

The Perfect Marriage 1 Kings 8v1-66

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[0 : 00] Kings 8, and that's page 344 of the Church Bible. That's 1 Kings 8.

Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the Ark of the Lord's Covenant from Zion, the city of David.

All the Israelites came together to King Solomon at the time of the festival in the month of Eternim, the seventh month. When all the elders of Israel had arrived, the priests took up the Ark, and they brought up the Ark of the Lord and the tent of meeting and all the sacred furnishings in it.

The priests and Levites carried them up, and King Solomon and the entire assembly of Israel that had gathered about him were before the Ark, sacrificing so many sheep and cattle that they could not be recorded or counted.

The priests then brought up the Ark of the Lord's Covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the most holy place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

[1 : 25] The cherubim spread their wings over the place of the Ark and overshadowed the Ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary, but not from outside the holy place, and they are still there today.

There was nothing in the Ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb, where the Lord made a covenant with the Israelites after they came out of Egypt.

When the priests withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord, and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord had filled his temple.

Then Solomon said, The Lord has said that you would dwell in a dark cloud. I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.

Thank you, A.V.

[2 : 30] Well, let's keep our Bibles open there and we'll pray. Father, thank you for your word, and we pray that you would bring great understanding and clarity where we do not understand.

We pray that your Holy Spirit would help us to not only see and hear about your faithful love, but that each one of us would experience your faithful love in our hearts today.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, before we start, just a brief reminder.

Last time we were looking at Kings, we were looking at chapters 5 to 7, which was all about, it was like walking into a construction site, the building of the temple, a place for God.

And, well, we continue on that theme. As God comes to be with his people. So, the title we've given it is The Perfect Marriage. I hope it will all come clear as we go along.

[3 : 55] Will you take her as your wife in marriage? Will you love her, comfort her, honour and keep her, in sickness and in health, and be faithful to her as long as you both shall live?

I will. Maybe you have spoken those words. Marriage is a very special but yet solemn occasion.

Man and woman stand before the congregation and make their vows and promises. From this day forward, as long as we both shall live, and before God, I give you my word.

Now, marriage is the primary way in which the Bible describes our relationship to God. And chapter 8, the whole of chapter 8, verses 1 to 66, is like a celebration of God's marriage to his people.

It's a reminder of God's faithful love. Look at verse 23. Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below.

[5 : 23] So what is it that distinguishes God from anything else or anyone else? Here it is. You who keep your covenant of love with your servants, who continue wholeheartedly in your way.

You have kept your promise to your servant David, my father. With your mouth, you have promised and with your hand, you have fulfilled it as it is today.

God's covenant love, his faithful love. Now, for a marriage, any marriage, if it's to last, demands that both parties remain loyal and faithful.

But what keeps our marriage relationship to God is not our faithfulness, but God who keeps his covenant love with us.

What will keep our marriage relationship to God intact is not our faithfulness, but God who keeps his covenant love.

[6 : 34] because when God promises to be faithful, we can depend upon it. There's four things we're going to see about this marriage.

First, our marriage to God is dependent on God's covenant faithfulness. It's dependent on God's covenant faithfulness.

You may have a little title at the beginning of chapter 8 in your Bible which says something like this, the ark brought to the temple. Well, a better title, and again, the titles in our Bibles like the chapter headings are not inspired, but a better title would be God moves in with his people.

Look at verse 1. Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families to bring up the ark of the Lord's covenant from Zion, the city of David.

The first 13 verses that were read to us are all about the ark. Now, the ark isn't to be confused with Noah's ark. They're not, you know, kind of carrying this huge, big wooden boat up.

[7 : 54] The ark is a wooden box overlaid with gold which symbolised God's presence with his people. And now that the temple has been built, chapters 5 to 7, the ark is being brought to the temple.

God is moving in. Verse 6. The priest then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the most holy place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim. Cherubim were angels, again, a symbol of God's presence. Now, before Kirsty and I got married, we lived in separate homes.

But when we got married, after we had made our vows and our commitments to one another, we moved in to the same house.

Our marriage brought us together in a lifelong union. And here God comes to move in to live with his people.

