

## **Christian Families (1) – Why Family Matters (Kisumu Conference 2010)**

This series of messages is about the family. To begin, I have seven arrows to fire at you. If I only shoot three, they may all miss. If I shoot seven, I can hope at least one will hit the target! The aim is to persuade you. I want you to believe, with all your heart and mind, that families really matter. Most of all, I want you to know that above all, your family really matters. If true religion does not begin at home, then it never begins at all (1 Timothy 5:8). So, why should we believe this really matters?

### **1. The Bible speaks everywhere about the family**

The story of man begins with a family. God made man male and female. The first thing in the world that was “not good” (Genesis 2:18), was a man with no wife. The first lesson Adam learnt when he named the animals, was that he needed Eve. This continues. The ten commandments speak about marriage, about sons and daughters and about how to treat your neighbour's wife. We have a whole book – Proverbs – in which a man speaks to his son to teach him how to live. Along the way, he teaches him about family; e.g. honouring your mother and father (Proverbs 30:11, 17), avoiding the adulteress (ch. 5), finding a good wife (ch. 31:10-31). Jesus taught about the family, avoiding adultery, divorce, and how important children are in God's kingdom. The apostles taught also about husbands and wives, parents and children – as we will see! At the end of the Bible, we finish with a great marriage (Revelation 21-22).

No man loves his Bible who does not study and struggle to have a godly family. No man who neglected his family truly loves God. No preacher preaches God's word properly who does not teach often about families.

### **2. Families come from God and are part of his plan for the world**

Families were not created by man. They are not ours, and we are not free to re-make them our way. We read in Matthew 19:3-6, that *God* makes every marriage. We may choose a bride, and pay a dowry – but the marriage is sealed by God himself. To treat a marriage as a small matter is not to insult man – it is to insult God. God gave three societies with his authority in the world. He gave the state (Romans 13:1, 6). He gave churches (Ephesians 2:19). The third is the family (which actually came first in time). We cannot honour God, without honouring families.

### **3. God gave a pattern in the creation for us to follow**

If you like your friend's chair, you can show it to the carpenter and ask for one like it. If you pay the carpenter, you can expect him to give you what you ask for. Otherwise, you will ask – why have you done this? If the carpenter replies, “Well, that is the way I liked it”, you will tell him that he can also pay for it himself!

God gave us a pattern for marriage at creation. He then told us to be faithful to his pattern (Matthew 19:3-6). We have been given a standard to reach and a mark to hit. God will look for us to be faithful. We can either follow his pattern and receive his approval, or change his pattern and receive his condemnation. There is no other option.

### **4. A man's family tells us what kind of man he is**

If your child wins the prize at school prize-giving for being the best student, then people will congratulate you. In the same way, Proverbs 28:7 tells us that a foolish son brings disgrace to his father. Why? Because his life bears witness to the training they gave him in life. He shows the world what kind of people they were.

If, in one factory, you find all the workers are honest, hard-working, kind, and faithful then you will ask, “Who runs this factory?” It is the same in the family. We can hide what we are really like from others by our words, faces and clothes. But our families are a sermon that preaches to the world, and cannot be hidden. Are they places of love, kindness, self-giving and joy? Or are they hard, cold places

of bitterness, laziness and selfishness? The answers cannot be hidden.

What you are in your family – that is what you are, and nothing else. 1 Timothy 3:5 says, “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how shall he take care of God's Church?” Some people will say that the family is not important, and that a good pastor can be a poor husband or father. God says those people are wrong. If you are a bad husband or father, then he disqualifies you from being a pastor.

### **5. Families are where young people are trained for the world**

In England people say, “the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world”. A cradle is a baby's bed. They also say, “give me the child, and I will give you the man.” The first part of our lives is spent in our families. The most important people in our early lives are our mother, father, brothers and sisters. Families are where we begin to learn about life – about almost everything. That is why we have the book of Proverbs. It teaches us to teach our children wisdom. Otherwise, they will follow the foolishness that is in their hearts (Proverbs 22:15).

We cannot give responsibility for this work to schools, communities or even churches. Ephesians 6:4 tells us that the responsibility belongs to fathers. We can use others as helpers – but the responsibility remains with us.

### **6. Families are where we are trained to be useful in the world**

Not only children, but also adults are trained in the family. Sometimes in a game of football, we may see a free kick that has been very well practised. The ball goes to just the right places, and the defenders are all lost when the goal goes in. Where did the attacking team learn to do that? They learnt it on the training ground. The family is our training ground. That is taught in 1 Timothy 3:5. What are you like in your family? Have you learnt how to be a true servant, or are you a lazy tyrant? Many men are proud of the authority they have in their homes. But just having authority proves nothing about our characters. Idi Amin had plenty of authority. In the family we should learn how to serve patiently, consistently, through many years.

### **7. The family is intended to give a model of the meaning of the gospel**

In Ephesians 5:22-31, we see that marriage should reflect the gospel. A wife should submit to her husband in the way that the church submits to Jesus Christ. A husband should lovingly serve his wife in the same way that Jesus Christ lovingly served the church when he gave himself at Calvary to save, wash and purify her, and then cherishes it as his own body.

Two preachers both preach that the gospel is a gospel of peace and love. In one preacher's home, people only serve themselves. The father makes everyone suffer under his harsh rule. It is an angry and selfish home. In the other home, people serve each other. They all give themselves to one another in daily self-sacrifice. It is a place of joy and peace. What will we learn in these two homes? Which will make the gospel seem alive and truthful, and not a dead lie?

The husband-wife relationship should be a model of how the gospel works. The husband-wife relationship is a living sermon that is preached to the world every day. What is preached from your home? Does your marriage preach the true gospel of Christ, or are you declaring heresy? We do not like to tolerate preachers who speak a false gospel. Why should it be alright to live one?