

Ephesians 5:22-33 - The Real Cinderella Story

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We have made our way through Ephesians to the end of chapter 5. We're getting close. Hang in there. We've made it to the part of Ephesians where Paul begins to address marriage and family relationships.

And so we're going to slow down for about four weeks and get to talk about those really important subjects together over the next four Sundays. We're not only going to talk about it during worship on Sunday mornings, but we'll have a chance to sit down together over lunch and have a dialogue and a Q&A.;

There's a lot to talk about these days with these significant issues, and some of it's better done conversationally. So we're going to do that at what we call Pastors on the Patio. That's scheduled for September 1st, by the way.

So we'll have a lot of opportunity to be talking about these things together in the weeks ahead. But I want us to remember as we talk about marriage that these verses we're about to read are not isolated from the rest of Ephesians.

[1 : 10] The whole book of Ephesians has been talking and teaching us about how we are connected in Christ. Connected to God through Christ and then also to each other.

That we're linked together into one body to house the Spirit of God, to magnify the grace of God. So when you see this image of the hands being held, remember that that's just one link in the larger chain.

That when we've talked about Ephesians all the way through, we've used a different image for the book of Ephesians, but it looks very similar. You see the hands being held there? Those hands are just one piece of the larger body, the family that God has brought together through His Son.

We're not leaving that in order to talk about marriage. We're talking about a particular relationship within the body of Christ. One link in the larger family established for God's glory and for our good. So all of us, married, single, divorced, young and old, all of us are to be living as God's holy and beloved children, filled with the Spirit.

[2 : 22] It's in that context I want you to hear the following words that you hear at many weddings. They are God's words and needful for all of us this morning. Ephesians 5 at verse 22, the Word of God.

Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior.

Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

In the same way, husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of His body.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

[3 : 45] However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. Pray with me. Father, thank You for this, Your Word.

We are grateful that You have not left us alone, but have given us Your guidance for our lives. You have spoken into our lives, and we, Your people, would desire to hear from You this morning, not from any man, but to hear Your words.

Holy Spirit, You must speak to our hearts. Would You do what You love to do and shine the spotlight on Jesus, that we would see Him clearly, that we would love Him more, and that it would change our lives.

We do ask that You would do that in His name. Amen. Ah, marriage. Isn't it just always like that? Don't you love marriage? Cinderella and Prince Charming, gazing into each other's eyes, dancing through life together.

[4 : 59] Such a wonderful picture, isn't it? Marriage, that's what we're going to talk about. Now, you're chuckling because this is a fairy tale, isn't it? That's what we call Cinderella.

We call it a fairy tale. Most of the marriages that you and I know don't look like this most days and don't spend most of our time doing that. That's not what you think of when you think of marriage. But I do think in many ways we dream and we hope that marriage will make us like that, don't we? I'll be honest. When I was engaged to Christi, I remember thinking something along those lines. I was pretty sure at that point in my life that I was somewhere close to Prince Charming and that marrying my Cinderella was basically just going to finish the process.

Any small things that were lacking, she was going to come in and of course be delighted to be with me. Of course, that was a given. But yeah, there were some rough edges and she'd rub some of those off and then not all of life would be easy.

[6 : 05] I knew that, but we were going to be together and we were going to be looking lovingly into each other's eyes and dancing all the time no matter what was happening.

That's what marriage was like coming out of college. You may not have ever used those words exactly. Hopefully I didn't. But you've probably thought something not too different from that.

When we think about marriage and when we talk about it, we do think a lot about how it's going to make us the best version of me, right? How's it going to make me a better me?

That marriage is going to make me feel good and fulfill my desires, the unmet longings that I have. That it will make my life better and more fulfilling.

That's what marriage is about. I'd suggest to you that's the standard view of marriage in our culture these days. That marriage is primarily about me. I believe it's similar in our minds too.

[7 : 05] That we say things when marriage gets hard like this just isn't working for me. This isn't what I expected. This is not what I signed up for. We talk in marriage about things like compatibility by which we often mean somebody who I can enjoy, I can get along with.

Someone who will make me a better person, that I can partner with and benefit from. It's in many ways about me. And not all of that is wrong or bad in itself.

But I think we misuse and overemphasize that perspective. And we miss God's highest intent. His grand design for marriage.

Notice in this passage what Paul does as he starts talking about our relationships. When he talks about marriage he doesn't even stay on husband and wife. Like you'd think if you were going to talk about marriage that's what you got.

