

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 13 September 2020**

Children's Talk: True Witness and False Witness

- We've been talking about relationships for the last few weeks and what makes for good relationships.
 - One thing that makes for good relationships is when people can speak the truth to each other.
- We can see the importance of this if we think about the opposite.
 - What's the opposite of the truth? (Lies)
 - One of the 10 Commandments is about lying.
 - But it doesn't actually just say, "You shall not lie."
 - It says this:
 - Exodus 20:16
 - "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."
- Do you know what a witness is?
 - A witness is someone who saw something.
 - When people get married or other important things happen they have witnesses there to say, "I saw those people get married today."
 - Witnesses also are people who see bad things being done.
 - If a person steals something from a shop but someone else sees them do it, then we say that that person witnessed the crime.
 - And then they can tell other people what they saw.
- The commandment says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."
 - You shall not say that you saw someone do something that they didn't actually do.
 - People have done that and caused a lot of harm.
 - Innocent people being locked in jail for a long time.
 - Even if you didn't get locked in jail you can imagine how angry and upset you would get if someone bore false witness against you—if they told someone else that you did something bad that you didn't actually do.
 - That would be a really mean thing to do.
 - So we can work hard to remember to never tell false stories about other people.
 - That includes also not passing along stories about other people that we don't actually know if they're true.
 - That's just passing along gossip.
- So we're not supposed to bear *false* witness; what about *true* witness?
- What if you see someone else do something that they shouldn't do, should you tell other people what they did?
 - This can be really tricky to figure out.
 - If they did something bad to you, and you can, the first thing you should do is talk to the person privately, rather than jumping to telling on them.
 - The Lord said, "[I]f your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother" (Matthew 18:15, NKJV)
 - But if you have been hurt badly or are in danger or someone else is, then you will probably need to tell someone else as soon as possible.

- Now let's think about it the other way around—what if you do something wrong, would you want someone to point it out?
 - Maybe you already know that you messed up and so you would be angry for someone else pointing it out.
 - Or maybe you wouldn't want anyone else to talk about how you messed up and you would feel angry for being told on.

- But, you need people in your life who are willing to tell you the truth.
 - You need people who are willing to point out when you're being mean or unfair.
 - Sometimes friends aren't willing to do that.
 - And so it's often family members that do it—your brother or your sister or your mom or dad.
 - We often get really angry at those people for doing that.
 - And maybe they should do it differently—not blame us like we did it on purpose, not tell other people about it.
 - But, overall, it's good to have people who bear true witness against us.
 - It helps us to see things that we might not see on our own.
 - It helps us to see things that we don't want to see.
 - And it just helps us see more than we would otherwise.

- If you want to have good relationships with people you need to be able to speak the truth to other people about how you see things and you need to be able to hear the truth from them, even when it's hard.
 - You will see more and understand yourself more and other people more and the world around you more.
 - And will feel more connected to other people.

- *Amen.*

Soulmates? Therefore... what?

Part 2: After You Get Married

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith

13 September 2020

Intro

- What do you do if you get married to someone and then at some point you realise that they're *not* your soulmate?
 - You're pretty sure that this person that you're married to is *not* the person that you're meant to be with to eternity.
 - What should you do then?
- There is a lot to talk about here.
 - And there are many different circumstances in which people can find themselves.
- I'm going to be attempting to provide you with some teachings from the Lord's Word that you can take into account when thinking about these dynamics in your own relationships and when you're thinking about the relationships of people around you.
 - It's really important that we seek for the Lord's Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path in what can be a very dark and confusing area of life.
- And you are going to come to your own conclusions and decisions about these things and I would encourage you to invite the Lord into that process.
 - Whether it's in your own relationship or the relationships of people around you, pray about it—talk to the Lord about it.
 - Ask Him to help you see which teachings from His Word apply in the relationship that's on your heart.
 - Ask Him for humility to be willing to do what He wants you to do.
 - And ask Him for the bravery and persistence to actually do the things that He wants you to do.
- The only way that any of us can have even moderately functional relationships is with the Lord's help and certainly the only way any of us are going to end up in a heavenly marriage to our soulmates is because of the Lord.

