So Lord, I pray that you would make your word quick and powerful in our hearts, that you would be with me as I speak, protecting my voice and making me clear.

Lord, also that you would bless that your word would be spoken clear and plain through me in a spiritual sense, and that you would work in our hearts, that first of all, Christ would be exalted, that God would be worshipped and adored, that we would be people who are careful to put our faith and trust in you and look to you continually, and that we would be instructed in how we should live in the midst of this world.

[5 : 55] I pray that you would be with us in Jesus' name. Amen. So we've seen that the work of God on our behalf is wonderful beyond description and puts us in the amazing position of being able to enter God's presence with boldness because of the work of Christ.

And this is an amazing blessing. The writer of the book of Hebrews is not finished. Even though the work of God is amazing and fills our souls with an amazing encouragement, our Lord has provided even more encouragement for our situation.

We talked last time about this. God has put us in a body in the church. He's mentioned already the importance of not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together and encouraging one another, and that was in chapter 10, verses 24 and 25.

And we looked last time at how the writer of the book of Hebrews gives us what is in verses 1 through 3 as a way for us to help and encourage one another. Encourage one another to live for Christ and not turn back in the midst of a world that would seek to turn you from Christ.

And as we just read, we mentioned last time that we're to remember to love one another, that brotherly love is needed and needs to continue even when it costs greatly.

[7 : 16] And I think that last phrase is beginning to show us the turn because as we've looked at these last, these first three verses last time, we've begun to see him mention things that talk about having to do stuff in the midst of trials and temptations, in the midst of where serving the Lord is going to start costing.

And so he's giving us this instruction about brotherly love in the midst of when it costs greatly. We're going to center today on verse 4 to see more of how we should live and encourage one another in the midst of the world that is against us.

I want to read just verse 4 again. It says, Let marriage be held in honor among all and let the marriage bed be undefiled for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Now, as I've studied this, I think that there is a correlation between that and the rest of the passage. The whole six verses is speaking to that idea of Christians being prepared and encouraged and equipped with knowledge and instruction so that they can live right in the midst of trials and persecutions.

Verses 1 through 3 talks about the relationship amongst brothers. 4 and 5, in one sense, seems disjointed in the sense that it's talking about marriage and then it's talking about money.

[8 : 42] And we're not going to make the connection of how money is the problem with a lot of marriages. That's not where we're going and that's not where that is going. I think the connection is contentment and how the Lord is with us.

But because of time, we're not going to be able to deal with that whole connection here today. We're going to just deal with marriage. And before I start explaining verse 4, I wanted to mention just a little bit about the world in that day.

I think it's important. You probably hear it. I hear it all the time. People say, I can't believe how bad people's morals are today. I can't believe how bad people act.

This is like nothing we've ever seen. And it is bad today and I'm not declining that at all. I'm not making light of that at all. Is it the worst that we've ever seen?

I'm not sure that that's the case. It may be, but it very well could be that that's not the case. Regardless of whether it is the case or not, the case of the time that this book was written was a time when things were awful.

[9 : 56] When you would probably say that they are worse than they are now in many respects. So the writer of the book of Hebrews is speaking of a time that could certainly apply to us.

And living in the time that he is writing, the Christians, what they were facing in that time, us facing those things, we would be just as bombarded then as we are now. So what I'm trying to do is I'm not trying to say, I'm trying to get us to not think, oh, this is the worst time ever.

How is God ever going to deliver us from that? How are Christians ever going to be victorious in that? The fact of the matter is there have been many times throughout history when morality and all the evil that's going on has been very bad and people have been discouraged.

That is not to make light of what we're going through. That is to say, God is faithful. He knows how to bring his people through these kinds of things. He knows what they need to know and this is part of what Christians need to know.

So I think this book was written in a time that was probably a little worse than what we're seeing today. And to set the setting without being too graphic, I just want to tell you in generic statements, my understanding, and I've heard many, I've read different things, many others who've mentioned that our understanding of what the day was like in that day that this book was written.

[11 : 24] One, homosexuality was rampant. rampant. Now, I'm not trying to pick that out as the worst sin. I'm trying to point out that too many today say that's the standard by which we say that this day is evil and that it is awful.

Okay? It was happening then too. But even beyond that, promiscuity, prostitution, adultery were not the exceptions.