Husband and wife. Paul can't stop talking about Jesus and the church, can he? Almost every time he gets started. And in case you haven't noticed when he gets to verse 32 he says, by the way all of this that I'm saying what I'm really talking about is Christ and the church.

[8 : 19] It's a mystery he says. But from the very beginning of the institution of marriage in the Garden of Eden this is what God has been intending to do.

It's the mystery of marriage Paul says. God designed marriage to display the remarkable relationship between Christ and the church. This is first and foremost what marriage is about.

And when we lose sight of this chief goal and purpose the consequences are devastating in our marriages themselves and beyond. Just think about what happens in a culture when we forget that marriage is not all about us and our fulfillment but about a higher purpose.

That it's not designed to fulfill my desires and make me fulfilled. That that's not the only thing that's going on. When God's intention for marriage is downplayed or sidelined there's very little to limit the damage that we will do.

Is there? We shouldn't be shocked at the culture around us losing sight of the priority of God's intent for marriage when we've often lost sight of it in the church.

[9 : 30] And we have. Haven't we? In many ways we've lost sight of marriage as part of this greater story that God's designed it for. We've allowed marriage in many ways to become an idol.

To become the ultimate story. To be the fulfillment of Christian living. Is to be married with a couple of kids. That that's the high point.

And so in doing that we've made unmarried people. Those committed to celibacy because of desires they wrestle with. Feel in many cases less than fully Christian.

As though the Apostle Paul or Jesus Himself was missing out on the essence of the fullness of abundant life. While harping regularly on biblical sexual ethics we've compromised biblical standards for divorce and remarriage.

We've taken the discussion of roles between husband and wife and we've made it pragmatic or political. We've started talking about it in terms of what will make me happy or what will play well publicly or what just works best for us.

[10 : 44] And we've taken it out of the context that God gives it to us in right here in this passage of part of the greater story. And we've done that in our marriages haven't we?

For all these things and for many more we need to repent church. We need to repent for the many ways we have made marriage about me and my fulfillment rather than about God and His glory.

Because Paul says this remarkable glorious relationship between Christ and His church that's the one that's the real story. The great story of which human marriage is a picture or a shadow.

So he's telling us in this passage don't get so caught up in the how-tos of human marriage that you miss the whole point. Don't get distracted in the next few weeks by trying to fix your own marriage and miss the reason that yours exists.

Don't you do that when you come to a passage like this? Either you think oh no he's going to try to fix my marriage. Or you think oh maybe he's going to fix my marriage. Isn't that the first thing we think when we open to this passage?

[11 : 56] Don't get caught up either in dreaming of being Prince Charming or Cinderella in your story and miss the real Cinderella story that you are already a part of.

And Paul's so focused on that story that we get chapters of it in the midst of his discussion on marriage of him talking about relationship between husbands and wives. Each of these chapters sounds a little bit like things we sometimes say with a little bit different twist on each of them and I'll explain that as we go.

But what's that great story? What is the story that Paul can't stop telling that we have to hear? The first chapter in the real Cinderella story is love at first sight.

What do we read in verse 25? Christ loved the church. Christ loved the church.

Maybe that doesn't strike you as remarkable. Maybe you're used to hearing that. Maybe that seems like old hat and after all when Cinderella shows up looking like this we kind of expect Prince Charming to have this love at first sight experience, don't we?

[13 : 12] It's not something surprising to us at all. But we, God's people, the church, we haven't had a fairy godmother clean us up. We're the Cinderella dressed in rags, beaten, abused, neglected for years.

Jesus sees someone created for greatness and relationship relegated to being a scullery maid, right? That's the story. She was created for something more, to be great, to have royal blood, to be in relationship and she's serving as a scullery maid and Jesus sees that Cinderella and He loves her.

Remember what God's people are like? Ezekiel 16 paints a graphic picture. On the day you were born, your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths.

No eye pitied you to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred on the day that you were born.

And then God comes, and when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, live! I said to you in your blood, live! I made you flourish like a plant of the field.

[14 : 35] At first sight, abandoned, bloodied, neglected, and God says, live! Live! I love you!

Isaiah 62 paints another picture. You shall no more be termed forsaken. Your land shall no more be termed desolate, but you shall be called my delight is in her and your land married.

For the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married. As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. What's the first sight? Forsaken, desolate, nothing to

offer, and God says, that's the one I see.

I will rejoice over you. I love you. The first chapter of the story sees us muddying ourselves on the filth of the world, right?

Turning away from God, running away from Him, seeking after ourselves, undeserving, forlorn, but God loves us.