[9 : 05] Verse 10. When the priest withdrew from the holy place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord and the priest couldn't perform their service because of the cloud for the glory of the Lord filled his temple.

You may remember from other accounts in the Old Testament when God appears, very often it's in a cloud. God's presence has come to the temple.

Verse 12. Then Solomon said, the Lord said that he would dwell in a dark cloud. I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever.

forever. So God moves in with his people. The marriage relationship. But what makes this marriage possible is God's faithfulness.

Have a look back up at verse 9. There was nothing in the ark, there was nothing inside this wooden box except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Horeb where the Lord had made a covenant with the Israelites when they came out of Egypt.

[10 : 30] Now the stone tablets you remember were written or what was written on them were the ten commandments and they were placed inside the wooden box.

The commandments were God's covenant with his people. It's like a marriage contract. Exodus 20 tells us what was written.

It starts out by saying I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. Here I am. I am the God who loves you. The faithful God who does not forget his promises.

I rescued you. I am faithful to you. And then we read down through the commandments. The first one, you shall have no other gods but me.

You shall not make for yourself an image or idol to replace me. I am your God. You are my people.

[11 : 32] These are the covenant promises, the contract that binds the marriage relationship together. Now history tells us that God's people, Israel, had done everything possible to break their vows.

They had replaced God with other lovers. And yet despite their failure, in chapter 8 we see God moving in with his people.

Not because they are faithful, but because of God's faithful love. Look at how Solomon responds, verse 15. Then he said, Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who with his own hand has fulfilled what he promised with his own mouth to my father David.

You see, the ark was not just a symbol of God's presence with his people, it is a written reminder of God's covenant faithfulness.

God is saying to them, you may break your vows, but I will never ever break my promise to you. So first, our marriage to God is dependent on God's covenant faithfulness.

[12:57] It was then, and it is today. Second, our marriage to God is sustained by God's mercy. Now, God's promise to move in with his people sounds exciting, and it was, but it was no small thing for God to come and dwell and live with his people.

Look at verse 29, moving on through the chapter. Solomon says, may your eyes, he's talking to God, may your eyes be open towards this temple night and day, this place of which you said, my name shall be there, so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays towards this place.

Now, you probably were in your house outside, you've probably got a number somewhere on your wall, or maybe you have a name that identifies your house, it tells us who lives there.

Well, it's as if God has written his name, Yahweh, on the front door of the temple. My name shall be there. God is making it abundantly clear.

I live here, I dwell with these people. Now, that might seem grand and great, but it's also a big problem. You see, the covenant promises went something like this.

[14:25] The marriage contract was like this. God said to them, if you obey me, then I will bless you. If you keep your promises to me, then I will live with you.

But if you disobey me, if you walk away from me, then I will curse you. If you fail to keep your promises, then you will be removed from me.

We can't live together. And Solomon knew that. He knew that he and his people had a sin problem.

So he begins to pray, verse 31. When anyone wrongs their neighbour, so if anybody does something wrong towards their neighbour, verse 32, then hear from heaven and act, verse 33, when your people Israel have been defeated by an enemy because they have sinned against you, verse 34, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people, verse 35, when the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, sin, because your people have sinned against you, verse 36, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel.

Not if we sin, but when we sin. Solomon's honesty only reveals the depth of the problem. God moving in with his people was filled with tension.

[16:11] To have the presence of God amongst them was both glorious and fearful. All at the same time, it was a joyful experience, but it was also terrifying.

They knew that if they broke their promises, it would mean they would face God's judgment. God would banish his people. They could no longer enjoy his presence.

You see, if they were to enjoy the intimacy of God, if they were to experience God's faithful love, it would require the mercy of God.

And here we see the beauty of God's mercy. Look at verse 46. Just jump on a little bit. Verse 46. Again, Solomon is still talking to God.

when they sin against you. For there is no one who does not sin. And you become angry with them and give them over to their enemies, who take them captive to their own lands far away or near.

[17:26] Well, we know the story, don't we? That's tragically what happened. The story, the whole story of 1 Kings is a slow decline of increasing unfaithfulness.

