TITLE: Preparing for eternity

TEST: 2 Tim 3:16-17; Prov. 27:17; Ephe. 5:22-33;

Gen. 2:24

INTRODUCTION: Since we just celebrated Valentines Day a couple days ago I thought I would talk about that subject this morning.

 Scripture tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16 – 17 that: **16All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,  17so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

 For you forgetful gentlemen here this morning I hope that the Word of God helped equip you for the good work of remembering your sweetheart on Valentines day..

Have you ever contemplated just what this life is all about?

If you could boil that answer down to just a three word phrase I think that the phrase that would best sum up what this life is really all about would be: “Preparation for Eternity!” Preparation for Eternity!

What is this life all about? Reduce it all down and this is what life comes down to-- preparation for eternity!

 How we live our life here on earth now will determine what our life in eternity will be like! In fact, how we live our life on earth will determine where we spend eternity. By our life choices today we will either be choosing eternity in heaven or we will be choosing eternity in hell.

We make the life choice of Choosing and following Jesus in this life and we will be securing our eternity in Heaven.

 We make the life choice of rejecting Jesus and living life for ourselves and we will be securing our eternity in Hell.

But this morning we will take the position that we have all chosen Jesus and have the eternity of Heaven in our future.

 For the Christian this life becomes all about the preparation for an eternity with Christ.

My primary text this morning will be:

 **Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) 17As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

Have you ever noticed that the years seem to fly by at breakneck speed? That the older that you get the more quickly time seems to pass?

 A child is born and before you know it he or she is walking.

 For months you may be planning a graduation party or wedding celebration, and before you know it, it seems the event took place 6 months ago!

 You plan and look forward to that long awaited and hard-earned vacation and all too soon you are wishfully looking through a photo album of the trip!

 It just seems that time often runs on fast forward!

EXAMPLE: -dvr= digital video recorder. You can record Gunsmoke or your favorite show to watch at a later time. Come to a commercial you can Hit the fast forward button once and it goes fast---hit it twice and it goes even faster---hit a third time and it flies by like a bolt of lightning and your back to your show.

 Life often flies by like a bolt of lightning when looked back upon in retrospect doesn’t it?

Well, in one sense life does fly by, because from an eternal perspective, life is short!

 The writer of 1 Chronicles describes our days on earth as but a shadow…

 Job says life is swifter than a runner.

 Kind David says that life is but mere handbreadth!

 James describes life as a mist, a vapor that appears for a little while and then is gone…Life is nothing more than a puff of smoke when contrasted with eternity.

Before long your family will be grown up and move away.

Even your career will fade away into retirement.

 But for those of us who are married or those among us who one day will be married, God has placed us on this temporal earth, in part, to develop our relationships with our spouses and to help prepare us for eternity.

 Do you know what Gods design for marriage is?

 To give us an earthly opportunity to mirror the eternal relationship between Christ and His Church and help prepare us for eternity.

Marriage helps prepare us for eternity by teaching us the process of sanctification.

Have you ever wondered why, within marriage, it is that sometimes your spouse will rub you the wrong way and there are times when you may rub your spouse the wrong way?

 That rubbing, a lot of times, is part of Gods design for marriage in order to help prepare us for eternity!

**Proverbs 27:17 (NIV) 17As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

I have always put this verse in the context of men’s fellowship.

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

Now, this is certainly true within men’s fellowship.

Christian men need other Christian men in their life to help them stay sharp in the Lord---Just as Christian women need other Christian women in their lives in order to help them remain sharp in the Lord.

But as I studied this verse out I found that it is not gender exclusive!

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

The Hebrew word for man that is used here is:

***eesh***

**a *man* as an individual or a male person; often used as an adjunct to a more definite term (and in such cases frequently not expressed in translation.) :—also, another, every (one), fellow, people, person.**

EESH comes from the root word…

 ***en-oshe'***

**properly a *mortal*; hence a *man* in general** This can be applied to man as in the male gender but it can also be in reference to mankind and be gender neutral.

As Iron sharpens iron so one person can sharpen the other!

We all have rough edges that need to be rubbed off, and many a person has found that marriage grinds off all sorts of rough edges and undesirable characteristics.

Marriage is a school in which we daily learn things such as forgiveness, patience and love.

In marriage, we learn to develop an intimate relationship, and that process can help teach us how to pursue an intimate relationship with Christ as no other earthly relationship can.

When we boil it all down what are the three main ingredients in a marriage relationship?

 Commitment, love and trust.

When we boil it all down what are the three primary ingredients in our relationship with Christ? Aren’t they the same? Commitment, love and trust!

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

How many of you have sharpened a knife using a steel.

A steel is a round piece of metal kind of like a rat tail rasp.

If you have a knife that is dull you run it over the steel to sharpen it.

Both are made of the same material but have been fashioned into different shapes and when one is rubbed against the other there is a sharpening that takes place as the dulled material is removed or rubbed off.

ILLUSTRATION….

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man, ONE PERSON sharpens another.**

 This honing or sharpening process takes place within all marriages and all earthly relationships… There is a rubbing away.

 Have you ever heard the phrase: They rubbed me the wrong way? Maybe you have felt this way about your spouse at times as they point out your imperfections to you.

Let me point out something here…. There is a right way and a wrong way to sharpen a knife when using a steel, when putting iron against iron.

EXAMPLE: If you use a cutting motion against the steel you actually will have a reverse effect….the knife will get duller instead of shaper.

 If your desire is to see your knife get sharper then you have to run it against the steel with a certain amount of skill.. hold the knife at a 45 degree angle and slide the knife along the steel with a gentle yet firm stroke….

The same is true within the marriage relationship! When iron comes against iron it needs to be done skillfully if it is going to have a positive and wanted effect. Sharpening the relationship and not dulling it. Help the person conform more into the image and likeness of Christ not hindering them or be a stumbling block to them in that relationship.

**So, Scripture says that as iron sharpens iron so one man, one person sharpens another.**

Again, the marriage relationship is to mirror the relationship that Christ has with His bride the Church.

This is exactly what Paul teaches us in:

 **Ephesians 5:22 - 33 (NIV) 22Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.  23For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.  24Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

What is it that Scripture is admonishing Christian wives to do here?

Mirror, imitate the relationship that Christ has with the Church within their marriage to their husband.

**22Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.  23For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.  24Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.**

Wives are to submit to their own husbands as the Lord submitted Himself to His bride, the Church.

 How did Jesus submit himself to His bride, the Church?

He submitted Himself to die on a cross for her.

**25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her  26to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word,  27and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.  28In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.  29After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30for we are members of his body.  31“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”  32This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.  33However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.**

 What is it that Scripture is admonishing Christian husbands to do here?

 Mirror, imitate the relationship that Christ has with His Church within their marriage to their wives.

Husbands are to love their wives just as Christ loved the Church.

How much did Christ love His bride, the Church?

Picture the movie the Passion of the Christ.

 Picture Jesus submitting himself to the lashes of the Roman whip! Picture Him carrying His own cross on that long and arduous journey to Calgary. Picture the nails as they are mercilessly driven into His hands and feet.

 Picture Him as He is hoisted up into the air on that cross and gives His life for His bride.

**25Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.**

As husbands and wives we each have been called and commanded to mirror Christ relationship with His bride, the Church, within our relationships with one another.

 You young people here this morning that are not yet married—you most probably one day will be.

 Before you walk down the aisle with that special person, you need to contemplate all that Jesus did for His bride the Church, think about the extreme commitment that He was willing to make for her and if you are not willing to do the same thing, if need be, for the one that you are about to get married to then my advice would be don’t get married.

If you aren’t willing to submit yourself to your bride as Christ submitted and loved loved His bride, the Church, then you will fall short of your calling as a Christian and will not mirror the relationship that Christ has for His bride, the Church, within your marriage relationship.

In my pre-marital counseling with the couple that I agree to marry I usually talk about these verses of Scripture in Ephesians that talk about wives being called to submit to their husbands as they would to the Lord and the need for husbands to love their wives just as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself to die a gruesome and cruel death for her-

 and then ask them to look at each other and if they cannot, in all honesty and sincerity, make this extreme commitment to each other then they shouldn’t get married to that person but wait until they find someone that they are willing to make that kind of extreme commitment to.

All of this reminds me of the story of the Chickens and the horses…

 A farmer's boy decided to get married. His father said to him, "John, when you get married, your liberty is gone."

 The boy said he did not believe it. The father said, "I'll prove it to you.

Catch a dozen chickens, tie their legs together and put them in the wagon. Hitch up the two horses to the wagon and drive into town.

 Stop at every house you come to, and wherever you find the man is boss, give him a horse. Wherever you find the woman is boss, give her a chicken. You'll give away all your chickens and come back with two horses."

 The boy accepted the proposition and drove to town. He had stopped at every house and had given away ten chickens when he came to a nice little house and saw an old man and his wife standing out on the front lawn. He called to them and asked, "Who is boss here?"

 The man said, "I am" Turning to the woman, the boy said, "Is he boss?" The woman replied, "Yes, he's boss." The boy asked them to come down to the street. He then explained his reason for asking and told the man to pick out one of the horses. He said he would bring the horse back to him that afternoon. The old man and the old lady looked over the horses carefully, and the husband said, "I think the black horse is the better of the two."

 The wife then said, "I think that bay horse is in every way the better horse. I would choose him."

 The old man took a careful look at the bay horse and said, "I guess I'll take the bay horse."

 The boy smiled and said, "No, you won't; you'll take a chicken."

 There is some truth to this story…Guys, when you get married you forfeit your liberty! Ladies, when you get married you forfeit your liberty!

It is what Scripture is talking about in the first scriptural reference that we have to the marriage relationship…

**Genesis 2:24 (NIV) 24For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

Whenever two come together to become one it will require the old sense of oneness and singularity to be done away with.

There is to be no I in the marriage relationship but only we, us and our if that marriage is to be as God has pre-ordained it to be.

**24For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.**

Have you ever thought that within the marriage relationship we are to have a mirroring of the trinity, the triune God?

Just as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit make up the one and only true God we find the same dynamic mirrored when a man and a woman join together in the covenant bond of marriage and the two become one..

One in unity, one in purpose, one in commonality!

**As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.**

Guys, God has given you your wife to help keep you stay sharp so that you will keep your spiritual edge.

 Ladies, God has given you your husbands to help keep you stay sharp so that you will keep your spiritual edge.

 When we contemplate the creation of man, man being created in the image and likeness of God as recorded to us in the book of Genesis we find this truth.

When we look at man alone, we don’t see the best reflection of the image and likeness of God…

When we look at woman alone, we don’t see the best reflection of the image and likeness of God…

 I believe we see the best reflection of the image and likeness of God in one place and one place alone and that is when the man and the woman come together in the covenant bond of marriage.

When the two become one is when I believe we see the best reflection and image of God.

So, guys, look at your wife, ladies, look at your husband and behold a valentine from Heaven! A gift from God especially made for you.

 Talk a look and see the other half of the real whole.

In closing this morning, I would like to share a love poem, a writing by Susan Polis Schutz entitled “LOVE IS.”

LOVE IS

being happy for the other person

when they are happy

being sad for the other person when they are sad

being together in good times

and being together in bad times

**Love is the source of strength**

Love is

being honest with yourself at all times

being honest with the other person at all times

telling, listening, respecting the truth

and never pretending

**Love is the source of reality**

Love is

an understanding that is so complete that

you feel as if you are a part of the other person

accepting the other person just the way they are

and not trying to change them to be something else

**Love is the source of unity**

Love is

the freedom to pursue your own desires

while sharing your experiences with the other person

the growth of one individual alongside of

and together with the growth of another individual

**Love is the source of success**

Love is

the excitement of planning things together

the excitement of doing things together

**Love is the source of the future**

Love is

the fury of the storm

the calm of the rainbow

**Love is the source of passion**

Love is

giving and taking in a daily situation

being patient with each other's needs and desires

**Love is the source of sharing**

Love is

knowing that the other person

will always be with you regardless of what happens

missing the other person when they are away

but remaining near in heart at all times

**Love is the source of security**

Love is the source of life

This morning, is the love that you are manifesting within your home mirroring the love that Christ has for His Church!

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once was asked, "How do you measure the success of your work?" She looked puzzled for a moment and then replied, "I don't remember that the Lord ever spoke of success. He spoke only of faithfulness in love. This is the only success that really counts."

Are you faithful to love this morning? Are faithfully loving the one God has placed at your side as your life mate?

 And, are you faithfully loving Jesus? Showing your love for Him by striving to mirror His love within your marriage and within all your earthly relationships?

How are you preparing for eternity?