[15 : 44] God loves us. Isn't that amazing? Can you believe that He walks into that, that that's the first glimpse He gets and He loves us? It's where the courtship between Christ and the church begins with Jesus seeing the beauty for which we were created through the ugliness of our sin and the mess of our lives.

Is that all you can see when you look at your life? For some of us, the ugliness, the mess, is all we can see.

Let me tell you something. God loves you. He loves you with a love so broad and wide and high and deep that it begins before the foundation of the world and He comes after you to love you not because of how beautiful you are.

It's love at first sight not because we are so naturally lovable but because He is so naturally loving. That's how the story begins.

The love of Jesus for us is such that it's not merely a feeling is it? What does the rest of the verse say? It has action attached. Christ loved the church and what?

[17 : 04] What was the result of that love? He gave Himself up for her. Verse 25 You've seen couples before so excited for their wedding day that you would say oh they're dying to be together.

And that's a phrase that we use but in this case it's actually true. There was no way for these two to be together except through death.

The only way the pure prince could be with his impure princess was to come and die for her. In this Cinderella story the prince couldn't just stay far away in the castle sitting back waiting for all the lovely women to come so he could make his choice.

Now that's not how this one worked. In this story the prince was required wasn't he? Listen don't let this get old to you I know how it feels you know this story.

Listen the prince leaves his castle. He has to come and seek after the lost princess the one who's been abandoned he had to come after his bride and pursue her to his own death.

[18 : 15] From heaven he came and sought her to be his holy bride. With his own blood he bought her and for her life he died.

He gave himself up for us. He took our place. He suffered the agony and the disgrace and the tears that were rightfully ours.

he gave himself up for us. He was crucified in our place. And he dies so that we can be together.

By his death we are united in this mysterious relationship we call union with Christ. Marriage to the king of glory. Verse 30 says we're members of Christ's body connected to him and that Paul says is why a man leaves his father and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh.

Why? Why does a man do that? Why does a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife? Because Jesus left his father to cleave to us. So that we could be one with him.

[19 : 26] So that we could know true and deep relationship with him. So that all the benefits of his sonship, the rights and privileges he had as a son of the father could be ours.

Why did he have to do that? Why did Jesus have to come and die so that those things could be true? Because he knew that we would let go of him if he didn't hold tightly onto us.

And so Jesus who didn't consider his privileged position in heaven something to be grasped, something to hold on to, considered you something to hold on to.

Amen? That's what Jesus valued. That's what he thought was valuable enough to hold on to it tightly. You. He came to seek his bride.

He gave himself up for us. So great is his love for his bride. So great is his love for you. So great is his love for us.

[20 : 29] That's how the story goes. But amazingly, he doesn't even stop there. He continues the cleansing and purifying of his bride through washing with water in the word.

Verse 26. He nourishes and cherishes her. Verse 29. When we use the phrase you complete me to talk about our relationships, I think we mean something like what I thought before I got married.

That you take a B plus guy and you complete him. You turn him into an A, right? You help him finish things off. Make the best version of me that I can be.

And that may be true in many marriages, guys, that's exactly what's happened. That does sometimes happen, but it often misses the point of marriage. Because what happens in this great story is not that a B plus guy turns into an A.

Jesus comes and he takes an F, a hopeless and abandoned mess. And he washes and cleanses, nourishes and cares for me.

[21 : 36] Look back at Ezekiel 16. What does God do? Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather.

I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck and I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.

Let's keep reading. There's a little bit more on the next slide. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver. Your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth.

You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty and your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty for it was perfect how through the splendor that I had bestowed on you declares the Lord God.

God is intent on us being beautiful isn't he? He's intent on making his people a beautiful and glorious bride and there's no fairy godmother to dress up the ragged bride.

[22 : 48] It's only Jesus' blood that washes his bride clean and clothes her in white. It's his spirit who remains with her working with his word to make her pure and beautiful.

Day by day exposing her to the glories of her Savior revealed in God's word. He will perfect the bride. bride. And so this great Cinderella story ends as do all good stories.

How? Happily ever after right? With the bride and groom living happily ever after. Jesus wants a permanent relationship with his bride.

Look at verse 27. He presents the church perfect to himself. He finishes the work and lives in relationship together forever. The church without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish holy and blameless.

Do you feel like that personally? Without spot or wrinkle or any other blemish holy and blameless? Do you feel like that about yourself? Do you feel like that about the church corporately?

[24 : 06] Is that the way she looks to you? Listen, if your answers are no I don't and no she doesn't, let me remind you of something.

Jesus will see that that happens. He will restore his church to the absolute beauty and the perfect holiness for which she was created so that just as it's always supposed to be, he will live an intimate relationship with her forever and ever.

