

The High Dignity of True Women

A Real Look at Real Marriage

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On Tuesday evening, just passed, I preached a message titled, "When Marriage Gets Difficult." It was in the normal course of the teaching I've been doing on the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. And I started that message and invited response to it. I said, after you've heard this message, if you would like to hear more on the subject matter, let me know. I had a number in my mind, a little range of numbers, not like Gideon's fleece. I said, if the response falls within this range, I'll go for it, and I'll preach a few messages on marriage. Well, that little range that I had was not nearly adequate to cover the responses that I got. It was two or three times what I had expected as what would be a serious demand for it. Dozens of people have reached out to me and asked for more teaching on marriage, more teaching on difficult marriages, and I want you to know I'm happy to oblige. I am your servant, and on such a serious topic, it's a privilege for me to be able to bring the word of God to you on this topic. For the next two or three weeks, maybe, Sunday and Tuesday, we're just going to pause everything and I'm going to respond to the things that you said are on your heart in response to the word of God. I am excited about this. I believe that it will strengthen our church and strengthen your families and strengthen your marriages.

One of the things that I said, and if you haven't heard that message, you really need to; it'll set the context for things. One of the things that I said in an effort to put you all at ease and those who will hear the messages in other places, it's not a problem to have problems. Difficulties in marriage are to be expected. Scripture deals repeatedly in many, many books of the Bible describing difficult marriages, giving us instruction on marriage, explaining some of the causes of problems in marriage. The Bible is a realistic book. That's one of the many things that I love about the Bible. It doesn't create this unattainable air of satisfaction and everything's perfect and all of that like you see people portray their lives on social media. The Bible meets us where you and I know life is at. Now, not everybody has problems in marriage. One dear saint went out of his way to tell me how many years he'd been married and how good his marriage has been and that was an encouragement to me. But I know that, you know, there are many of you like me that over the course of time, you've found difficulties in marriage. And as I've said, I'll say this once and not repeat it for the rest of eternity, that's a joke: any problems that we've had in our marriage have been my fault. They really have been.

And so I preach with a sense of sympathy as one in need of grace as we come to this and as I was preparing for this Sunday, I had prepared a full message that I thought would be the perfect way to go, and then as I continued study and thinking about everything, I think the Lord led me in a different direction for what we have here this morning. I can say this. I can only wish with all of my heart that I had heard this message that I'm about to preach this morning much earlier in my married years. I think it would have helped and it would have shaped me in a way that would have been beneficial and would have facilitated a better way to approach marriage than what I did for so long. So this start of our series on dealing with marriage and thinking about marriage, this opening message, beloved, I want to tell you, I assure you that this is not what you're anticipating at all. This is not at all what you're expecting me to say. I also want to just put your minds at rest and just enable you to kind of let your guard down a bit as you hear what I have to say. I am not here this morning in particular, there will be no element of rebuke in anything that I say. There's not going to be any scolding or, you know, laying out of unattainable goals or anything like that. We just want to look at Scripture and see what Scripture says in a way that I think will help everybody in the room, and not simply those that are married, but those that are not married. Both women and young men alike are going to find in this things that give them direction for the future, even if they're waiting on marriage, let alone well into marriage.

And so we're going to turn as a start to Ephesians chapter 5, which is kind of the preeminent passage in Scripture about marriage. We're just laying background today for it, but I'm just going to read the first three verses for reasons that will become apparent over the course of time. And just one final thing, I just can't tell you enough how important this is as you hear me today. I'm on your side. If you've been a bad husband, a bad wife, your teeth are grinding because of how difficult marriage has been for you or how much hurt it has brought to you, I'm on your side. I'm on your spouse's side. I'm on everybody's side here. I really am. And so this is from a sympathetic pastor to people who have asked me to teach on this matter, and I realize that the many that have contacted me are only representative of others who didn't speak. So with that in mind, Ephesians 5, verses 22 through 24.