Recap

- Today is the second part of a mini sermon series on soulmates.
 - Last time we talked about before you get married; today we're talking about after you get married.
 - And, as I said last time, I think the thing that really matters about our beliefs about soulmates is not so much whether or not we believe they exist, but what conclusions we come to based on our beliefs about soulmates.
 - Soulmates or not? Therefore... what?
 - This is even more the case once you get married.
- To recap some key points from last time,
 - You will be married to your soulmate in heaven.
 - But you can't necessarily tell in the natural world whether someone is or is not your soulmate.
 - And the most important work to be doing for your eventual marriage to your soulmate is to be doing the work of living a religious life—acknowledging evil in yourself and working

with the Lord to repent from it, trying to live according to what the Lord teaches in service to the Lord and the people around you.

- That work is what will allow you to be gradually reborn into someone who can enter the kingdom of heaven and have a heavenly marriage to your soulmate.
- And the last thing I want to repeat from last time is that I want this to be a conversation.
 - I'm going to be trying again to not be out of touch with reality and at the same time not lose sight of the ideal.
 - And I might get that wrong.
 - Or I might say something that doesn't seem to make sense in a situation that you're thinking about.
 - Or you just might want to talk about these things more.
 - Good! Contact me. Let's discuss this further.

The Main Point

- Back to our question from the beginning: what do you do if you get married to someone and then at some point you realise realise that they're *not* your soulmate?
- Here, upfront, I want to tell you the main point of this sermon for today.
 - There is a lot of value in sticking with a marriage that may not be to your eventual, eternal soulmate.
 - There is a lot of value in sticking with a marriage that may not be to your eventual, eternal soulmate.
 - It can be good for you, your spouse, your children, society, and it can even be good for your eventual marriage to your soulmate.
- You may generally be nodding at that idea but then also immediately thinking of exceptions.
 - "Ok. Yes. But what about when...."
 - So let's talk about the exceptions to this principle.

Exceptions: There Are Times When It Would Be Better to Leave

- There are circumstances when it would be better to leave—to not stick with your marriage.
- As I mentioned a few weeks ago, the teachings of the New Church make it clear that a person is only allowed to get divorced and marry someone else if their partner has committed adultery (*Married Love* §255).
 - The Lord also taught this directly when He was on earth (Matthew 19:3-12).
- There are a couple of important things to note about this.
 - First, it is important to note that people are not required to get divorced if their partner commits adultery.
 - Many people choose to stay married to their partner who committed adultery against them and they then sometimes build a new and stronger marriage with that same person.
 - But, if your partner commits adultery, you are allowed to get divorced from them and this seems like a necessary step if your partner is unwilling to break off the affair.
 - Second, it is important to note that there are legitimate reasons for temporary or permanent separation from your married partner.
 - These reasons are outlined in the teachings of the New Church (*Married Love* §§251-254).

- Physical abuse, emotional abuse, substance abuse are all legitimate reasons to be separated from your partner for a time or permanently.
- Anything you have in your mind as a “But what about...” I would probably say, “Yes, that is a legitimate reason to be temporarily or permanently separated from your partner.”
 - And it might even be necessary to get legally divorced from your partner in order to protect yourself and your children.
 - You just would not be free to get married to someone else unless your partner has committed adultery.
- This is a big topic that probably should have been its own sermon but I just wanted to acknowledge that yes, there are circumstances where the right course of action is to no longer be with the person you’re married to.
 - And you can know that I worry that some people will hear the things I’m saying today as justification for walking away from a marriage that they should actually stick with.
 - And I also worry that some people could hear what I say as support for the idea that they should stick with a marriage that they should actually walk away from.
 - Which is more harmful?
 - They both seem pretty harmful.
 - And I go back to my recommendation at the beginning—reflect on the teachings and pray to the Lord.
- Having touched on the exceptions, now let’s get back to making the case that there is a lot of value in sticking with a marriage that may not be to your eventual, eternal soulmate.

