

There are some TV shows I'm glad I watched. There are some TV shows that I wish I could watch. And then there are some shows that I have absolutely no interest in watching. Shows that I am proud to have never seen. And in that last category falls a pair of TV shows that have somehow lasted a combined 36 seasons on television. And they are called The Bachelor and The Bachelorette.

If you've never seen them, they are the ultimate in dating competitions. One man or one woman, surrounded by a crowd of people of the opposite sex. Weeding them down week by week. Rose by rose. Until they finally narrow the field to their single soulmate and get married.

Or not. In reality, there are very few happily ever after stories in the history of either show. In fact, out of those 36 seasons, there are currently only 4 couples who got married and remained married. But people keep watching anyway. Even though I think most of them know that what they're seeing is not how you build a successful marriage.

Marriage is built on trust. And commitment. And sacrifice. And forgiveness. And faithfulness. While these TV relationships are built on impressing the other person. Wowing them with money and good looks and humor and charm. They're about drawing attention to yourself so that you might have some chance of standing out in the crowd. And, frankly, from what I understand, there's a fair amount of deceit and manipulation involved as well. None of this has anything to do with marriage.

I bring this up because the relationship between God and His people is often depicted as a marriage. St Paul tells us that marriage was actually created by God to teach us about our relationship as a Church with Him. So there are a lot of analogies that can be drawn between the two.

And when I was reading our Old Testament lesson this week, I started thinking about those analogies. I started thinking about the contrast between a TV show marriage like the Bachelor or the Bachelorette and a real marriage. A Godly marriage. God's marriage to His Church.

The lesson starts off by establishing the primary visible characteristic of God's people: they are obedient to his commands. They listen to them, they teach them, they do them, they keep them, they refuse to forget them. They add nothing to them. They take nothing away from them. The pure Word of God is held at the center of everything they do.

Why? Because it gives them wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding that no other nation in the world has. Wisdom and understand that makes them stand out amongst all those other nations. Wisdom and understand that makes them impressive.

Because it also makes them righteous. As a preached a few weeks ago, wisdom and righteousness go hand in hand throughout God's Word and they do again here as well. The statutes and laws of God are wise because they are righteous.

And once again, the nations take notice of this righteousness. They look at their own laws and they realize that Israel has something better than they have. Once again, it makes the people of God look impressive.

And it makes God's people powerful. They are to go in and take back their homeland from the Canaanites. And their faithfulness to God's Word lets them do that. It's spelled out in black and white: *“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you.”*

That's power, right there. Listen to God's Word. Obey God's Word. And you will conquer armies. Can any other nation claim to have that kind of weapon? It's an impressive level of power that God is giving them. And continues to give them throughout the Old Testament.

The problem is that the relationship – the marriage – between God and his people isn't found in the impressive characteristics of His law. It's found in this single verse from our lesson: *“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?”*

That's the marriage of God and his people. Right there in a nutshell. God is near. And he wants us to call upon him. That's the foundation of our relationship. Israel's marriage with God was never meant to be built on the impressive things that God can do or that God would let them do. But on his faithfulness to them. And on their trust in his love and forgiveness. That's a marriage.

Unfortunately, Israel often forgot that. At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had most certainly forgotten it. The Pharisees were obsessed with being impressive. On impressing the world by getting their nation back from the Romans through their wisdom and righteousness and power. On impressing God himself with their wisdom and righteousness and power.

They were focused on the outside. On how they looked. On how clean they were. How well they kept the Law. How much knowledge they had accumulated.

And, unfortunately, we fall into the same trap. The trap of thinking that if we're good enough, maybe we can impress the world. If we can just impress the world with our wisdom and understanding, we can convince them to become one of us. If we can just wow them with our righteousness and appearance, we can lure them in. If we can just overwhelm them with our power and influence, then they will give up their fight.

In short, instead of being the true bride of Christ, we end up spending our time trying to be the TV bride of the world. Making ourselves one of the suitors for the world's attention. Forgetting that we already have a husband.

What the Pharisees forgot, and what we often forget, is that there is no other nation that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us. A god so near that he can look directly into our hearts. And see that we are not the wise, righteous, powerful people that we try to portray.

No, when God looks into our hearts, he doesn't see wisdom or righteousness or power. He sees evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. He sees someone defiled by sin.

But he also sees someone that he has made new. That he has made clean. That he has clothed with his righteousness. When he looks at His Church, he sees his bride. Dressed in all her impressive splendor.

And he says to us what he said through Moses. There is no god so near to us as the Lord our God is to us. There is no god who is so trusting, so committed, so forgiving, and so faithful. There is no god who will sacrifice more for you than our God has already sacrificed for us on the cross.

We look for a TV marriage with the world. One built on being superficial and impressive. Of wowing them with money and good looks and humor and charm. Of drawing attention to ourselves so that we might have some chance of standing out in the crowd.

But the church already has a real marriage with Christ. And you know what? That real marriage that we have with him already stands out in the crowd.

Have you ever known someone who was married for decades? I noticed in our bulletin that we have a couple like that with us this morning: Tom and Gladys celebrating 50 years of marriage. It's that kind of marriage that people look at and say, “I want that.” People may flock to their televisions to watch two people have a 6 week fling. But what they really respect and want for themselves is a marriage that stands the test of time.

That's the marriage that the church has with Jesus Christ. One that has stood the test of time. The test of centuries. Not because we were so faithful to Him. Oh no. We weren't. But because he is so faithful to us. So near to us. And we can always call on him.

In his time here on earth, Jesus Christ was not an impressive man. He did not teach things that the world thought were impressive. He did not die an impressive death. He would not have been chosen to be the Bachelor or given a rose by the Bachelorette.

He could have been impressive, but he chose not to be for our sake. Because we weren't impressive either. He chose to make himself less so that we could be greater. He chose to humble himself so that we could be glorified. He chose to die so that we might live. So that he might gather us together as His Church and be his bride forever.