22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 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. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Well, the best help in thinking about marriage can come, after we've read this text, can come from the simplest of observations and it's an observation that I don't remember anyone ever making in my hearing. But beloved, this is so simple. It's so basic. Wives come from the realm of women. A man finds his wife from the realm of women, and that wife belongs to the realm of women that God appointed. A right view of marriage and help for your marriage is informed by a biblical view of women, and the reason that I emphasize that for you is this, is that when you get into the midst of marriage and you're having difficulties, your spouse is grating on you or is unkind to you, your immediate desire is, "How do I fix this problem? How can I make this problem go away so that it

won't disturb me in my peace any longer?" And that's not really very helpful. It's like having a dam collapse and you go and you put, you know, one clod of grass to stop the flow of water right there, but the whole dam is collapsing because the structure underneath it is not solid. We want to come back and establish some strength and stability to the foundation of marriage itself, and I believe that you will find and agree with me in the end that the simple observation that wives come from the realm of women is going to be far more helpful than you might suspect.

A right view of marriage, in other words, needs a biblical view of women. To help you in a difficult marriage, we need a biblical view of women and here's our problem: nothing in the world at all supports that view. Culture has poisoned the waters irretrievably over the course of my lifetime with so many destructive philosophies and ideas and activities. Just think about the way that our culture views women, what it teaches women, the ideas of feminism, striving to be the same as men, the pervasive affirmation of homosexuality and transgenderism, and a more specific but an illustrative mark of it over the past many years, and this is not a philosophy so much but it represents so much, the idea of female combatants in mixed martial arts combat. All of that portrays a view of women and is the environment in which we live, it's the air in which we breathe, and we are drinking from poisoned waters in our culture in ways that I know that we don't even recognize in all of these things and the church is not independent of the influence that culture brings to these things. But beloved, the waters can be polluted much closer to home as well. You and I, without thinking about it, we bring our own personal biases into the institution of marriage and those of us that have been married for decades, you know, we kind of brought those in into the past and kind of sorted it out piece by piece a little bit at a time maybe. But we're all products of our family history. We don't often think this way about what it is that has influenced the way that we think and the way that we relate to the person closest to us. It's difficult to step back and assess the impact of it all because we just assume it.

We presuppose it on Father's Day. That's about all I'm going to say about this day. Many of you had good parents, and praise the Lord for that if you did. We give thanks to God for blessing us with godly parents, whatever their individual faults may have been. We're grateful for that. Some of us had fathers who did not treat our mothers well. They were unkind and not at all the representative of the love of Christ to our mothers. Many of you lived through divorce in your childhood. That affected you. I know people who never knew their fathers. The father met the mom, the baby was conceived and the father was gone, and the incredible ache and emptiness and void that the resultant daughters have in light of that just cannot be measured decades into their lives. They didn't know their fathers. Others wish they hadn't known their fathers. I get that.

And so that makes it difficult for us to think rightly about women; if our fathers didn't model very well how to love and treat a woman, then that shapes us. But let's go a little bit further. How will we process the biblical role of wives if our own mothers were ungodly, temperamental, or manipulative in their approach to life, and they had none of that tenderness that Scripture describes as being the mark of a godly woman. How will we ever measure that? And I know some of you have suffered greatly and struggled with

great difficulty as you moved into your adult lives and tried to sort out, "What do I do with this woman and the way that she lives and the way that she poisons everything around her?" But even within the walls of the evangelical church. It's been 12 years now, I can say this without identifying anybody. Over the years, even within the walls of Truth Community Church, we've seen the reality of controlling husbands who intimidate their wives into silence. It breaks my heart thinking about these dear sweet ladies afraid to say a word for fear of crossing their husbands and what he might do. It's just etched on their face the combination of fear and wondering what's going to come next, flinching at the gaze of her husband. We've seen it in this way, young men, unmarried men, trying to lord themselves over their girlfriends. This is not healthy. This is not good. I remember one conversation in particular. Remember, we've been around for years, so you don't, you know, there's no reason for you to think you know who I'm talking about. Having a conversation with a young man describing the way that he was interacting with his girlfriend and the things that he was trying to teach her and train her to do. I didn't say it at the time, I didn't have the heart to say it, but as I was listening to him, I was thinking, "Man, you are a creep. I hope for her sake that she breaks up with you." And soon after she did. The Lord blessed her by protecting her from that young man. Others, perhaps even more young men, have conditioned themselves to see women through the dirty lens of pornography and shaping their view of women in that most sinful, dreadful, distorted way. And going a step further, what are we to say about the realm of women when young women, I don't want to say our young women and make you think I'm making a comprehensive statement here, I'm not, but when young women, even within the outward church, embrace a worldview that is full of vanity, competition, and ambition in life? How can they ever live a biblical life? How can they ever be a biblical wife in light of what we just read in Scripture, "Submit to your husbands, submit to them in everything as to the Lord." Nothing about that mindset of self-seeking, proud vanity either in appearance or in position in life, how can they ever live a biblical life and have a biblical marriage if that is the controlling worldview by which they are operating? You can see, beloved, that our task is very great as we seek to consider marriage in this time to come. All we can do is turn to the word of God and pray that the Spirit of God would help us along the way.

