**Series**: The Book of Hebrews

**Title**: Precious Marriage - Fruit of Faith

**Scripture**: Hebrews 13:4

**Description**: Faith's treasure includes a precious marriage and wholesome sex!

# Read

For many people there will be no more painful topic than marriage. And so I tread carefully as I expound this biblical topic.

At the same time I am utterly convinced that there is no higher, more sacred, incredibly amazing institution among the human race than marriage -> Of all the encounters God gives commonly to all humans, nothing surpasses this.

[of course, not everyone gets married; Jesus himself said there are 'eunuchs' by birth, by others, by personal choice for the kingdom of God! For such, to enter marriage would be like a fish on dry land. So while marriage is this incredible encounter, it doesn't define our humanity, and we mustn't measure ourselves by it.]

Nevertheless, this verse is written to the church - to the statuses and experiences *of all of us here* - whether painful, pleasurable, or absent - just one verse, with one main point: *marriage* is *sacred* - and we must treat it as such.

We're in ch13 - Fruit of faith : "***Affection for believers***", today: "***Honour of Marriage***"

I have the task of expounding How to Honour marriage, no matter what your status is... 1 verse but so much that God has to say about it... I will need to compress, and also close with some important counsel because there will be burning questions.

# Pray

# Read

Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

# How to Honour Marriage

* God is calling us all to **think of**marriage, **as He does**! God loves marriage; this is not Paul's subjective opinion. God invested himself in creating us and designing us for marriage, and calls us to (4) '*hold it in honour'* as He does.
* Simple breakdown of the verse into 3 parts will help us see How to do this...

## Esteem the Feast of marriage (4a)

* The word for '*hold in honour*' is "*to see as Precious*" - a word about **Value**.
	+ [ILLUS: man valuing properties, estimating it's value; and then the tussle : to the government, 'it's not worth that much'; to the agent, 'it's worth much more!' He's an estimator, and so let's use this word, Esteem.
* (4) "*Highly valued let marriage be*!" **Precious**! - When something is **precious,** it is desirable to have, Let marriage be recognised, let it be esteemed.
	+ **> It strikes one** - could marriage be less valued today? General disposition toward it.
		- of all the news/movies/series that feature marriage - is it portrayed as a strong or weak institution?
		- I wouldn't be surprised if someone told me "divorce rates declining" because fewer people are desiring to marry, *'why marry if I can enjoy the privileges of living with someone, having kids, a life partner... what's marriage got to do with it?! It's in marriage that things go bad*!'
* (4) Let***marriage!*** - LIT: '*the wedding feast*' - a word understood in all cultures - that EVENT and CELEBRATION - and what distinguishes it from all other human enagements: 2 individuals becoming 1
	+ The **marriage feast** is **the pressing in** of both spouses into 1 composite whole: to find the grooves, shapes, thoughts, mind, dreams of each other, to so adjust and accommodate onelself sacrificially to the other, that there is a Oneness, Synnergy, Understanding, Fulfilment, Satisfaction, Safety, Security - "I got your back"
	+ **- The marriage feast** is a ***covenant*** that ***irreversibly binds*** ***2 into 1***. A beautiful composite, richer than the sum of its parts.
	+ **the Marriage feast is beyond 'living together'** in the same house - When marriage is only seen as 2 individuals in a convenient arrangement with benefits, it's missing the point - I've noticed the growing use of the word "partner" when referring to spouse. **Not partner**, but **spouse**.
	+ Now you could have a ceremony, but if the 2 are not oathing themselves into one, they're not esteeming the marriage feast.
	+ The **marriage feast** is the **2 becoming 1** - change in identity and nature. Living together is what you do with your friends, college mates, family, while your independent paths suit.
* The source of all marriage pain is the **GAP** between ***'the real marriage feast***'of bonded oneness, and the alternate ***'partnerships'*** of independent people many find themselves in. The absence of the Oneness.
	+ *It's not that you're late from work again and the supper is cold - but that I'm feeling abandoned - we're not One!*
	+ *it's not that you joked about me in front of my mates - but that I feel like you don't have my back!*
	+ *You've spent our money without me.*
	+ *You wouldn't speak to your close friend the way you speak to me!*
* The marriage feast is abandoned, by degrees, in moments that make up a lifetime. Stirring disappointment... and revenge... and Full-out war. **Then the estimator comes around and says, "Is this even a house?"** - and you've asked that a number of times, haven't you?
* **The marriage** is supposed to be **the marriage feast**.

