

## The Gospel Made Visible

Eric and Sarah, we rejoice to be here celebrating this day with you. Thank you for asking me to share a few reflections on marriage. Eric, your parents have been faithful friends for 35 years, and I have known you since before you were born. I will never forget watching you lead a musical procession of children around and around the house wearing only a superman cape... and diapers. Sarah, you're getting a *super* guy.

Eric and Sarah, you have both been raised by parents who know the reality of grace, who live out the gospel in their daily lives. So you both already understand everything I want to say, which can be summarized very simply: *Marriage is the gospel made visible.*

Have you heard of the "Four Spiritual Laws"? Or "Evangelism Explosion"? These are just two of the many ways Christians in this country have been trained to present the gospel. Such outlines of the gospel message are helpful in their own ways, although no one can ever plumb the depths of the gospel, nor can we ever explain it completely. In the next few minutes, I'll show you a way I like to introduce the gospel — the mystery of the ages now revealed in Christ — and then suggest some applications to your shared life together in marriage. For, again, *marriage is the gospel made visible.*

So imagine that we're sharing a cup of coffee and I'm sketching the gospel on a napkin.

The first point, symbolized by a downward arrow, is that **Jesus is God**. As we have been celebrating throughout the Christmas season, Jesus is **Immanuel**, God with us, not a God who is remote from us. Startlingly, the true God became truly human; not just God-like or human-like, but really God and really human. In this baby in Bethlehem, this man from Nazareth, God is revealed in our human flesh. He has come to live among us. He relocated from heavenly



glory to take up residence within the flesh of broken, fallen, suffering humanity, so that we might know the presence of God with us in grace and glory.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

Second, **God is love**. Through the revelation of God in Christ we discover that God is Triune, a communion of three Persons. This diagram, the *triquetra*, is a classic symbol of the Trinity. What the doctrine of the Trinity means is that, amazingly, God is love. In the Triune Christian God we see that a loving communion of persons is the ultimate reality, the heart of the universe, the origin and source and destiny of all things. This God of personal relationships, of loving communion, is the One revealed to us in Christ. Nothing in this world makes sense until it is seen in light of the reality of the love of God as revealed in Christ.



“God is love” (1 John 4:16)

Third, **Jesus is Lord**. In the person of Christ, all things in heaven and earth are redeemed, re-made in a new creation, re-created from the inside out. Jesus is Lord beyond our imagination. As Paul explained in the first chapter of Colossians:

“By him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.... He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and **through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven**, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:16–20)



Through the whole course of his life, from conception to ascension, and especially in the triumph of his death and resurrection, Jesus Christ maintained a union of humanity with God, or, as theologians like to say, of his human and divine natures, in unbroken communion and love with the Father. Jesus conquered the depths of hell and human alienation, for they were not able to break the bond of love between God and humanity that was forged in Christ. He maintained his union with our humanity unto death.

Fourth, **we're included in Christ.** Because Christ has joined with us in our humanity, becoming one with human flesh, we are brought into the life of God and raised up in Christ to share in the divine communion of love. We live in Christ. We have union with Christ. Christ is our life. In Christ we participate in new life and the loving communion of God.



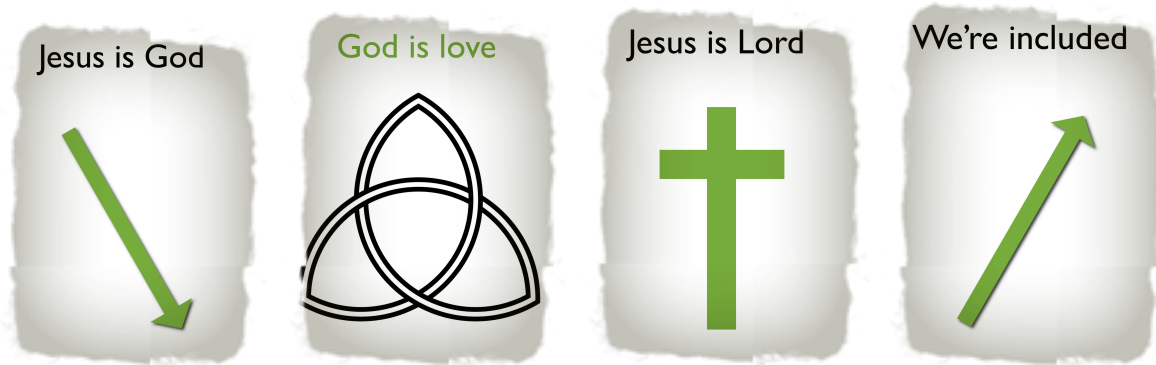
Sin and death died on the cross in Christ's death when He became the fullness of our sin. In His resurrection we are all raised to new life. In Him we were all born again. Human nature was liberated and transformed. The stranglehold grasp of death and the old life was broken. Now Jesus is Lord, and we live in a new creation.

Therefore, repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. *Repent* means to change the way you think and act in light of the reality of Christ and his gospel of grace. Christians are those who are awakened to the reality of Christ and who embrace the reconciliation he has accomplished for us. *Believe* means that in faith we trust Christ to be ever at work, through his Holy Spirit, within us and around us establishing the re-creation of all things. His kingdom has come, and we carry the good news.