They were almost the norm in that day and age. It was almost thought as normal for a man to marry a woman and have a lover on the side. It was almost normal for most, all Romans to think that way.

Or a great majority of Romans to think that way. Again, I said it wouldn't be graphic so I won't go in. It was bad. It was part of their way of life.

It was part of their false worship. You've read in the Old Testament, if you've read from Judges and Joshua and you've read even into the Kings and Chronicles, you've read how there were temple prostitutes, there were cult prostitutes, there were idols that were worshipped by means of sex acts that were rampant in Israel's day.

[12 : 39] Those kind of things went on in Rome. Those kind of things go on today, but we don't think of it so much as an idolatrous religion. We just, people serving immorality idolatrously.

We don't need a God to worship. We're just going to live life in an idolatrous way. But the time there was not good. Marriage meant little to nothing in the curbing of licentiousness in that day because everybody thought, hey, that's just the way it is.

I can marry somebody and I can have somebody on the side and it doesn't matter. And that's what these people were facing. So in the midst of that, in the midst, I'm sorry, in the midst of living in a world where all this was going on, we have this, this body of believers growing and in particular this body of Jewish believers growing who had become Christians.

And they were living in a world where they were being bombarded by everything that was around them. hearing this, seeing that, being used to these things happening right in front of our faces, being promoted as normal.

And so, the writer to the book of Hebrews is he sees these Christians being discouraged because of what they're going through, the trials and suffering. He's wanting to encourage them and instruct them so that as they go through these trials and temptations, they have a standing, they have a founding, they have instruction that will help them how many people today are turning from the Lord because they get caught up.

[14 : 21] They get caught up in the things of immorality and they become overwhelmed and they're like, I don't know how to get out and I don't know how to go back and I don't know how to be pure and people get to the point that I give up, they say.

And so, we live in the same kind of situation and the same thing has been present through the ages where the sin around us has been a snare, has been a temptation, has been a trial to Christians.

How do Christians bear up in those kinds of situations? Well, the writer to the book of Hebrews gives us verse 4 as part of that instruction and he tells us to let marriage be held in honor among all.

And so, let me start by saying what does it mean to hold marriage in honor? And I think the easiest thing to start with is going to show you is going to be to show you what it's like to not hold marriage in honor.

I think that might help you to see what holding marriage in honor might be. So, not holding marriage in honor can look like choosing not to marry for selfish or sensual reasons.

[15 : 30] You've heard that today, haven't you? I've just decided not to marry. I don't think marriage is for me. I don't think I want to be bound to someone. It just seems good for me just to think marriage is not essential.

I think it's an arcane institution. People might say, why would I commit to one woman or one man when I can get as many as I can if I'm single?

marriage is too much work. I mean, I have to go home to the same person every night. I have to give of myself.

I have to share in the responsibilities. I have more things to do because I'm married. Marriage is married. Marriage is too much work. Others might say, I don't need marriage.

I can get my needs met with pornography or the hookup culture. I mean, if I need love for a week or for a day or whatever, I can hook up with that person.

[16 : 44] I can just watch this. I can do that. You know, it's just the thinking of the day. And some may even say marriage is just an institution created by man for the needs of a particular time.

Yeah, I've heard this so often. Oh, yeah, marriage was created by man because it was so much better when it was an agrarian society for a man and woman to be married and have a lot of kids. That was the only way they could make it on the farm.

So it was just convenient for them to have marriage back then. And it just made sense. We live in a city where you don't need kids to be able to work the farm. You don't need kids to be able to do this or do that.

Our kids don't die as fast as they did in the olden days, except for abortion. And, you know, we don't need marriage. It's just an institution of man.

Now, these are things people might say in thinking about how a person might not be holding marriage in honor.

[17 : 55] They might choose not to be married for selfish or essential reasons. I'm going to give one caveat right here because I, in talking with single people, have heard this and I want people to understand that I am not speaking this way.

I am not saying, or let me put it this way. I wrote it down so I would be careful. I'm not talking about those who cannot find a mate or are single for the sake of the kingdom of God.

I'm addressing those who are licentious or selfish. But those who are single, before I go on, and this is kind of out of position in the message, but I'm just going to say it here.

If you're single, be careful because these worldly excuses can be a temptation. Not being able to find a mate can lead to following some of the same avenues of circumventing the need for a mate.