And God did what he promised. 300 years after Solomon came the Babylonians. They came in, marched in, destroyed the temple, destroyed the ark.

God's presence gone and God's people carried off into exile. The marriage relationship in tatters. You see, if they were to enjoy God's intimacy, mercy, it would require God's mercy.

So Solomon continues to pray, verse 47, and if they have a change of heart in the land where they are held captive and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors and say, we have sinned, we have done wrong, we have acted wickedly, and if they turn back to you with all their heart and soul in their land of their enemies who took them captive and pray to you towards the land you gave their ancestors, towards the city you have chosen and the temple I have built for your name, then from heaven, your dwelling place, hear their prayer and their plea and uphold their cause.

Now it's interesting to note that the first people to have read the book of first kings, would have been those very first people who had been carried off into exile.

[19 : 10] So you can imagine the marriage relationship is in tatters, the temple has been destroyed, the ark is gone, the very symbols of God's presence, and here they are in a different place, and they remember, they remember, if they are to enjoy God's intimacy, it requires God's mercy.

And so they cry out, verse 50, and God forgive your people who have sinned against you, forgive all the offences they have committed against you, forgive us.

You see, under the old covenant, God's people could never fully and enjoy the blessings of God. Their failure, their broken promises, their wandering lustful hearts meant they were constantly removed from God's presence.

Yes, God was merciful, yes, he would take them back, yes, God was so forgiving he would dwell with them, but their sin meant it never lasted and it was never enjoyed.

It was a relationship whereby they were kind of in, out, in, out. They never enjoyed God's love. And that's why God had promised a new covenant.

[20 : 40] Look at this from Hebrews 8. For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another.

But God found fault with the people and said, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant.

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. By calling this covenant new, he has made the first one obsolete.

need. So God had to bring about a new covenant, a new contract, because they couldn't keep their promises.

If they were to enjoy God's intimacy, it needed something new, something better. You see, the ark of the old covenant has now been replaced.

[21 : 43] Look, we can see it here before us this morning, with the table of the new covenant. You see, every time we eat of this bread and drink of this juice, we are reminded of God's presence with us.

But not just his presence, God's faithful, committed and loyal love. How? Well, because the bread and the juice speak of Christ's death for us.

Jesus, the God-man who came to stand in for us, to represent us fully and completely before God, and as Christ came, he took the blame for all of my unfaithfulness, all my wandering, lustful wanderings from God, all of my sin.

He takes the blame. But not only that, but Christ lives the perfect life for me, and fulfills and keeps the vows of obedience that I could never keep.

He does it all for me and for you so that I can enjoy God's presence forever. And this new covenant is so great that even when I sin, not if I sin, but when I sin, God will never remove himself from me and I will never be removed from him.

[23 : 19] Why? Because Christ has taken my unfaithfulness and he has kept the vows of obedience for me. Here we have a marriage that is dependent not on my faithfulness or your faithfulness or your ability or the strength of your love, but on God's absolute loyal and enduring faithful love to you and to me.

You see, if we are to enjoy God's intimacy, it requires God's mercy. And the table reminds us to look again to Christ on the cross where mercy continues to flow with arms outstretched so the flood of mercy comes to God's people.

So second, our marriage to God is sustained by God's mercy. Third, our marriage to God is nourished by prayerful dependence.

Turn over to, where are we, verse 56. Our marriage to God is nourished by prayerful dependence. Solomon knew that if their relationship to God was to be enjoyed, if it was to go on in the right way, well then it depended on prayer.

[25 : 00] And here we have like a marriage prayer, and I want to commend this to you as a prayer that we can pray ourselves in our marriage relationship with God.

I'm just going to read it just very quickly and just make some comments as we go along. There's really five parts to this prayer that we can pray in our marriage relationship to God.

First, praise him for his faithfulness. Look at verse 56. Praise be to the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, just as he promised.

Not one word has failed of all the good promises he has given to us. How true is that? Not one word has failed.

God is faithful and loyal. Praise him for it. Verse 57. A desire and a longing to experience God's presence.

[25 : 59] Verse 57. May the Lord our God be with us as he was with our ancestors. May he never leave us nor forsake us.