Why esteem the 'Marriage Feast'?

* Rom 12:2 says we must be transformed by renewing our thinking - we can't transform marriage into a feast - we can't esteem marriage as God does - by looking for good examples and trying to imitate them - like parents, or some couple married for 60 years. We must see marriage for the Preciousness that God gave it

3 quick reminders - or maybe this is new to you!...

### The Marriage Feast is Precious because

**God Himself appoints, bears witness to it - Matthew 19:3-6**

3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning
**made them** male and female, 5
and **said**, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer **two but one** flesh. What therefore **God has joined** together, let not man separate."

* Marriage has divine sanction, It's a sacred ordinance, not a cultural convenience. God designs the covenant and then God witnesses the covenant (see Mal 2:14-16)
* The actual cultural form - church, under a tree, 7 day festival, before a magistrate... regardless: **The event of 2 covenanting to 1 is a God design** > the nature of your identity changes, composite whole. Yes, your bodies look the same - maybe get a bit wider, personalities probably adjust - but the hearts, minds, identity changed into 1.

**The marriage feast is also precious because It is "limited edition"**

* Luke 20:34-35

34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age [life here] marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead [life in Heaven] neither marry nor are given in marriage, 36 for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

* Unique dispensation - limited privilege. To some that sounds like a relief... but there's a better way - bring your marriage under God's design - and there will be treasurers this life cannot exhaust. You will grieve deeply at their passing.
* What is limited is precious - Don't squandor. [ILLUS: won't have children in the house forever (hope!)... same with marriage!] It's limited edition.

**3rdly the marriage feast is precious because it preaches Heaven (this explains why it's limited...)**

* We all know : marriage is a picture of Christ and His Church - and that we're also waiting for His return, which is called the 'Marriage Feast of the Lamb' - Rev 19:7

Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"-- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb

* But many, I believe, still haven't clicked; and others like me keep on forgetting, **the 'marriage feast' between husband and wife is not only a picture - it is a shadow of the True -** and that is why it's limited edition... the better edition will replace it;
	+ Just like **temple sacrifice** was a temporary shadow of Christ's work; The activity 'preached ' hope and understanding - it was real, and effective, given and celebrated... but only for a season, until the True temple and sacrifice came!! The point of the temple sacrifice was always **Christ saving**, - the expectation was always **Christ saving**.
	+ The **point** of the marriage feast is **Christ and His People uniting in the New Creation**, the **preview** is your marriage - but the **expectation** is always this salvation!
	+ What does this mean for marriage? Marriage is the perfect end-times sermon. [So much interest in end times currently]. Your marriage is to preach to this creation about that magnificent change of Love, Oneness, Synnergy, Understanding, Fulfilment, Satisfaction, Safety and Security - ! *Marriage is a God-sized idea; Ultimate, Eternal purpose of your marriage! Preach!*
* Eph 5:24-32 (see 2Cor 11:2)

## Esteem the Bed of marriage (4b)

Obviously this refers to sexual aspects of marriage. The marriage feast develops in closeness, and sexual intimacy is the highest expression of that. That intimacy is the whole romance of touch, kissing, caressing, mutual giving of delight. (and by the way, God's Word encourages this! cf Song of Solomon)

* Now just as the feast is to be honoured, the "***bed***" is to be "***undefiled"***. That means: let nothing of your sexuality (whether you're married or not) be in contradiction to the **preciousness of marriage** - sex is for marriage, all sexual intimacy is for marriage
	+ ![this is viciously attacked today: atheists and liberal theologians who deny personal creator, literal first man and woman - ie that marriage is purely a human construct of convenience that evolves over time, to be redefined and discarded as the values, intentions and motivations of any society changes - essentially 'we're animals who function by instinct alone'.]
	+ But to have **that estimation** of the **marriage bed** is to ***defile it***.
	+ BTW: even when sexuality is confined to marriage, it can defile the marriage bed, if instead of upholding trust and care in the marriage relationship, erodes it through selfishness or neglect. The way we exercise sexuality stems from the heart - and a heart that is self centred or manipulative will also show itself in the marriage bed.
* So, **'*let the marriage bed be undefiled'****:* includes don't expose yourself (and your partner) to sexual immorality -
	+ [ps Pagan Roman and Greek culture was just as sex-centric as today - worshiped] Pornography, Novels, TVs and series, Eye indulging in the lust for another... or just plain self-interested - all these erode the sacred trust of sacred and secret treasure between you two alone - all these other stimulations are redefinitions of 'sex'; We need to be transformed by renewing our minds about this.
* **The Good News is**... ***Sexual Intimacy can be undefiled***! Bringing honour to the Precious Marriage, and glorifying God! He desires your pleasure - pure vulnerability, safety, delight]. Talking about False Teachers, Paul says they

