

"After Every Wedding Comes a Marriage"
Hebrews 13:4

April 6, 2008 - Sunday 11:00AM - Dr. David McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, After Every Wedding Comes a Marriage]

McKinley: *Lord, you are holy and we proclaim it today. We pray for the power and the work of Your Holy Spirit in our hearts as we open Your holy Word and that we hear Your word to us say "Be holy even as I am holy." Let us not separate that which we declared You from that which You have demanded of us. And while we know that we can never accomplish it of our own will, effort or goodness, we thank You that You give us the power to live holy lives in this day. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Bless us in these moments. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen... Amen.*

That was beautiful! Wonderful testimony to the Lord in a precious time of worship. Todd, choir, thank you so very much today. Ah... not only today but always for blessing our lives. I brought with me ah... to the pulpit this morning a very beautiful piece that was put in my hand last night just a few feet away from here over in our chapel.

I went to the chapel at 7:00 pm last to attend a wedding where there Mary Katherine McCoy married Joshua Grant Graham. And Josh Graham, the youngest of ah... the children of our pastor Jack and wife Deb, was married last night and all I can tell you is it was an incredible, beautiful wedding. And ah... the faces of all were shining and beaming. The hearts of our Pastor and Deb dancing with joy to see their son, Josh married.

And ah... it was such a joy for me to be a part, along with my wife Connie. We've known Josh since he was six months old. He had a cherub face and as though it were a red halo. He had red hair and ah... was just a beautiful little boy. We watched him grow; by that age of three ah... at the instruction of his mother he had learned how to position the batting stance and order of every member of the New York Mets team. [laughter] Of course, that's not mom! That's dad that taught him to do that. And ah... it's just been a wonderful thing to watch the journey and then to see the beauty of God's hand of blessing upon his life and Kaytie's life as they were joined in marriage last evening.

This is also a very wonderful thing to me and sort of the completion of a very interesting... well, about 30 to 40 days in our lives because our own son, Joseph was married in Columbia, South Carolina on the first of March. And ah... we traveled there. Thankfully Jack and Deb joined us there, alone with ah... a lifetime of Connections friends and family who were there. And it was such a wonderful thing to see our son Joseph receive his wife Abigail and to begin their lives together.

And weddings are such beautiful and joyful celebrations! It's amazing how it does become the intersection and the crossroads of life and... and how

many things compress in the moment of a wedding ceremony to be able to share the hopes and dreams of a lifetime and the joys and memories of family, love and relationship.

Of course, everything does not always go well at all weddings. And I have officiated in plenty of weddings where I can tell you that ah... they were filled with surprises. Thankfully, the two that I'm speaking to you about right now both went off without a hitch. But all you have to do is watch America's Funniest Home Videos and you can see that there are plenty of... of interesting experiences that can happen at a wedding.

And all weddings, no matter where they are, have one thing in common. No matter ah... who attends or where they're held, how much they cost, how many people are present, the fact of the matter is, is that after every wedding comes a marriage. I actually read a book by that title about 20 years ago. I've never forgotten the title of the book because it's such a truth about life. Weddings are very well planned, ordered and organized experiences. And though things can get out of control, for the most part the plans of a wedding come together.

But most marriages are much more chaotic. They have less thought and planning and preparation for them and many times the outcome of the marriage is a much greater disaster than even some embarrassing moments that can happen at a wedding.

It was Abraham Lincoln our sixteenth president who once declared: "Marriage is neither heaven, nor hell; it is simply purgatory." [laughter] I've often wondered what Mary Todd's thoughts were about that statement her husband made. I wondered how many nights he spent out of the Lincoln bedroom in the White House as a result. [laughter] Obviously that is a reflection of what some people think.

It was the German writer and poet Goethe who said, "Love is an ideal thing, marriage a real thing; a confusion of the real and the ideal never goes unpunished!" [laughter]

And then someone has said this: "Marriage is the process of finding out what kind of person your spouse would have really preferred!" [laughter]

Whatever you say about marriage, there's a lot of skepticism about marriage in our world today. And for all the beautiful portraits that are hung after a wedding, the picture of marriage is often very unclear. In fact, the picture of marriage is often a picture of something very painful.

All you have to do is to ask a man like Paul McCartney... Sir Paul who's written more than his share of love songs, but who knew something other than a love song this year. Speaking of songs, have you ever thought about this song that he wrote? "Yesterday all my troubles seemed so far away./ Now it looks as though they're here to stay. Oh, I believe in yesterday./

Suddenly I'm not half the man I used to be./ There's a shadow hanging over me. /Oh yesterday came suddenly." [light laughter throughout]

Well, it certainly did. It cost Sir Paul 3.2 million dollars wedding in a castle. No one but he and Heather Mills and the attorneys know for sure what the final settlement was in their divorce, but no question about it, it has been an un... and unsightly picture.

And I say that today not really to draw your attention to celebrity because everywhere we look, we see all the profiles of celebrity and the broken relationships and the strings of things that go on. But I say this to all of us today because we all know that in reality we live in a world today where this issue... the issue of marriage and what happens in marriage touches our lives, our hearts, our homes, our ministry. And it's not just something that's out there with profile people; it's something that's all around us on a very personal level as we gather in this place today.

And I say this to say to you that the Bible has some very clear, very concise and very convincing words to speak about the subject of marriage. In fact when God addresses this subject, He concentrates His word in such a way that there's no missing of the meaning, and there's understanding of the depth and the significance of what is being said about the subject of marriage.

And so today I want to take one verse found in one book and I want us to think about what the Bible teaches about how after every wedding comes a marriage. And what does that really mean? The book is Hebrews, the thirteenth chapter, the fourth verse. And I invite you right now to open your Bible with me and turn to Hebrews chapter 13 and verse 4, because I want us to read together... I want us to see together and embrace together how the Bible concentrates specific teaching on this subject of marriage. And I want us to gather today to embrace this teaching as God's people and God's church in this generation. Hebrews 13, verse 4 says this:

4) *Let marriage be held in honor among...*

What's the next word? Well, some got it, but I want to be sure that all get it. Okay? Are you ready? Let's read that verse again.

4) *Let marriage be held in honor among (Say it with me) all [all]...*

That's still not convincing. And we're going to do this till we get it right, okay? [laughter] This is interactive and I have the opportunity to enter and keep you active for at least the next hour and a half so just [laughter] chill out and get with me, okay? You ready? Let's try it again.

4) *Let marriage be held in honor among all [ALL]...(Excellent! You must be hungry!)...and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterers.*

That's pretty straight forward language, isn't it? God says that marriage is to be held in honor among all, that the bed is undefiled and that God will judge fornicators and adulterers. And in those words brought together in this single verse we begin to see and to understand something of the serious nature of the Bible's teaching on the subject of marriage.

But this subject and this issue is not something for some. The greatest risk that I face to even introduce this subject in a crowd like this is to have a group of people here who say this message is not for me. But I want to be absolutely clear that you understand that I didn't say, God said it. This subject and what we think about it and what we believe about it is for (say it with me) all. [ALL] Not some, not a few... all!

And therefore it is important for us as the church of the living God to stand in this day and to address this issue and to speak to it as clearly and as straight forwardly as the Bible speaks to this issue.

So today what I want to do is at the outset I want to establish several very important statements about the Bible's teaching on marriage. I hope that you have a pen and a piece of paper and will write these down and maybe underscore some of these in the references in the margins of your Bible. I hope that you'll use them as something that you can take and share with others around you. But I believe it's important for us not just to have messages on the idea of how to do marriage, but what and why does the Bible teach what it does on the subject of marriage. So if you're ready let's begin to outline that criteria today.

First, the Bible teaches that marriage is divine in establishment... marriage is divine in establishment. It is not the result of the evolutionary progression of culture and society. Nowhere does the Bible give indication that marriage is something just happened as a result of man's progress. It, from the very beginning, was designed, created and established by a holy God for people who would be inhabitants on the planet that He created.

By very nature of the use of this word *marriage*, God is identifying an institution. God is establishing an order. And God says let marriage be held in honor among all men.

Now in the beginning in the book of Genesis, chapter 1, the Bible tells us that God created everything that was made in a succession and in an order. And every time that God finished making something, God said this: He said, "It is good... it is good... it is good." Read the first chapter of Genesis, take a highlighter and just write down or mark the number of times that God, when He created something, said, "It is good." But you get to the end of that chapter and God says, "It is not good for man to be alone." He's not saying what I've made isn't perfect; He's saying I'm finished, it's not complete.

And so the Bible says in the second chapter of Genesis there's sort of an enlarged, an elaboration on the creation beyond the heavens and the earth

and the seas and all that is there, all the plants, all the animals. The Bible says, "God made man and God made woman and he put them together in the garden, and when He finished, you know what He said? He said, "It is very good!" Exclamation point! I'm a literalist; I believe when the Bible adds a word, it's there for a reason. And God looked at what He had finished and He said, "Now that is what I intended it to be! It is very good!" Why? Because marriage from the very beginning is established by God. God established marriage in creation. God protected marriage in the revelation of His law.

Do you remember when Charlton Heston went to the mountain to meet God and to get the Ten Commandments? [laughter] (Did you know that Charlton Heston passed away last night? Yeah. Kind of etched his way into all of our minds and hearts playing the role of Moses standing on that mountain, where those bolts were coming in and burning the law of God into those tablets.) But Moses stood there as ma... God's man, and God revealed things that mattered. Ten things that were the establishment of law and order for society, for living and for the righteousness of God.

And one of those commandments was specifically dedicated to the promotion and protection of marriage [tap] when it said, "You [tap] shall [tap] not [tap] commit adultery." God established it in creation; He protected it when He established and revealed His law; He blessed marriage in the ministry of Jesus.

Jesus performed His very first miracle at a wedding feast at Cana of Galilee. And so as you read the Bible you find a book that is very pro-marriage and very much affirming the fact that God is the author and God is the Creator.

What I'm trying to say to you and what I want to be sure that all understand today is this truth: Marriage is not a me-thing. Marriage is not a you-thing, marriage is not an us-thing; marriage is a God-thing! It's for all of us to see and all of us to understand, and all of us to honor, because marriage is divine in its establishment.

Dr. Al Mohler, the president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, recently said this: He said:

"Marriage is not greatly respected in our postmodern culture. For many, the covenant of marriage has been discarded in favor of a contract of cohabitation. An ethic of personal autonomy has produced successive generations who think of the world as the arena of their own personal fulfillment and of marriage as an outdated relic of an outgrown culture of obligation.

"Ours is an era of self-expression. Individuals express themselves through marriage, and then express themselves through divorce--as if all of life is nothing more than a succession of acts of self-expression.

"A divorce culture explains away obligation and sacred promises as temporary statements of emotional disposition. I may feel married today--I may not feel married tomorrow.

"Some have lambasted marriage as a domestic prison, a patriarchal and oppressive institution foisted upon unsuspecting men and women in order to deny them freedom, autonomy, fulfillment, and liberation. And, for a post-Christian culture, there is that nagging problem of the essential character of marriage as a sacred institution. A society that disbelieves in God will eventually disbelieve in marriage."

And I believe that we are seeing that unfold in our society, in our nation before our very eyes.