Now let me pause there after that introduction and simply say this. As I look back on teaching that I've done on marriage over the years, I affirm everything that I've ever taught, nothing about my view has changed. You get further and further into ministry and you just start to realize that one or two messages just aren't sufficient to address worldview issues like what I've just described to you. And so we just step back and we consider Scripture broadly, we let it inform our thinking, and if the word of God starts to inflect the way that you think about things and the trajectory is changed, then a lot of good things can follow without specific instruction on individual problems that you may have. We need today, beloved, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, today we need Scripture to wash our minds and to cleanse our hearts from all of that pollution that I just described and to set us in the right direction and there's no better way than to consider what our good Lord has given to us in the word of God. And that's what we're going to look at today. This is background for coming to Ephesians chapter 5.

I'm going to give you three sections to this message. I'm very, very excited to do this. We're going to consider, first of all, Scripture and the dignity of women, and then Jesus and the dignity of women, and then thirdly, the church and the dignity of women. The title of today's message is "The High Dignity of True Women." The high dignity of true women, and it's in today's culture that you have to say "true women" for reasons that I don't need to expand on any more than just highlighting that, that I'm talking about the real thing, the real realm of women, not that artificial where women try to be men or men pretend to be women. They're not part of the discussion here. It's what God created a person to be in the mother's womb and set forth in Scripture what they are to aspire to.

So let's look first of all at Scripture and the dignity of women. After we've gone through these things, Scripture, Jesus, the church, and the dignity of women, I will just give you a very brief two-minute summary of how it changes everything about your married life. But number one, Scripture and the dignity of women. What I'm going to do today, I'm just going, most, a big part of the time, I'm just going to allude to Scripture without having you turn there, just for the sake of time. Scripture and the dignity of women. Here's the fundamental statement that I want you to hear, and this changes everything, is that a woman is noble. It is noble to be a woman. Scripture ennobles women. They are created in the image of God, for one thing, and I'll get to that in a moment, but I'm going to give you, as we talk about Scripture and the dignity of women, I'm going to give you, very briefly, three sub-points about women in light of Scripture that should affect the way that every one of us looks at women as men, and the way that women should think about themselves in light of Scripture. There is, at the risk of overstatement, you could easily make a case that there is nothing more noble in the creative plan of God and what he has done than to create a woman and to establish a biblical view of what a woman can be, should be, and what God calls them to be.

So first of all, we consider Scripture and the dignity of women. First of all, women are created in the image of God. It says in Genesis 1, verse 27, "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them," and that idea is repeated in Genesis 5 also. And so a woman is equally created in the image of God just as a man is, created with a mind and relational capacities and able to reflect the communicable attributes of God. A woman has a high dignity simply from the fact that she is created in the image of God. We start there. And so as husbands consider their wives, as young men, unmarried men consider women, we need to realize that in the entire realm of women, in the class of women, everyone that we see is someone that is created in the image of God. Part of the problem, I'm glad I remembered to say this, part of the problem that creates a difficult marriage and this goes both ways, but I'm just going to state it on the one side of the equation, is that men come to think about their wives simply in relationship to themselves. They think about their wives in terms of what the wives' responsibilities are to them, what the wife can do for them, and what they want from the wife, from the kitchen and from other places in the house, and do not start with a right view of their wife in seeing the wife in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing the wife as someone connected intimately to Christ, someone intimately shaped by God, and that changes things. All of a sudden, you can't look at a woman, when you know that

she's created in the image of God, you can't look at her separate and apart from that and isolate her for the objects of the fulfillment of whatever you want from her.