We could go into a lot of things, but because of the setting, we'll not there. Let me just say again, I am not trying to bash people who are single.

[19 : 08] I'm trying to get us to see that marriage is to be held in honor, both by married people and single people. Not honoring marriage can also look like not seeing marriage as an important and foundational institution by God.

Not honoring marriage is saying it isn't important. And it goes along with that one excuse that people say it's an institution created by man. And so hopefully seeing that as a way of seeing that we're not taking marriage seriously.

not being faithful to marriage emotionally and physically. This is a way of seeing marriage is unimportant by saying I don't see it to be something where I have to be emotionally faithful or physically faithful.

That's what not holding marriage honorably might be like. Being physically present and sexually faithful would be seeing marriage as honorable.

Another way of seeing marriage as not important might be seeing marriage as not holding to the instruction God gives concerning marriage. The idea of leaving and cleaving.

[20 : 49] The idea of seeing husband as Christ, seeing the husband love his wife as Christ loved the church. Seeing the wife respect her husband as unto Christ and serving as heirs together of the promise of life.

People who do not honor marriage don't leave and cleave. They don't see the husband's love as Christ, to be like Christ loving the church.

They don't see a wife's responsibility to respect her husband as unto Christ. They don't see serving together as the heirs of life to be something that's important.

Well, let's turn it back around. Holding marriage in honor. And I'm going to step on some of the same things. But holding marriage in honor is seeing marriage as a foundationally important institution of God.

Something that is to be pursued, promoted, and protected even when there's a great cost involved. marriage in God.

[21 : 59] We'll talk about this more in a few minutes. But holding marriage in honor sees marriage as the institution that God made it. God created man and woman and brought them together there to leave and to cleave and together there to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue the earth.

And so marriage was a foundational institution. After God created man, it's the first thing he set up was their marriage. It's something that is to be pursued because God commanded it.

It's something to be promoted because God commanded it for a purpose. It's something to be protected because God has commanded that marriage be part of what he's called as far as fulfilling the cultural mandate.

even if there's a great cost involved. Seeing marriage as something we are to be totally, holding marriage in honor is seeing marriage as something we are to be totally and singularly committed to emotionally and physically and sexually.

If you're going to honor marriage, you're going to commit to the person you've married. You're going to commit to emotionally, emotional oneness. You're going to commit to physical oneness in the sense of being with each other and working together.

[23 : 27] You're going to commit to sexual oneness. No one else is going to be part of that bond. Holding marriage in honor is seeing marriage as something we are to be totally and singularly committed to emotionally, physically, and sexually.

Holding in honor is seeing the commands and instructions of God as the true and only guide to forming and living in a marriage relationship. If you're going to hold marriage in honor as God would have it, you're going to say, I'm going to do things the way God has said.

I'm going to have marriage to be what God has called for it to be. And if you're going to honor marriage, you're going to look at marriage as it speaks of in Ephesians 5 as a picture of Christ in the church.

That always weighs on me and I think about marriage. My love for my wife is to always be a picture of what Christ has done in showing his love to the church.

That mystical relationship of oneness, of unity, of love. And if I honor marriage as God is intending for man to honor marriage, man or woman, if I hold it in honor, I'm going to see marriage as a picture of Christ in the church.

[24 : 50] Well, he goes on in this passage. He says, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and the adulterous.

What are some of the ways to defile a marriage bed? Well, he gives us the primary ways here. It's the idea of adultery and sexual impurity.

Adultery being the act of sex with someone or even the relationship with someone who is in a husband and wife sort of way. The act of sex with someone who is not your mate.

It's the desire or imagining of sex with someone who is not your mate, as Jesus spoke of in Matthew 5, 27 and 28. So, defiling the marriage bed is adultery, as it speaks of there, sex outside of marriage, imagining or desiring sex outside of marriage, and two, sexual purity and sexual impurity that defiles a marriage.

And that could be speaking of what Jesus mentioned in Matthew 5 that I just quoted, but it also could be any act or desire that defiles the marriage bed. essential pursuits, pornography, selfish self-pleasure.

- [26 : 18] These are all ways to defile the marriage bed. Now, bringing it back to this situation, the situation was, here are Christians who had been instructed by God and they're living in a world who say that marriage is not to be held in honor, and the marriage bed, it's open, doesn't matter what people think.