Therefore, those of us who believe the Word of God, those of us who have embarked upon this relationship called marriage, and all of us, whether we are married or unmarried, whether we are old or young; whatever the status of life maybe... married, divorced, widowed... Whatever the stat... ah... the ... our life situation may be, the reality is, is that we must stand in the face of this culture and speak what the Word of God says: "Let marriage be held in honor among all because marriage is divine in its establishment." (Can I get an amen?) [Amen!] (Alright... I'm going to keep pushing till you get it right, okay?) [light laughter]

Next, marriage is total in commitment... marriage is total in commitment. The Bible knows nothing of arrangements; the Bible knows much of commitment. The Bible says in Genesis 2:24: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."* From a biblical perspective marriage is seen as an adjoining, an alignment of life together; and therefore, it is total. It's not a fifty-fifty proposition; it is a total commitment of life. And that creates quite a crisis for us in our culture today because we are living in an uncommitted culture.

I pulled up this week, a study called "The State of our Unions". It's a study that ah... addresses the issue of the so... social health of marriage in America, and in bold letters it says: "Why men won't commit." And it talks about the fact that we have the largest generation in history of young men who have become adults that are... who are unwilling to move forward in the commitment of marriage. It says: *"The mating and marrying behavior of today's young single men is a topic of growing interest in the popular culture and among young women."* It goes on to talk about how the... they have learned that while they say that they want to someday get married and have children, they live in a society that provides all the benefits of marriage without any of the responsibilities. It goes on to talk about how there... there really is a movement and a trend that is changing the dynamic and the demographic of our culture because we're unwilling to embrace commitment.

Now I've got a major study that's probably about thirty or thirty-five pages in length here describing this issue. But I'd like to just step back from that issue and just say to you guys: Okay, guys, listen to me. Proverbs chapter 18, verse 22 says this... you ready? I want you to write it down. It says: "*He who finds a wife, finds a good thing and attains the favor of the Lord.*"

Guys, you want the favor of God on your life? One of the ways that you can know God's favor and blessing is finding a wife, making a commitment, and getting married. (And all the women said:) [AMEN!] (Alright, good! You're listening! I'm trying real hard to preach for you up here, okay?) [laughter] Because this is an issue! It's an issue we've identified in our culture, but it's an issue that is established in the Word of God! God presents marriage as a commitment relationship! It's not an arrangement. It is as though it were a covenant made between a man and a woman that can be blessed of God.

And yet we live in a world today where we have men who are living at the point of avoidance; we have women who are living at the point of compromise. Men don't want to take responsibility; women are willing to give up some areas of commitment protection and responsibility to try to gain intimacy, and the result is that people are struggling in their marriages, struggling in their lives, struggling in society. But the Bible teaches us we've got to make much of commitment.

You know what the prenuptial issue is in marriage? It's not how much you've got; it's how much are you going to get. That's the prenuptial issue of marriage. Are you willing to give yourself to marriage because marriage is a total commitment that we're called to fulfill for the glory of God.

Third, the Bible teaches that marriage is pure in relationship... it is pure in relationship. "*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and the [marriage] bed is defiled...*" Now that's pretty straight forward, isn't it? The Bible is talking about the marriage bed; it's talking about the act of marriage, physical intimacy. It's talking about sex. And the Bible says clearly that sex is God's idea!

God established the physical union and intimacy of marriage. And the Bible teaches in its broad teaching, if you study it, that there are three basic reasons for the act of marriage. It is for procreation... to continue the human race and to put it within the confines of a secure relationship. It is for communication... that there are expressions beyond words that are to be shared. It's not something that has come in some wrong way; it's the right way to communicate within the context of marriage. And the Bible teaches that God made it for satisfaction. Sex is for satisfaction. It's not something that's a part of our animal nature; it's a part of our created nature by God.

And therefore, we as the church of God must understand that all that has distorted and that has brought deception and disease and devastation

through sexual impropriety is not of God; it is of the enemy Satan. And the Bible says that the thief has come to steal, to kill and to destroy. And he does that everyday through images, through experiences, through impressions, through lies about what the physical union of marriage is all about. But the other side says that Jesus came that we might have life and that we might have it abundantly.