This woman is created in the image of God. We start there. Now secondly, Scripture and the dignity of women, number one, they're created in the image of God. Secondly, women share equally in the gift of salvation for those that are saved. Women share equally in the pardon of sin and the gift of eternal life. In Galatians 3:28 it says, "There is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus," and all that statement is saying is that men and women share equally in the gift of God in Christ in salvation. A woman who is in Christ, her sins are pardoned as fully and equally as a man's are. The gift and the promise of eternal life belongs to her in fullest measure, just as it does to a man. And so if you are in a Christian marriage, a Christian man and a Christian woman, we men need to look upon our wives as saying, "They share equally in that which is most precious to me. I cannot abuse that. I can't violate that any more than I could try to abuse or violate Christ himself." Christ has laid his love and goodness upon her, then she is – watch this, watch this closely – if Christ has set that woman apart for himself, and she belongs to him for all of eternity, then there should be a sense of reverence and respect with which you treat that woman in your life, because she is in union with Christ herself. She belongs to him. He chose her from eternity past. He thought of her on the cross. He's going to bring her to be with him throughout all of eternity. And so I'm speaking metaphorically here, not in reality, you can't slap that woman without slapping Christ himself. And so there should be a healthy sense of respect, reverence, and even fear in the way that you deal with the woman in your marriage because Christ has laid his hand upon her in a way that you should begin with respect and deference.

She's not your property. She belongs to him. She's on loan to you. But she came from him, she'll return to him. And you need to keep that in mind. We need to keep that in mind, men. So much so, if you think I'm overstating it, thirdly, we're saying Scripture and the dignity of women. First of all, they're created in the image of God. Secondly, they share equally in biblical salvation. Thirdly, in the realm of marriage itself, husbands are commanded to honor their wives in marriage. 1 Peter 3, verse 7, "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life." And many commentators, if not most, think grace of life is referring to the institution of marriage there. Husbands, wives, they share in the grace of life. Marriage is a grace that God gives in this earthly life for joy and contentment and all of that. And the command of God to husbands is, you look at that woman and you respect her. You honor her. You protect her. This is God's command to you in that marriage relationship. Scripture calls you to recognize, honor, protect, and defend the dignity of that woman. And just so you know, in the way that I'm thinking about this as I stand here, I'm not talking so much about external threats from the world or anything like that, but just in context of your own relationship. The intimacy of the marriage relationship, there's a sense of honor and a fear of God in the way that you treat your wife because she's created in the image of God, she's an equal sharer in salvation, and you are commanded directly to honor her in your life.

Now, we've been going for 20 minutes or so. That'd be quite a lot to just stop on right there, wouldn't it? But we can go a little bit further as we think about women in the realm of the home. Children are commanded to respect their father and their mother on equal terms. The fifth commandment, "Honor your father and mother." Ephesians 6:1, "Obey your parents in the Lord for this is right." And so we see the unique realm and the high dignity of women, even in the way that children are commanded to honor their mother. And so there's a lot here, isn't there? Just in what we said already, Scripture assigns a place of high dignity to women. Creation, salvation, marriage, family structure are all designed for us to recognize the high dignity of women. Period, full stop. And so let's step back for a moment and just recognize a very basic principle: a divine dignity covers those who are born as women and those who live as women according to God's created design. A divine dignity, a high dignity, is attached and woven into the existence of a woman that male and female, husband and wife, that everyone ought to recognize.

Now, beloved, just circling back to my introduction for just a moment, you realize this high, lofty, sanctified position that women hold in the created order of God, you realize just how awful things like pornography are, you realize how awful female combatants in mixed martial art events are. This is so contrary. This is so contrary to it all. You recognize that these things of trying to get women to be men and all of those things that I alluded to earlier, just how much of a violation and an attack it is upon the design of God in marriage, and on the design of God in women. And so we have to come and look at that and step back and say, "That's not right. I'm going to think about women differently in light of what Scripture says about the dignity that God has placed upon them." And so, this is obviously not a statement that women are perfect. No, all women have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. But we're saying that the divine design is something that we are all to respect and acknowledge and to respond to, this order that he's given.