It Is Common to Feel Like Your Partner Is *Not* Your Soulmate

- Any time you have that feeling that the person you’re married to might not be your soulmate, it can be pretty crushing.
 - Like you’ve made this huge mistake.
 - And you’re grieving the loss of all the dreams that you had for what your marriage could be.
- I want to acknowledge the hardness of that.
- And I also want to let you know that that feeling is very common and almost should be expected.
- Even if you happen to be lucky enough to be married to your eventual soulmate, you’re not both going to *always* be at your best.
 - We’ve each got our higher, better self and our lower, selfish self.
 - If your partner is stuck in and acting from their lower self or *you* are stuck in your lower self and acting from it, then it’s not going to feel like it’s possible to have an eternal marriage between the two of you, because it’s *not* possible.
 - Your eternal marriage will be between your higher self and your partner’s higher self.
 - Sometimes you’ll be in touch with that and other times you won’t.
- Also, it could very well be that you’re not married to your eventual soulmate.
 - Last time we read a passage that said that—at least in the 1700s when the book *Married Love* was written—most marriages were based on external things rather than the internal things that would make for a marriage that lasts to eternity (*Married Love* §49).

- So it could be that you're *not* married to your soulmate; that might even still be the more likely scenario.
- Ok. But therefore... what?
 - What does the Lord want us to do then?
 - What the Lord wants us to do is different than we might expect.
 - It boils down to
 - work with what you've got
 - and look to eternity.
- The main thing I want to do now is read and talk about two lengthy passages from the book *Married Love*.

Work With What You've Got

- This first passage is from the beginning of a chapter on "The Reasons Why An Appearance of Love, Friendship, and Good Will Are to Be Seen in Marriages".
 - We talked about this in the sermon on the wedding at Cana and how married partners who feel very different from each other can and should still treat each other in friendly and loving ways and that that can lead to reconciliation (*Married Love* §289).
- *Married Love* §271
 - [A]lthough states of coldness separate the minds of married partners in the world today, we know that they continue to live together and have children. This would not be the case if appearances of love were not possible as well, which at times simulate or imitate the warmth of genuine love. ... [T]hese appearances are necessary and useful...—without them homes would not hold together, and so neither would organised societies.

In addition to this, some conscientious persons may labour under the idea that disagreements of minds and resulting internal estrangements between them and their partner are attributable to some fault in themselves, so that they are to blame, on which account they grieve in heart. But because internal differences are not in their hands to remedy, it is enough for them to assuage distresses arising from conscience by shows of apparent love and favour. Friendship may even return as a result, which carries within it married love on the part of the one, if not on the part of the other.
- You might feel like you are internally estranged from your partner.
 - You might feel like your marriage is not living up to the potential of all that it could be.
 - But that's not necessarily your fault.
 - You don't need to beat yourself up about it.
 - It's not in your power to fix it.
 - Instead you can just work on acting in a loving and friendly way to your spouse.
 - It reminds me of this teaching of the Lord:
 - Luke 6:32-36 (NKJV)
 - ³² "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of

the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶ Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

- Your partner may sometimes feel like your enemy or it may feel like you're loving them and getting nothing in return.
 - But the Lord promises that, if you can learn to love and be merciful even in those circumstances, your reward will be great.
- The passage from *Married Love* continues:
- *Married Love* §271
- Marriages in the world are generally contracted on the basis of outward affections. Nevertheless, marriages in the world are to continue to the end of one or the other's life.
- Not your soulmate? Therefore... what?
- Therefore, nevertheless, stick with your marriage till the end of your life or your partner's life.
- Now that I've talked about the value of reconciling yourself to the likelihood that you might be married to someone who's not your soulmate, now I want to make the case for the value of operating according to the assumption that your married partner *is* your eternal soulmate.
- This is the "look to eternity" part.

