

Word Notes Sunday 22/01/17
Tony Hodge: The mystery of marriage

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday, listen to the podcast if you missed the talk <http://www.newmarketcommunitychurch.co.uk/podcasts.htm>)

Key Text: Ephesians 5:321-30 NCV; 31-33 ESV

Marriage is a profound mystery. Perhaps we can all empathise with that sentiment – Men are from Mars, Women from Venus after all. But this is odd - here's a passage from the Bible often quoted at weddings written by Paul the Apostle in around AD 60 to a church in Ephesus. In the middle of giving advice on relationships to his flock in he admits to not understanding the mystery of marriage and then says he's talking about "*Christ and the Church*". Why is that? What has it to do with marriage and husbands and wives? The answer to that can be found through the whole Bible, a book that starts with a wedding and ends with a wedding and has a betrothal, marriage promises of sorts, in the middle.

The first wedding is right at the start in Genesis chapter 2. Adam is alone and there is no mate for him. God puts him to sleep and forms Eve out of his rib – poor biology but remember this is picture language written to help us understand a deeper truth. The two are one flesh, and that is why a man and a woman leave their parents and become one body (Gen 2:24).

The at the end of the Bible is another wedding – that of the Lamb and his bride. Blessed are those invited to this wedding feast! Picture language again – who is the Lamb, the bride and who are their guests?

And so to the middle. John tells us at the start of his Gospel how the Word was made flesh and lived among us. He's talking about Jesus (Jn 1:14). When another John – the Baptist, sees Jesus coming towards him he declares: "Behold The Lamb of God" (Jn 1:29). Then we get to the promises. In Luke 22 and Matt 26 Jesus gives his body in the account of the first Eucharist or Communion just before he is arrested and crucified. "*This is my body given for you this is my blood poured out for you*". Does that sound a bit like "*All that I am I give to you*"?

The Bible is a love story, telling of God's unrelenting, pursuing, self-giving love for people, for you and me. There's even an intimate love song in the middle – go look! So now Paul's comments about the mystery of marriage and it being about Christ and the Church make more sense. He's talking about how marriage and the love between husband and wife is a picture of Jesus and his love for His Body – the church. Apostle Paul is saying: "Look, we kind of understand what marriage is – the joining of two people in love where each gives up their own agenda for the good of both". Well that what Jesus offers – he gave up remote apartness in heaven came to join with mankind in our troubles and gave up his life on the cross for us and invites us to yield to his love, his support, his care – all freely given when we yield to his headship.

Here then is an invitation – to the wedding of the Lamb and His bride, of Christ and the church, the marriage that will be consummated at the end of time, will you accept Jesus' offer of himself given for you? Will you respond to that gift with a yielding love, saying yes to his husbandly leadership? Will you come to the great wedding meal of the lamb?

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

Paul is encouraging his flock to live a new life, not the way of the world. They should model Christ in their relationships.

- 1) Why do you think Paul makes such a big thing about marriage relationships?
- 2) There are 4 main promises in marriage: To Love, To Honour and To Keep and of Fidelity.
 - a) What do those words mean to you?
 - b) Is that different from the current world view?
 - c) If you are married how are your promises challenged in everyday life?
 - d) How do they reflect God's promises to mankind?

3) How can your marriage (or other relationships) speak to a broken world? Can your weaknesses and failings encourage others when set against a commitment to the marriage promises?

Witness (*this is the bit where the cell talks, plans and prays about how to share the Good News*)

Live out your relationships according to Paul's teaching to the Ephesians.