Now secondly, let's consider Jesus and the dignity of women. Jesus and the dignity of women. It is a remarkable study to look at the way that Jesus interacted with women during the course of his earthly ministry. When you see the broad principles that we talked about with Scripture and the dignity of women, what you see is Jesus extending that, showing us what it looks like, modeling it for us. And we're going to read three passages, maybe, and allude to several others here but, beloved, and just remembering that we're in a room that acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, and most of you would acknowledge that with your lips, even if it's not a reality in your heart. We recognize the unique authority of Jesus Christ, his supremacy as God in human flesh, his Lordship over the church, he's the head of the church. And so when we think about women in light of the Lordship of Christ, we want to see whether what Jesus did is consistent with the high view of the dignity of women that I've been describing. And the answer is, it most certainly is.

Jesus unfailingly showed kindness and compassion to the women he encountered in ministry, and I just want to say, there are so many more texts and examples that we could look at than time allows us to consider. But I want you to turn to the gospel of Luke 2. We're going to look at three or four passages in Luke. When you study the books of the Bible as a whole and look for their themes, often teachers will point out that Luke seems

to have a particular theme; one of his themes is Jesus and women. And so the title of our message is "The High Dignity of True Women." We've seen Scripture in the dignity of women. Now we're going to look at Jesus in the dignity of women, and we'll go through these passages rather quickly.

As a youth who was God in human flesh, Jesus Christ honored his mother. That's an amazing thing to contemplate. Here he is, God in human flesh. Here he created his own mom and yet he lived in submission to her and honored her. You look at Luke 2 at the end of the chapter. His parents had been looking for him, couldn't find him. Verse 48, his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress." And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me?" Do you not know that I must be in my father's house?" And they did not understand the saying that he spoke to them. And he went down with them and came to Nazareth and was submissive to them and his mother treasured up all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man." There he is, born under the law, the law which says, honor your father and mother, and Jesus Christ honored his mother with perfection, and his mother loved him and treasured up all of the aspects of those things in her heart in a way that we can't begin to contemplate what that must have been like. She knew the angel had revealed to her that this was a unique child. She knew that he was born to her apart from the normal means of human conception. She knew that she needed him as her own Lord and Savior and yet here is this child honoring her like no child ever honored their mother. We can only imagine the richness as she contemplated the privilege of being in that position. The point is, Jesus recognized the dignity of his mother and honored it.

Now secondly, look over at Luke chapter 8. Luke chapter 8. So when we think of Jesus and the dignity of women, he honored his mother, number one. Secondly, he extended his healing ministry to women. He extended his healing ministry to women. Look at Luke 8, verse 43, "there was a woman who had had a discharge of blood for twelve years, and though she had spent all her living on physicians, she could not be healed by anyone. She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately her discharge of blood ceased. And Jesus said, 'Who was it that touched me?' When all denied it, Peter said, 'Master, the crowds surround you and are pressing in on you!'" He said, "How could you ask who touched you? Everybody is touching you. You're in the middle of a mob here of everyone wanting a piece of you. How could you ask such a question?" But Jesus knew that there was someone that had touched him in a special way, touched him, as it were, with the finger of faith, someone reaching out to him in dire need and in a desperate heart, said, "If I can only touch his garment, I know that he will help me." In verse 46, Jesus said, "'Someone touched me, for I perceive that power has gone out from me.' And when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling, and falling down before him declared in the presence of all the people why she had touched him, and how she had been immediately healed." You almost get the sense that she feels like she's in trouble. She touched him unawares. He's asking for her. Now everybody's going to know. Everything about her condition is going to be made known. There's a combination of shame and fear and all of that. And how did Jesus respond to this woman? Well, he responded to her with the highest of dignity, the highest of

compassion and kindness and love. Verse 48, "he said to her, 'Daughter,'" a term of endearment, "My dear child," you could say, "your faith has made you well; go in peace." There is Christ treating a woman with utmost dignity in the midst of oppressing mob.

Well, go back a chapter to chapter 7. He extended healing ministry to women. He showed grace and kindness to grieving women. In verse 11 of chapter 7 we read, "Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her." Oh, the broken nature of her heart. She'd already lost her husband, and now her only son was gone, too. How disconsolate she must have been. How broken and without hope she must have been and yet Jesus comes, and in keeping with the high dignity of true women, look at how he responded. "And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep.' Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, 'Young man, I say to you, arise.' And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother." He felt compassion on this brokenhearted woman. Why? Because there was a dignity about her. She was important to him. Her sad situation was going to become a display of his messianic credentials. He was going to exercise power and display a sign that showed he was someone greater than a mere man. Yes, yes, yes. But don't overlook the fact in the midst of the miracle that there is a personal direction of his affection and kindness to this woman in particular. He had compassion on her and intervened into her sorrow and restored her and restored her son to her.