The Bible warns against fornication—sex outside of marriage; adultery—sex within marriage but outside of the marriage union. I like the way the Phillips translation says it. "God Himself will judge those who traffic in the bodies of others, or defile the relationship of marriage." God is serious about our behavior physically, sexually, because God's tied it together physically, emotionally, spiritually. In all of life our relationship with Him and others is affected by understanding that marriage is pure and the bed is undefiled.

There's another thing the Bible teaches and that is that marriage is permanent in design... it's permanent in design. God does not build homes with revolving doors. God built marriage to be strong and secure. From the very beginning permanence was emphasized and then reiterated in the book of Matthew chapter 19. Jesus said, "*Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife; the two shall become one, so they are no longer two, but one. And therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*" The greatest rebuke and warning given in Scripture on the subject of marriage is given to say do not trivialize the significance and the permanence of this relationship. Marriage is permanent in design.

Then marriage is honored through effort... marriage is honored through effort. The Bible says, "*Let marriage be held in honor.*" The idea is to be an active, aggressive effort to uphold the honor of marriage. Marriage requires work and effort. There's no magic that just suddenly creates a great marriage. Every great marriage is the results of diligence and faithfulness and work. God discusses marriage in a variety of ways talking about roles and relationships and responsibilities. And when the Bible talks about marriage it doesn't call it just a state of life, or a status of law; the Bible presents marriage as active duty. And if you are married you are involved and engaged in the active duty of marriage.

And that's so important because in life, as you go through life, the circumstances of life change. You know the marriage vows always talk about rich or poor, sickness, health. Those things are all realities in life. The circumstances of life are constantly changing and... and as you are in a marriage relationship to fulfill that commitment, you have to work through the changing circumstances and seasons of life. Certainly it's because we have conflicts in marriage.

Now I'm just curious. Is there anybody here who would literally stand to your feet right now who is married and say, "I have never in my life had a marriage conflict." Cause if you do, I'm going to make you come up here and tell us exactly how you've done that! [laughter] And if you do, I'm going

to call you out because you're lying in church. I know exactly what's going on. [laughter] Conflict.

And then communication is so challenging. We live in a world where it's just hard to stay on the same page and stay in tune with one another. It's like one guy who said, "I had some words with my wife and she had some paragraphs for me." (pastor chuckles) [laughter]

We're doing everything we can as a church to keep building into the lives of people strength and stability for marriage. One of the great new ministries that's been launched, not just as a Prestonwood ministry, but through a couple at Prestonwood, is a ministry called Marriage Mentors. And Marriage Mentoring was started by Dewey and Lynn Wilson who was a homebuilder, who felt God's call in his life to begin to give attention to building marriage. And they've created the opportunity for people to grow in marriage, not just in crisis and conflict, but to grow through all the seasons of life.

In just a few weeks as you'll see here on the screen they're going to have a training opportunity, and if you would be interested to grow in your marriage by becoming a coach couple, or you are a couple who has a need for assistance in some issues of marriage, I want you to know that these are some ways that we are investing effort for development in marriage, and honoring marriage through effort to build on the foundation and the teaching of Scripture. Marriage is so very important it needs our attention. And I'm so thankful for this ministry and all that it means.

Then the Bible teaches that marriage is purposeful in pattern... marriage is purposeful in pattern. The Bible goes beyond talking about marriage as just being the common bond of earthly matrimony; the Bible describes marriage as being a picture of another relationship. In the book of Ephesians Paul, reiterating what was said in Genesis, but adding one point in the book of Ephesians, wrote this [Ephesians 5:31-32]: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife. The two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church."*

The Bible declares that God's plan in marriage is for marriage to give a picture to the world of who Christ is and what Christ came to do. Christ came to save; Christ came to love; Christ came to forgive. And the sacrificial death of the Christ... of Christ on the cross is a picture of the sacrifice, the giving and the heart of a man and a woman to one another to present Christ to the world. God uses this union in a powerful and a very beautiful way.