And here, as the writer of the book of Hebrews is wanting to ground these people through the midst of their trials, he's telling them that no matter what the world may think or do, physical intimacy is something reserved only for the person we are married to.

That's a mentality that must be had for the single and the married. In that day and age, as I mentioned, people thought that they could do anything.

Temple prostitutes, regular prostitution, adultery, and it was affecting Christians and they were thinking, oh, I don't know if I can keep going in trusting Christ.

And he's saying, no, you need to be careful to hold marriage in honor and the marriage bed undefiled. Defiling the marriage bed, it goes on in this passage, God says is serious because God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

- [27 : 50] God established the institution of marriage at the creation of man, therefore making marriage and the marriage bed an institutional bedrock of society.

God set it up. This is what society is based on. Man was to leave father and mother and be glued, that's what the word cleaved means, be glued to his wife.

Together they were to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and have dominion over the earth. God takes seriously something that is of such foundational importance.

The world today, in the world today, sex is treated as something like a pastime, something to be enjoyed with no strings attached, with whomever catches your eye.

We live in a hookup culture that can promote adultery and sexuality. They have apps to promote it. It will actually signal you if you're walking through a situation with someone who's close by who has the same mentality of being in a hookup culture.

- [29 : 02] It will say, hey, there's somebody who you could be willing to be with. We live in that kind of country, that kind of time. So we live in a hookup culture that promotes adultery and sexual immorality.

Temptation for this is all around. Not only apps, society is like that. It's been interesting to be out and amongst people and both in what little I hear, but in talking with people who hear more, the water cooler talk.

What people talk about when they're on break, when they're off together with friends and the ways that they talk about people of the opposite sex and their thinkings and stuff like this.

Society has a tremendous pull in that direction. TV is built that way. You're always, the TV program is always built so as to make you want the two people who are not married to be together.

The internet is full of things that promote that. Even social media is built in such a way to often encourage illicit relationships.

- [30 : 14] Sex is treated as a pastime, but God will judge the adultery and sexual immorality that defiles the marriage bed. So we need to have the right mentality as we live in this earth.

We live in a day where people would be the exact opposite what God is and are promoting exactly opposite what God is promoting here.

We need to be people who stand against that. since God will judge those who defile the marriage bed, what if you or your mate has defiled the marriage bed?

Let me step back and stop and think for a moment. How many of us have not had the wrong kind of thought that qualifies as Jesus thinking and desiring in our heart? How many of us have not stepped into areas by means of encouragement or not encouragement but interest in things that we should not and we think oh that that is stepping in that direction of not holding marriage in honor not undefiling the marriage bed.

What do we do? We live in amongst a group of people that are promoting it. Many of us have been saved many of us even at an older age have been saved and we've spent years being influenced by the thinking of this culture.

[31 : 50] Maybe we can say I've been saved for X amount of years but prior to that for years I was involved in things that dishonored the marriage bed that dishonored marriage.

What do I do? How do I react in this? Some scriptural principles. Nowhere in scripture does defilement of the marriage bed require divorce or require that you not marry.

Two are made one in marriage and that points to the union of Christ and the church. What I'm getting at is the foundation of what marriage really is.

the whole idea of what happens if you've done it before you're married I'll deal with in just a minute. This is going to the idea of what if you're married and you've stepped in ways that causes you to think I have I have not held marriage in honor.

I have not held the marriage bed and I've transgressed the marriage bed. What do I do? Do I do I am is married my marriage done? Should I just walk away?

[33 : 03] And I want to point out that 1 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5 point to the fact that when two people are made one they are made one before God and that they cannot be separated and that this union points to Christ and the church.

Breaking of that union gives a picture of breaking the union of Christ and the church. What if you've transgressed that line and you think oh should should I divorce?

Well let me just point out that the marriage bond is only broken by death in Romans 6 1. 1 Corinthians 7 says that Christians are not to put away their mates.

And so stopping there thinking so far pretty much in the area of Christians who have overstepped these lines and they go what do I do now?

where we're going in just a minute is there is repentance to be had or performed and forgiveness to be had.

[34 : 12] I want to point you to a verse from 1 Corinthians chapter 6 actually a set of verses we'll read them again in a minute but it says in 1 Corinthians 6 9 do not be deceived neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkard nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Pretty ugly list. But in verse 7 he's 11 he says and such were some of you but you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by his spirit.