Look to Eternity

- The first part of looking to eternity is to not let your eyes wander away from your married partner.

Don't Let Your Eyes Wander

- Again this comes to the conclusions and decisions that we make based on our beliefs about soulmates.
- Maybe you're feeling pretty sure that the person you're married to is *not* your soulmate.
 - If that helps you not beat yourself up about things not being as good as they could be, then that's good.
 - If it helps you to let go of trying to control your partner and make them into something that they're not, then that's good too.
 - But, if you conclude that therefore you're going to entirely check out of your marriage and keep an eye out for someone better, then that can become harmful.
- Part of the Ten Commandments is "you shall not covet your neighbour's wife" (Exodus 20:17).
 - Don't entertain thoughts in your mind about who you're *meant* to be with or who you might have ended up with if only things had worked out differently.
 - The person you're meant to be with right now is the person you are with—finish and klaar.
 - Even in a hypothetical situation where you're married to Person A on earth and you're going to eventually be married to Person B to eternity after death, that doesn't mean that you're meant to divorce Person A so that you can be with Person B on earth.
 - You're meant to follow the Lord's commandments and by doing that you will be prepared for your eternal heavenly marriage.

- This is a place where movies and books can be really unhelpful.
 - Lots of books and movies tell the story of a woman who finds herself in a cold marriage.
 - Her husband is consumed by his career and so is not paying attention to her.
 - Or her husband is just boring or not putting any work into their relationship.
 - Or her husband has real problems—substance abuse, anger management problems—legitimate concerns.
 - And then along comes a guy that she used to know back in high school.
 - And they both liked each other but circumstances meant that they never ended up together and now here they are, brought together again by fate.
 - And this guy is everything that the husband is not—he’s sweet, he pays attention, he goes out of his way to help.
 - Clearly, *this* is the guy that she is really meant to be with.
 - No! No, no, no, no, no.
- Pursuing romantic relationships with people who are not our married partner—even if it’s just in our own head—is exactly the opposite of what will lead us to true love.
- We need to reject and shun and run away from all thoughts and feelings that would lead our eyes to wander away from our married partner.
 - And when we do that, that allows for the possibility that we might be able to work towards eternity with this flawed person that we find ourselves with.

The Effect and Value of Looking to Eternity

- I mentioned in part 1 of this series that I sent an early draft of this sermon series to an email list for New Church ministers.
- A number of them responded by pointing to a particular passage from *Married Love* about the effect and value of looking to eternity in marriage.
 - One of them wrote, “I particularly love *Married Love* §216 very much. It has been one of the foundational teachings for myself in how I have approached marriage personally, and has been incredibly powerful in that regard.”
 - Let’s read it.

***Married Love* §216:1-2**

- People who are in a state of true married love look to eternity in their marriage, while the opposite is the case with those who are not in a state of married love.

What the state of married partners in heaven is like when thought of eternity leaves their minds and an idea of marriage as something temporary occurs instead, for me came to light from the following experience:

A married couple from heaven was once granted permission to be with me, and some clever-talking scoundrel then managed to take away their thought of eternity in regard to marriage. On being deprived of this thought they began to lament, saying that they could not go on living and that they felt a sense of distress as never before. When their fellow angels in heaven perceived this, the scoundrel was sent away and cast down. As soon as this happened, immediately their thought of eternity returned to them, and rejoicing with a heartfelt joy on account of it, they tenderly embraced each other.

- You see how important the idea of marriage lasting to eternity is?

- Please don't let me be a clever-talking scoundrel and talk you out of believing in the eternity of your relationship.
- If you've never doubted it before, don't start doubting it now.