That's why one of my great concerns today is that because of the status of marriage and the brokenness of marriage in our culture and in our churches that we have failed to give the glory to God that He desires and that He deserves to the institution of marriage. Marriage is about the glory of God. Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever realized that marriage

is not about you, your fulfillment, your happiness? But marriage is about God and His glory and His honor. Because the Bible teaches in the wonder and the beauty of the glory of God in marriage.

And could it be... could it be that the state of our witness today... that the church in America is in direct proportion to the state of our marriages in our homes in America? I don't say this as a sweeping condemnation to those who in this room have experienced the injury and the brokenness of divorce. I'm saying it to us as a church. I'm saying it to us as a people. I'm saying this that we may all honor marriage. Could it be that we have so trivialized marriage that we have lost the testimony and the creditability of our witness for Christ because we are not showing Christ to this world?

Do I expect the world around us to understand this truth? I do not! Does God expect the church to understand this truth? He absolutely does! Let marriage be held in honor among all! Top to bottom! All ages, all stages, all conditions of life! Because we are the people of the living God!

Now having said this, I have obviously presented to you a very specific and a very clear statement about the Bible's position on the subject of marriage. Let's just rehearse it for just a moment if we can. The Bible teaches marriage is divine in establishment, total in commitment, pure in relationship, permanent in design, honored through effort, and purposeful in pattern. That is an important position for us all to understand based on the teaching of the Scripture.

But I want to go beyond the position to the proposition and the practice of what does this mean to us. What does this say to us? What does this mean beyond just giving a nod so that it touches the heart? I believe that it means several things that I do not want us to leave without understanding.

First, I believe that this means that Christ is sufficient for success in marriage. I want you to know with all of my heart I believe that marriages in today's culture can succeed with the help of the power of Jesus Christ. God designed marriage not to fail, but to work! And God wants to work in our lives that we might succeed in marriage and that we might honor Jesus Christ! This Book is a Book of law and the Bible tells us the consequence of sin and the standard of God. But it is also a Book of life and God has given us life through His Word, and what He has provided for us in marriage He wants to bless in our lives if only we will draw on the sufficiency of Jesus Christ!

There is not a person in this room who is sufficient for marriage. Jesus is sufficient for marriage. And just as He is the sufficient Savior who came and died on the cross, who was buried and rose again, who's all sufficient sacrifice and payment for sin covers us and gives us new life! In that new life He gives us sufficiency to succeed in marriage!

Maybe you are listening to me today and you are struggling. Maybe you are listening to me and you're going through a tough place in your marriage

right now. Maybe your heart is broken and you feel wounded today, and what you need to hear and to be reminded of today is that while you may not be sufficient or your mate may not be sufficient, or your friends are not sufficient, Jesus is sufficient, and Jesus changes lives in marriages!

There's a couple sitting right here on the front row in front of me; they had a number of years where they were apart; they were divorced. Their marriage was gone and they didn't want to have anything to do with each other. But each of them came to Jesus and Jesus changed their hearts, and Jesus made their marriage work again. And I know they sit here every Sunday giving glory to God for what He's done! Jesus is sufficient! [applause] Yeah, give them an encouragement. Give them a hand!

You want to know why marriages fail? They fail because of people... people who are sinners and who need to be made new in Jesus Christ. The reason we don't have "happily-ever-afters" is because they're disrupted by self-indulging princes and self asserting princesses. What we need is somebody who can deal with the "self" problem.

Warren Wiersbe said, "The root of most marital problems is sin and the root of all sin is selfishness." Submission to Christ and to one another is the only way to overcome selfishness. For when we submit, the Holy Spirit can fill us and enable us to love one another in a sacrificial, sanctifying, satisfying way, the way that Christ loves the church.