forbid marriage [which]God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

* [thought: What is God telling us about the experience of Heaven in this limited experience... if this is a temporary shadow, if Heaven is no loss but only gain, and all believers, of whatever earthly status will experience intimacy with Christ!]

## Esteem the abuse of marriage (4c)

* (4) is all about *value* - measuring worth. And this is a self evident conclusion - those who value oppositely to God -
	+ - who esteem marriage as not precious that which God has **created** and **witnessed** to, given as a **shadow**, and **shaped after His own gracious salvation in Christ** - who call *bad* what God has called good, and to call *good* what God has called bad -
* those who value oppositely to God will find His value judgement in return -

4 Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

* Those who judge marriage worthy of abuse will be judged worthy of condemnation
* *"the Sexually immoral* ": typically sexuality apart from marriage; "*Adulterous"* : typically sexuality against a marriage - no need to get technical, this is *the whole span of sexual immorality*
* If marriage is only a human construct of convenience, this is an unreasonable statement. But if Marriage is a message from the Living God - just as a false teacher is condemned, so too the sexually immoral and adulterer.

Eph 5:3

1Cor 6:9 Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [[ 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers ]] will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

* ! Gospel of Grace - return! The first step away from condemnation is sorrow; then repentance[turning], then faith, then obedience

# Concluding counsel

May the Lord renew our minds and produce all the glory of His Design in our lives. Some counsel - without expounding the scriptures - just a few words... God's Word has rich resource for all of this, and if you find you need to hear this, then get together with a mature believer, an elder, and let them walk through the scripture with you.

* To the married: Honour your marriage - prioritise is like God does. Actively pursue your spouse. Look at them with delight, and where there are cracks and crevasses, repair, and seek counsel. Even if there is no 3rd party/unfaithfulness and no intention to drift, the routines and concerns of life will diminish your affections. **1. Let the marriage feast** **continue** - date one another. **2. Guard the marriage bed**. ... **3. Seek out God's design** for your marriage in His word.
* To the unmarried/ young widows/widowers: **Firstly: Give thanks for the place God has you in** and don't let longing for marriage squandor the opportunities you have as single. Being unmarried has incredible benefits - marriage requires some intense investment and work, attention. Nevertheless - **Secondly: you are a sexual being** with all the mechanisms and chemicals for sex : Honour Marriage and refuse to indulge love until God witnesses the covenant between you and your spouse. Until *that* covenant, enter *a covenant with your eyes/heart*, as Job says, [(31:1)NIV] '*I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl'*. ie **Reserve and preserve the preciousness of Marriage** - refuse sin, repent quickly, relish Christ
* To the divorced/ those considering it: I grieve with you at the incredible pain of an aborted marriage. The church of Jesus has untold stories of sin, disobedience, unfaithful spouses, neglected marriages, addictions, hard hearts - because He came to save sinners - of whom each of us is chief! ... I think of **2Cor** - the man who, in the church, had been boldly sleeping with his father's wife : disciplined by the saints, but then truly repented with sorrow : Paul urged them to receive him back into fellowship. ... Or the **woman at the well** who had 5 husbands plus 1: though turning to Christ and being a witness in her town to His grace, had all that baggage to carry [how can she repair / make right - there's no fixing the mess] - **Adultery and Sexual immorality is evilly-messy, complex to navigate** - Friends be afraid of sin and its fruit. Even when your spouse has slept with another person, divorce is not necessarily the right option. But after divorce there has to come both a repentance, and a faithful journey to undertake before the Lord, and only by His help. Get counsel. Don't see remarriage as a remedy.
* To those in an Abusive marriage: Categorically - Abuse is evil, and dishonouring God's Marriage. Honour marriage, and honour the Lord by refusing to let it continue. Don't think that because God designed marriage, that you are therefore committed to accepting that abuse. 1] Refuse the abuse and protect yourself... reporting to the authorities, 2] Get a trusted godly counsellor involved to help you discern how to navigate the marriage.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith