PREACHING & TEACHING

Sermon on Marriage

Preaching notes on marriage for a congregation that is not all married, including the Ephesians 5 problem and the verse before it that most sermons skip. Written for a Sunday where a third of the room is single, divorced or unhappily married.

topic notes · 4 segments

Topic notes. Movement three is about who else is in the room, which is the part marriage sermons most often forget.

BEFORE YOU RECORD

- Every marriage sermon is heard by someone whose marriage is failing and who has told nobody. They are listening for whether this church would be safe to say that in.
- If you preach Ephesians 5, start at verse 21. Beginning at 22 changes the meaning of the whole passage and congregations have been handed that edited version for a very long time.

01. Three texts, three costs

choose one

[Song of Songs is underpreached for obvious and bad reasons]

Ephesians 5:21-33. The standard choice, and it commits you to the submission question. Handle it directly or choose something else; a preacher who reads it and then talks about something adjacent is noticed.

Genesis 2:18-25. Older, stranger, and about companionship before it is about anything else. The stated problem is that it is not good for the man to be alone, which is a different starting point from most marriage preaching.

Song of Songs. Almost never preached, and a congregation that has only ever heard marriage discussed as duty and structure will find it startling that this is in the book at all.

02. The verse before

the honest reading

[verse 21 reframes everything after it]

Ephesians 5:21 says submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, and the verse about wives has no verb of its own in the Greek. It borrows the one from verse 21.

Which means the passage opens with mutual submission and then works out what that looks like in two directions. Preaching it from verse 22 produces a different text, and it is the version that has been used to keep people in situations they should have left.

03. Who else is in the room

do not skip

[a third of the congregation, usually]

Single by choice, single not by choice, widowed, divorced, married and miserable, married to someone who does not come. A marriage sermon that addresses only the happily married is speaking to a minority of most congregations and telling everyone else where they stand.

Note also that the central figure of the faith was single, as was the author of Ephesians, which is worth saying out loud in a church culture that can make marriage sound like the finished version of a person.

04. The trap

avoid this

[the technique sermon]

Five tips for a better marriage. It is the easiest sermon to write on this subject and it competes directly with several thousand better-researched books. What a church can offer that a book cannot is a community that notices when a marriage is in trouble, and that is worth more than the tips.

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