The arrow points both upward and forward: upward because our lives are hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:3), and forward because who we already are in this new creation will only be revealed with Christ at his return. So now, in repentance and faith, we live by faith and not by sight. We embrace a reality which is both "already" and "not yet." We do not yet fully see who we are in

Christ, but even now, by the Holy Spirit, we participate in the new creation, and live in anticipation of the future.

This is the gospel on a napkin: Jesus is God, God is love, Jesus is Lord, and we're included in Christ.



Now, as we apply the gospel to marriage, let's remember that the Christian life remains centered on the gospel of grace in Christ. We never grow beyond this. Rather, Eric and Sarah, I urge you to build your life together on the gospel and its word of grace. So let me suggest some applications of the gospel to your shared life together in marriage. These are just a few ideas; I'm sure God will bring to your mind other applications as well, for *marriage is the gospel made visible*.

First, **Jesus is God**. Eric and Sara, model your love for each other on the **Incarnation**. This means taking the first step in reconciliation. Don't recoil, don't wait for the other to make the first move. Forgive before you are asked. Relocate to where your partner is. Enter into your partner's pain and suffering, just as Christ took upon himself our our fallen human flesh. Embrace your partner's weaknesses, even in their worst moments, be with them, for them, walk beside them, take their life into yours. Remember Joe South singing "Walk a mile in my shoes"? An Incarnational approach to marriage means walking not only a mile, but a lifetime, in the other's shoes.



“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

Second, **God is love**. The doctrine of the **Trinity** is the foundation for a Christian understanding of marriage. In contrast to the open circle of divine communion, we humans tend to be like black holes, curved back inward within ourselves, unable to forge external relationships of love that escape beyond our own crushing load. But the gospel means that Christ has come down to us in our lost and lonely estate, in order to lift us up into loving relationship with God, to bring us into the divine communion.



We were made to share in this Trinitarian communion of love. This is the source of the image of God we carry, as recorded in Genesis 1, “male and female he created them.” To reflect the Trinitarian communion of love is the image of God in us, and the essence of marriage. Your love for one another is a sacred expression of the image of God, the communion of God made visible. Your communion together in marriage will be a **visible word**, a witness of the loving character of the Triune God, for the watching world and for any children whom God in his grace may bring to share in your loving communion, just as he already has brought you to share in his own.

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth....” (Genesis 1:27–28)

Third, **Jesus is Lord**. He is the Victor; he has triumphed over every power in heaven and earth. Because Jesus is Lord, all things will work together for your good, as Paul wrote in Romans 8:

“neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor any-

thing else in all creation, will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38–39)

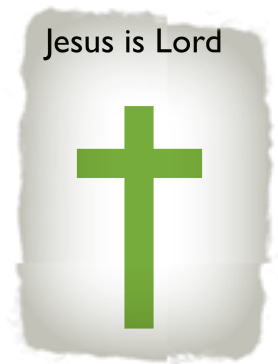
As Jesus held God and humanity together in the union of his divine and human natures, so he will hold onto your union together in him. From this day forward, Eric and Sara, you are one flesh. Never give up on this marriage union. In the grace of Christ it will hold, even as you pass through the fires, face the floods, and wait through the darkest hours of the night. He is there with you. He has been there before. He will never give up on you. He will never let you go. He will see you through. He is Lord of all.

Fourth, **we’re included in Christ**, our lives are hidden with Christ in God. The reality is that we are reconciled in the communion of God in Jesus, so we are now to live in loving relationship with God and one another through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We saw that the arrow points both upward and forward: We embrace a reality which is both “already” and “not yet.” We are *already* in Christ, yet we do *not yet* see fully who we are in Christ. Yet even now, by the Holy Spirit, we participate in the new creation, and live in anticipation of the future. So in your love for one another, regard each other not *as you are*, but *as you will be* in the grace of God.

“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:7)

After the Ascension, at the right hand of the Father, Jesus Christ bears, believes, hopes and endures all things on our behalf and in our place. In the same way, Eric and Sarah, believe and hope for, and in the place of, one another. Regard each other not according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:16), but as a new creation, hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3), to be revealed



at the restoration of all things. Treat your partner daily as if they are in Christ, for this is the reality of who they are. When your partner stumbles and desponds, let your hope for them never waver, for you are included in Christ. Your hope for your partner is based not on what others see in them, nor on what they see in themselves, but on the new creation that is hidden with Christ in God and will be revealed at the last day. Such hope can never be shaken. The gospel is a living hope, a hope of glory, which you hold for one another.

In conclusion, neither the gospel nor marriage are about rules or authority, nor are they about social conventions or other people's expectations. Rather, marriage — like the gospel — is all about relationships in unconditional grace, and the realities of persons in loving communion.

- The Incarnation shows us that **Jesus is God**. Make the Incarnation your model of reconciliation with each other.
- Through Christ we see that **God is love**, a Triune communion of persons. Your marriage will manifest the reality of this loving communion.
- **Jesus is Lord** of heaven and earth, and **He will see you through** your darkest hours.
- **You are included in Christ** and your life is hidden with Christ in God; therefore **hope all things** for each other.

Love one another as Christ has loved you. Just as with the gospel, so with marriage. I like to think that Jesus began his public ministry at a wedding in Cana to signal to us that **marriage is the gospel made visible**.

*Kerry Magruder, January 8, 2011*