One more in Luke chapter 7. Jesus and the dignity of women, he honored his mother, he healed women, he showed compassion to women. Here we're going to see he forgave women, very sinful women, in fact, which those of you maybe here in your life has been one of, you know, promiscuity or whatever, and you don't even like to look in the mirror in light of that. Well, you don't have to look in the mirror, but let me invite you to look into the face of Jesus and see how he receives women just like you. We're going to read kind of an extended passage here, Luke 7, verse 36. "One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment." Complete utter abject humility and repentance at the feet of Jesus. Very sweet to see. "Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner.'" And you know, just the dripping arrogance of that is something that it's not difficult to find repeated in certain areas of Christendom today. "She's a sinner. She's just a woman and a dirty one at that. How could you let her touch you?" "And Jesus," verse 40, "answering said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' And he answered, 'Say it, Teacher.' 'A certain moneylender had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he cancelled the debt of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon answered, 'The one, I suppose, for whom he

cancelled the larger debt.' And he said to him, 'You have judged rightly.' Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon," now listen, don't lose sight of what's happened here. Simon, critical of Jesus and condescending and condemning toward this woman that was in his house, and this dear woman, having wept her repentance over the feet of Jesus and humbled herself as she did, no doubt, and she's in the midst of this, she's the object of the Pharisees' parsing discussion, with a broken heart, fully conscious of her sins, having nothing to commend herself to Christ, now Christ is going to speak about her in her presence and in our day and age, that conversation wouldn't go any better than what the Pharisee had planned. But not with Jesus. Jesus recognized the high dignity of true women. Verse 44, "turning toward the woman he said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house, Simon; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many," he didn't just ignore the sin, he openly acknowledged the reality of it, "her sins, which are many, are forgiven--for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.' And he said to her," you can almost picture it if we let our thoughts about the setting go just a little bit, you kind of picture her on her knees looking up into the face of Christ, not knowing what he's going to say, but hopeful, drawn to him, having expressed her love to him. She looks up. He looks down upon her and said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Your sins are forgiven. What love, what mercy, what kindness he showed to this broken, desperate, sinful woman, and by his authority as God in human flesh, says, "By my own authority and by my own power, independent of what anybody around me thinks, I forgive all your sins." I mean, I'm speechless. The kindness that he showed to this woman who was on the bottom scale of society. And the Pharisees' groups, they hadn't had their last attack on him. "Those who were at the table with him," verse 49, "began to say among themselves, 'Who is this that even forgives sins?'" And he ignores the question, he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you, go in peace. It's all, it's okay now. You are under my grace. I forgive you. You can go in peace. The past has been forgiven and you have new life now to go forward in."

Jesus and the high dignity of women. Here's what I want you to see, beloved, through all of those things: in word and in deed, Jesus Christ freely extended the kingdom of God to women and did so gladly, did so abundantly, graciously, and freely in a culture that did not give equal status to women at all. This was completely counter-cultural, a fact you could see if you read in John chapter 4, which we're not going to go to for the sake of time. He freely extended the kingdom to women and honored his mother. I've given you four passages, and listen, time would fail me utterly here this morning if I spoke of six other passages, which are, again, only representative. You could consider the way Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law in Mark 1. You can consider how he healed Jairus' daughter in Mark 5. You could consider how he honored a widow who gave her last mite to God in the temple in Mark 12. You can consider the Samaritan woman who he made known that he was the Messiah in John 4, a woman who had had five husbands, and the man she was with then was not her husband. You can consider his love for Mary and Martha in John chapter 11, when their brother Lazarus died. Scripture says he loved them, John 11. You could consider how he provided for his mother while he was dying on the cross.