Not only do I believe that Christ is sufficient to make marriage successful, I believe that walking out creates greater problems than working out issues in marriage. I say this to you because I've watched the cycle. I've walked with the families; I've lived the reality of what it is to see in life the brokenness that comes as a result of failure in marriage. And I want you to know that I believe with all of my heart that persistence pays off. And there's a reason that God calls for commitment, and God establishes permanence; because the result of brokenness is so great in our lives.

Rabbi Earl Grollman who was a writer and a counselor in the area of marriage, asked about the question: Which is more traumatic: death or divorce? And this was his response: "The big difference is death has closure; it's over. With divorce it's never over."

I could go up and down the aisles of this church today and have people stand and say, "Yes, because of a divorce in my family... because of a divorce personally, it's never been over. It comes back again and again; at birthdays and... and... and at graduations and at weddings and at funerals." It just keeps going because there's never a full closure.

And I simply say to you today that I believe that there's a message that needs to be called to the heart today and that is that walking out creates bigger problems than working out issues in marriage.

And then, let me very quickly say that I believe God's grace mends human brokenness. Just as much as I believe that Christ satisfies and that Christ makes sufficient the ability to succeed in marriage, I believe that God's grace is all sufficient to those who have been broken by marriage. If you hear my voice today and hear this strong standard that I've tried to reiterate and underscore, and hear me creating a blanket of condemnation, then you have missed the message because the heart of this message is that there is a God who loves you, who wants to protect you and care for you!

Everything that He has established within parameters is for your well-being and your blessing. He wants you to agree with Him that He wants to care for you! And whether you have been the initiator of a series of consequences in life that have brought brokenness in your marriage and you have violated that covenant, or you are a person who has been victimized by the brokenness of someone that you trusted, hear me today! God's grace is sufficient for forgiveness and for an ultimate fulfillment in your life. Your life is not over! There is hope for you! There is grace for you! And God is able to make His grace abound in all sufficiency that you may be sufficient in all things! And we're seeing His abounding grace has abounded much more.

And today I pray that there are people here who hear this message and who cringe to think: What has happened in my life? And yet underneath that, there would be the Spirit of God, saying, "I love you; I care for you; I'll cleanse you; I have a purpose for you!" Because I believe that God's grace mends human brokenness. The consequences don't always change. The pain doesn't altogether go away. But God uses pain and consequence for His grace.

The last thing that I would say to you today is that I believe that commitment glorifies God. And that's kind of the bottom line. If the Scripture says: "Let marriage be held in honor among all; the bed is undefiled; that fornicators and adulterers God will judge", then the bottom line is... is that God is glorified through commitment. And when we live and fulfill a commitment to His standard, whether we are married or unmarried, when we honor Him and we magnify that which He has established, then we are able to live for the glory of God. And that's my challenge to those of you who are married today... is that you would live out commitment not just for your good and the good of your family and the good of your kids, but that you would do it for the glory of God.

I mentioned to you that I had the joy of performing the wedding of my son and my daughter-in-law in Columbia, South Carolina on the first of March. What an experience as a dad and as a pastor. I had plenty of lumps in my throat, I promise. But lumps and all, I managed to get through it. Ah... I know that ah... there could not be a greater joy than to see a son who loves the Lord and is honoring his faith marry a young woman who loves Christ and they sought to do that in the ceremony. But when we move beyond the vows and moved to the rings, my son Joseph had purchased for Abigail some very beautiful rings that he was able to give her as a gift, and it was such a

joy to see him smile and put that on her finger. I'll never forget what Connie my wife said. She said, "You know watching him on his wedding day was like taking all the Christmases and all the birthdays and all the joys of life combined and just kinda putting them all together in that moment and seeing it on his face."

But then came the moment where Abigail his wife would place a ring on his finger, and the ring that was placed in my hand from her to be placed on his finger was actually a ring that fifty-four years earlier in Spartanburg, South Carolina, on March the twentieth, had been given from my mom to my dad on their wedding day.