- The passage continues, this time about another couple.
 - This couple seems to also have been good people who had been married on earth.
 - Now they're in the spiritual world

- *Married Love* §216:3
 - On another occasion I listened to two partners who one moment entertained a thought of eternity in respect to their marriage, and the next moment a thought of it as something temporary. The reason was that an internal dissimilarity existed between them. As long as they had the thought of eternity, they were happy together; but when they began to think of their marriage as something temporary, they said it was no longer a marriage—the wife declaring that she was no longer a wife but a mistress, and the husband that he was no longer a husband but a lecher. When their internal dissimilarity was revealed to them, therefore, the man left the woman and the woman left the man. Afterwards, however, because they each had an idea of eternity in respect to marriage, they were matched with partners of a character similar to their own.

- I find this to be a really interesting and useful case study.
 - This is a marriage between two good people who had an internal dissimilarity and who eventually did not end up together for eternity—*i.e.* they were not soulmates.
 - They vacillated in their ability to believe that their marriage was going to last to eternity.
 - But they were happier together when they believed that they were looking to eternity in their marriage and, because they believed in eternal marriage, they were eventually given a heavenly partner who also believed in eternal marriage.
 - The implication of this seems to be that, even if you wonder if the person you're with is not your soulmate, it's better to work on the assumption that they are.

- The passage finishes by saying this:
 - *Married Love* §216:4
 - It is the same in the case of marriages on earth. When married partners there love each other tenderly, they think of eternity in regard to the marriage covenant, and not at all of its being terminated by death. Or if they do think about this, they grieve, until strengthened again with hope by the thought of its continuing in the life to come.

- In response to this passage one minister wrote,
 - “In the grand scheme of things, the question of the existence of a particular soulmate seems to me academic in comparison with the daily usefulness of living with the intent of building a marriage relationship that grows eternally.”
- Another wrote,
 - “In many ways, though I intellectually know that it is possible that my partner in heaven... may not be my wife that I am with now.... But I almost purposefully ignore that in the way I think about my marriage here and now, and try to devote myself to the idea that this marriage is my eternal marriage, and I need to live into that belief with everything that I've got.”
 - I think that's good advice.

“I know we are not going to be together forever but I’m sticking with you....”

- I’m going to tell you a quick story and then we’ll be done.
- I was once at church men’s weekend and an old man who was there told this story.
 - He said, “I was not a very good husband. And there was a time in our marriage when my wife said to me, ‘I know that we are not going to be together forever!’ But then she said, ‘But I’m sticking with you because, by the time you meet up with the person you’re going to be married to in heaven, I want you to be a husband worth having.’”
 - And then he said, “And she did stick with me and I learned to be a better husband to her and now we’re pretty sure that we’re going to be together forever.”
- Do you see the power of the “Therefore...”?
 - She was *sure* that he wasn’t her soulmate but the conclusion she came to about what she should do as a result was exactly the opposite of what many people would conclude and it was exactly right for making progress towards her soulmate.

Conclusion

- It is a hard place to be in to be wondering if the person we’re married to might not be our soulmate.
- I would encourage you to hold that judgment gently with a willingness to have your mind change with time.
- I would encourage you to see that the Lord has a lot of useful teachings to help you figure out what to do as you navigate that difficult situation.
- I would like to remind you that the Lord has loved you and will continue to love you with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3) and that He encourages you to keep His commandments and abide in His love (John 15:9-10) and strive to love your married partner as the Lord has loved you (John 13:34).
- And finally I would like to quote the last verse of the song “O Precious Sign” to you, which we will listen to as the postlude today.
 - It reminds us that we are in process and our partner is in process and so, along the way, it might not look like we can fit together, but there is the possibility of an eternal marriage to our soulmate if we stay committed to the covenant represented by the wedding rings we’re wearing.
 - Shine bright, thou golden ring, with gleam and glitter,
from fire that melts and welds the twain in one;
a perfect union, all the dross consuming.
Behold one angel when its work is done!
- *Amen.*