"Woman, behold your son," pointing to John. "John," in so many words, "John, behold your mother." One of his dying acts was caring for the woman who was his mother. From beginning to end, from the beginning of his life to the end of his earthly life, from beginning to end in his public ministry, there is this remarkable display, this consistent, unerring display of grace and kindness from Jesus Christ to women, that if you just look for it, if you spend a week or two reading the gospels and look for it, you'll see this woven throughout his ministry and I am just trusting the Lord in this message to be gracious to me for omitting so many other things that would prove the point.

Scripture and the dignity of women. Jesus and the dignity of women. If Scripture and Jesus Christ accord this obvious high dignity to women, then this informs everything that we think and do and say in response to every woman we meet. And my friends, my fellow men, I say this to you with sympathy and realizing that I haven't thought this way throughout, you know, most of my life. This rebukes me, sorrows me to realize it, but there's something here that changes the way that we think about 50% of humanity, let alone the ones that are closest to us. One writer said, "Jesus Christ honored women, taught women, and ministered to women in thoughtful ways." He honored women, he taught them, he ministered to them. Obviously, he saw a high dignity in women and exemplified it perfectly as he did everything else with perfection.

So let's go to the third point, the church and the dignity of women. The church and the dignity of women. I'm just going to say in passing, I hesitate to even mention this, but I know the way many minds work and so it's not even part of my notes. Of course, there are distinctions in roles between men and women in the home and in the church. We honor those distinctions here at Truth Community Church. That's all I'm going to say about it. We're not egalitarian in what we're saying here today. But as we consider the church and the dignity of women, I want you to walk out with these closing thoughts. All of this that we've seen today matters greatly and deeply as we consider marriage in the days to come. Beloved, God is consistent with himself. The apostles were consistent with the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to a passage like Ephesians 5 and read, "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord," you must understand that the God who has assigned such high dignity to women and the Christ who treated them with dignity and who assigned the apostles, obviously, whatever we read that is addressed to women and addressed to wives in Scripture is extending that high dignity, not taking away from it. Oh, I know, it's counter-cultural. It's counter-church in most places. But it is gloriously counter-cultural and I would say this, is that godly women will embrace it out of love for the Lord when we come to Ephesians 5.

But on Father's Day, a word to the men is fitting here today. Being a Christian and you men look at me. I mean it. You look at me right now because you need to hear this. Being a Christian impacts the way that you treat women and the way that you think about women. Your wife is not an object for you to use in any way that you see fit. You unmarried men, women are not an object for the gratification of your lust. They're not. Whether it's your wife, a daughter, a mother, in light of the high dignity that God assigns to true women, isn't it obvious that you cannot treat women with contempt, with anger, as your personal slaves? There's a dignity to them and if you aspire to be like Christ, there's

going to be a sense in which you recognize that woman in your life, especially that Christian woman in your life, as a co-heir in Christ, the Christ that you say that you love. If Christ treats women, even sinful women, failed women, guilty women, if he can treat them with compassion and love and grace, isn't it obvious that we have no alternative and nothing that we would prefer more than for the Spirit of God to reproduce that in our lives and have us act in similar manner? I think that's enough said. I don't need to illustrate the failures in order to drive the point home to your conscience. We've all fallen short here. That doesn't make it right. That does not make it right.

And so whether we were thinking of a mother, a wife, or a girlfriend, or a daughter, you must honor that dear woman as her high dignity from God deserves. If we start there, we're going to find a path forward in dealing with difficult marriages. Come back on Tuesday as we continue the theme.

Let's pray together.

God, you created women. When you created Eve, you made her to be a companion and a help meet to Adam, and we thank you for blessing the human race with the concept, with the people of that realm of humanity, of women. Thank you, Father, for the women that you've put into our lives. Let us look at them through the eyes of grace, whatever their failings may be, even as Christ did, and to honor them. And Father, may the recognition for ladies, for women here today, for young girls, teenage girls looking forward and deciding the kind of women that they're going to become, Father, help them to set aside the vanity, the ambition, the competition spirit that the world would infect them with, and let them come, as it were, like Mary to the feet of Jesus and say, "Lord, teach me. Help me to live in accordance with the high dignity that you've bestowed upon my position in life." And whether that's a young woman or an older woman, Father, knowing that the end of the days are near, let them all aspire to that and may you change us, Father, permanently as we look into what your word has said about these things. In Jesus' name, amen.

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