My mom and dad marked fifty years of marriage together. My mom passed away in 2004 but from Spartanburg, South Carolina in 1954 to Columbia, South Carolina, just sixty miles away in 2008, a ring made a journey across a lifetime. And though it certainly is an heirloom in a family, it represents the call to commitment and to faithfulness before God. And the faithfulness of God to all who look to Him and all who trust Him. And I simply said to my son, "Joseph, never forget the call to faithfulness in your heart, and never forget the faithfulness of God to you."

That's what I want you to remember today... is God's faithfulness to you. I don't have a ring to put on your fin... on your finger today to tell you of His faithfulness; He has given you the bond of His word, to say that if you will take Him at His word... if you will trust Him with His word... if you will honor His word, then His faithfulness will be known in your life.

I want to ask that heads be bowed and eyes closed. I know I've talked about marriage today, but as I speak of marriage, I speak of two words... "I do." And some of you are here today and the greatest thing that could and should happen in your life today is that you need to say "I do" to Jesus Christ.

Just as that bride walks down an aisle and as a groom meets her there, Jesus invites you to come to Him. Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Christ forgives our sin. Christ gives us a new life. God is faithful to forgive, to cleanse, to change those who call on the name of Jesus. And today, if you've never done it... I don't want you just to hear a message on marriage, I want you to hear the message of Jesus Christ! And today I want you to say... some of you "I do" to Jesus. [music begins] Just right now say:

Jesus, I do. In my heart I do recognize that I'm a sinner. Jesus, I do understand that You are the Savior. Jesus, I do ask that You would forgive me of my sin. Jesus, come into my heart. Lord, take my life and let me live for You.

Pray that prayer; trust Christ today.

Others of you have already prayed the "I do" to Jesus, but you need to pray and you need to say, "I will. Lord, today because I have made the

commitment of my life to you, I will today honor You, honor marriage and honor Your church."

And some of you need to move today to make this church your church... your home. There needs to be a commitment. You don't need to have an arrangement, a live-in relationship, a co-habitation with a church; you need a commitment to a church! And today you need to say "I will... serve Christ, honor His church, join His church... be a part of it."

Some of you today who are married need to say "We can." You need to come today at this time of commitment and prayer. Maybe you want to kneel at the altar. Maybe you just want to say "Lord, afresh and anew, we know that we can survive. We know that we can thrive. We know that we can con... we can succeed with Your power. And today there needs to be a big "We can" in the name of Jesus.

Father, You know hearts and lives, You know needs, You know hurts. I pray for those who are broken today and who need Your grace; that grace would be supplied. I pray for those, Lord, who today You're calling to Yourself, that they would hear and respond with "Yes, I do, O Lord." I pray, Father, that You would gather us together in strength and fellowship and faith, to let us be faithful to You in this generation... to Your word and to Your truth. And, Father, I pray that You would do a transforming work in this hour. In Jesus' name. AMEN

I want to invite you to stand with me, and as you stand to look right this way. I want to ask that no one be leaving, no one moving away. We're not going to be but just another moment or two. But I need to say to everyone here, this is the time of decision and response. Yes, the music is playing. Yes, the pastor is standing at the front. And this is the opportunity for everything in the wedding to start happening. And today if you want to trust Christ and say "I do" I'm going to ask you to do just what a bride would do... step into the aisle, make your way here, and you're going to meet one of the ministers here at the front of the church. You just come and say, "Today I want to trust Christ." Others of you need to come and say, "Today I will... I will follow Christ, join His church! I'm coming to be a part of this church."

You don't just have to come here. If you're there in the balcony, don't come down here; just make your way right there behind you we have ministers standing at each of the areas right there in about three locations, ready to receive you. And I want to just ask you to go there, or them to come here.

And so as we begin to sing, as we begin to pray, I do, I will, we can! Let Christ work in your life today and honor Him in this moment of faith and response as we sing. Let's sing, let's pray, you come.