That's where your story is headed whether it feels like it today or not. To be honest in our culture I feel like that almost seems too good to be true these days, doesn't it?

I mean we see pictures even of Prince Charming and Cinderella riding off after their wedding and happily ever after is below this picture and we think yeah well we'll see and we'll see won't we I just don't know I'm not sure if they really meant the words they just said to each other there are tough roads ahead I'm just not sure if it's going to be as happily ever after as they are feeling like right now and I believe this is one of the primary reasons why the Bible would say that God hates divorce even though he allows it because in this broken world people sometimes need protection from the harm of one who has broken covenant with them right God knows that but he hates divorce because the marriage that our marriages are supposed to reflect is a lasting one a permanent relationship one where the husband loves and forgives even his wife's worst repeated failures I'm not intending to berate you if you have walked through the pain of divorce not at all I'm trying to offer you the glory and the hope of a perfect marriage because none of us has a perfect marriage none of us has a marriage that lasts eternally but the love of Christ is fixed on his own eternally he'll love his own to endless day a relationship with absolutely unending love completely inexhaustible forgiveness and eternally renewed passion is hard for us to imagine but it is exactly what we were created for that's exactly what God made us for is that kind of relationship and Jesus is preparing his church to be presented to himself so that that can happen to enjoy that relationship forever church your marriage to Jesus will outlast the best human marriage it's the one that lasts forever the eternally lasting marriage is between

[27 : 04] Jesus and his church and no matter how many times you felt like yours won't stand that that marriage that you can be a part of will it will last forever because your bridegroom will never fail

you that's the hope of the gospel it's why the great story of scripture ends in revelation with a wedding right with the wedding supper of the lamb and when the bride shows up for the wedding supper look at what it says revelation 21 I saw the holy city new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying behold the dwelling place of God is with man he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God that's where it's going he will be with us forever he will dwell with us as our God we will live happily ever after glory glory glory right it will be like that it's going there you can look forward to it that is my favorite part of the real

Cinderella story my favorite part I hate getting to the end of a good book and then it's over right don't you hate that I have to go back to the start and start over again the real Cinderella story never ever ends he keeps loving us and keeps living in relationship with us do you know that bridegroom oh do you know that kind of love have you experienced his love for you like that can you wait to be with your savior forever we call all of that the real Cinderella story we often call it the gospel the good news of Jesus Christ the message of his grace and it's the story I want all of us to leave here this morning enthralled with it's not that our marriages are unimportant it's just that they're not first and foremost about us they become most beautiful and most what God intends for them when they're retellings or pictures or snapshots of that great story the story of the glorious prince who comes down from his throne to seek after the abandoned princess and sacrifices everything to rescue her to restore her to her original beauty and to live with her forever forever we'll talk over the next couple of weeks about what it looks like for our marriages to retell that great story to be a picture of the remarkable relationship between

Christ and his church but one of my favorite examples of that is this story told by a surgeon Richard Selzer in a book called Mortal Lessons Notes on the Art of Surgery the surgeon describes a scene that he witnesses in a recovery room after he has performed surgery to remove a tumor from the cheek of a young lady the surgeon writes this I stand by the bed where a young woman lies her face post-operative her mouth twisted in palsy clownish a tiny twig of the facial nerve the one to the muscles of her mouth has been severed she will be thus from now on the surgeon had followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh I promise you that nevertheless to remove the tumor in her cheek I had to cut the little nerve her young husband is in the room he stands on the opposite side of the bed and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight isolated from me private who are they

I ask myself he and this wry mouth I have made who gaze at each other and touch each other so generously greedily the young woman speaks will my mouth always be like this she asks yes I say it will it is because the nerve was cut she nods and is silent but the young man smiles I like it he says it's kind of cute all at once I know who he is I understand and I lower my gaze one is not bold in an encounter with a god unmindful he bends to kiss her crooked mouth and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers to show her that their kiss still works he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers to show her that their kiss still works and Selzer says when he sees that it's like watching god a broken bride who can't fix her brokenness but a loving bridegroom who condescends moves toward her twists his own lips as it were so that their relationship can work again do you see your savior the bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom's face his face for you twisted beaten bloodied love and yet oh how glorious and precious let's pray Jesus thank you would we see your face this morning that we might actually believe someone would love us like that father would you captivate our hearts with the love that you have shown to your people in sending your son as we come to this table with the picture of the savior who would accommodate himself to our brokenness in order to make us his bride forever overwhelm us and give us great joy we ask in his name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org