In Christ he is never going to leave us and so we pray that we may experience that more and more. Third, there's a longing for deep change in our own lives.

Verse 58. May he turn our hearts to him to walk in obedience to him and keep the commands, the decrees and laws that he gave our ancestors. That longing that God would change our hearts in such a way that we love to obey him.

Fourth, we pray for provision in our relationship with him. Verse 59. And may these words of mine which I have prayed before the Lord be near to the Lord our God day and night, that he may uphold the cause of his servants and the cause of his people according to each day's needs.

We can pray to our faithful God who will provide all that we need in our relationship with him. And we pray all these things for his glory.

[27 : 23] Verse 60. So that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. What a great prayer.

I just simply commend that to you. Work through that prayer yourself this week as a way to pray our relationship to God. So that's how we pray.

Why do we pray? Well Solomon knew we need to pray. Not to earn favour from God but because without God we have nothing and are nothing.

You see through our prayer we are admitting our complete and utter weakness. It is a dependency upon God. One summer when I was young our neighbours were away on holiday and they asked me if I would water their garden for them.

They were away for two weeks. Well I completely forgot to do any watering at all until the day before they were due home. And of course panic the garden was wilting everything was dying so I turned on the hose early in the morning and what did I do?

[28 : 31] I forgot to turn it off. So the place was flooded. I mean the water was kind of coming up to the side of the window. It was really really bad. Well the flowers soaked it up and they began to flourish and they said you did an awful lot of watering when you were away.

Well the point is very simple. Prayer is like that. When we pray or if we forget to pray it's like having the tap turned off.

But when we pray it's like the tap being turned on. All that we need from God is given to us so that the marriage relationship can be nourished so that it can flourish into everything that it is meant to be.

So don't look at prayer as something to do to earn God's favour and if I pray ten times a day God is going to bless me. No through prayer we are depending so we can nourish.

We can turn on the taps and let our lives be flooded with all that we need to nourish our relationship with him. then lastly our marriage to God is enjoyed through joyful worship.

[29 : 52] Every wedding that I've been to and I'm sure it's the same with you when all the vows and promises have been made there's a feast, there's a party, everyone celebrates the marriage union and that's what Solomon and all the people do when God moves in as the marriage as it like begins they throw a party.

Look at verse 63. Solomon offered a sacrifice of fellowship offerings to the Lord. 22,000 cattle. Wow! And 120,000 sheep and goats. So the king and all the Israelites dedicated the temple of the Lord. talk about a meat feast.

No veggie burgers here. What a party! And look at all the people! Verse 65. So Solomon observed the festival at the time and all Israel with him.

A vast assembly of people from Lebo, Hamas, way up into the north, to the wadi of Egypt, right down in the south. There were people from all over the kingdom coming together for this great celebration.

[31 : 06] middle of verse 65, they celebrated it before the Lord our God for seven days, and that wasn't enough. So for seven more days, 14 days of all, of eating and drinking and feasting, what a joyful celebration.

And look at the response of the people. Verse 66, on the following day he sent the people away, they blessed the king, and they went home joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the Lord had done for his servant David and his people Israel.

Now let me ask us this, how much more can we be joyful and glad in heart for all the good things the Lord has done for us?

How much more can we celebrate? God has been faithful to his promise. He has sent his son who died our death and who keeps the vows for us so that we can enjoy his presence without fear.

We can call him father. We can run to him as children and know his embrace and he will never turn us away no matter our sin.

[32 : 40] And we can rest. There is no more work to be done because Christ has completed and finished it all.

We are to celebrate and to enjoy our relationship with God. Here is a God whose mercy covers all our sin and who keeps his covenant of love.

And in a moment we are going to celebrate. We are going to have a feast. A feast that is a feast. An appetizer of the ultimate feast to come.

Of that wedding feast when we will be with the Lord Jesus and we will reign with him forever and ever and ever. God's covenant faithful love.

Do you know it? Have you experienced it? Can you rest and enjoy in all that he has done for us?

[33 : 48] Let's pray. Fro här theme who have here to join them.

patience you