Some of them had been there. Now I don't believe he's just talking about people who were there before they are Christians and now they are Christians. That promise of the work of Christ is sufficient and efficient for the Christian also.

So what if you have defiled the marriage bed? Do not divorce. All kinds of sins have been committed by Christians have been washed away by Christ.

God requires from those who have defiled the bed repentance. Commitment to the institution of marriage that he's established. And I would say if you're in this situation I would encourage you to talk with your elders.

[35 : 47] Get counsel. Get those questions answered. Get help. Going back to the first three verses speaking about brother love and how we're to help one another.

Get with folks who can help you work through this. So in a nutshell what I'm saying is defilement does not end the marriage. What are we to do?

What are we to do? All Christians are to see marriage as instituted by God. You and I as we face what's around us as we face the temptations of the world we need to be people who see marriage as instituted by God.

We need to say this is a good thing. This is what God has established. What God has laid down and ordered is what we are to marriage is to be a place where people show their love for God and one another by forsaking all others and cleaving to their mate.

In the midst of this world that's what we should do in marriage. Leave all others cleave to your mate. Marriage is to be seen as a bond between two people before God breakable only by death.

[36 : 59] And before God we are to see that not only our own marriage but the marriage of all around us. They're all to be seen as something to be held in honor.

Therefore we should act so as to foster one another's marriage and protect our own. As we think of the Christians going through the trials in that day people were tempted by the vast majority of immorality that was around.

They themselves were to honor marriage and not defile the marriage bed. They were also to be people who were encouraging and helping others both in the way they related to one another in their relationships being careful not to draw inappropriate relationships between men and women that were not their mates but also in the idea of being brothers and sisters who would be quick to encourage folks say you know let's be careful brother your marriage is struggling here because you're accepting the thinking of the world in this way and so be careful to hold it in honor both our own and others marriage needs to be held in honor not just because it's moral I mentioned this earlier it's the bedrock of our society holding marriage in honor is a help against the pervasive inundation of the immorality around us when we fail to hold marriage in honor we and this is true of the whole world when the world fails to hold marriage in honor we take away the basis for respecting all authority that's happening today because marriage is not held in honor authority is crumbling children don't have to obey their parents in people's minds employees don't have to obey their employers people don't feel like they have to respect those in authority over us thinking of governors and rulers it's all based on that holding of marriage and honor the basic and first institution is something we are to be careful to hold in honor and based on that are all the other positions of authority let me sum up by saying because marriage is honorable don't be afraid to marry that was something that was prevalent in this day people afraid to marry because things were going so bad don't be afraid to marry don't let the world convince you that it's too much work that it's too inconvenient that it's not politically correct don't let them make you think that marriage is just for those who've achieved their goals or are financially secure you hear that a lot don't get married until you're in the position you want to be don't get married until all your debts are paid off that's not holding marriage in honor you may be here saying it's too late for me

I've already failed I've not held my marriage in honor I've defiled my bed then I'm going to read again this verse because I want this verse to be ringing in your ears 1 Corinthians 6 9 through 11 do not be deceived neither be sexually neither the sexual immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who practice homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor revilers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God and such were some of you but you are washed you are sanctified you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God for those of you who are trusting Christ you are washed you are sanctified you are justified in the name of Christ he has done this work for you so be encouraged to work for Christ be those who are trusting in him be those who are trusting that his death has paid for your sin be those who see his life as providing you a righteousness that makes you acceptable in the sight of

God stand in those promises stand in your standing and choose to hold marriage and honor and let the marriage bed be undefiled repenting and trusting Christ's work for you and asking for his help along the way let's pray together father I thank you for this verse and though we live in a world where the opposite of this verse is just everywhere whether it's as bad as Rome or not it's not the issue it is bad and Lord in this day and age Christians young Christians old Christians are often tempted to turn away to give up on their marriage to think lightly of their marriage to not invest in their marriage or for many not even to marry at all I pray that you would protect us from these things may we be people who in the midst of trials and tribulations in the midst of a world that would turn us against Christ may we be people who stand for you and walk in a way that you have laid out before us

[42 : 15] Lord we ask that if there be those here who don't know you that you would bring them to yourself also this morning in Jesus name amen