

Hope for All: the Story of Sex

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Good to see you. Yeah, what Mike was saying, please just wanted to remind you that if you missed last week's! talk then you can listen back to it. You just need to email Paula and say please can I have! the link. So this one is not as easy as go to the YouTube site that will be on there because the stuff we're dealing with is a bit more sensitive. But that doesn't mean it's not so if you missed it then please go back and get the link and listen to it because without the foundations the building isn't going to be very strong is it? So that's great.

Secondly we've done a worksheet so if you appreciate a worksheet to help you engage with the message or especially if you're a teenager then just on that table by the door over there there are some sheets to help you engage. Please use them otherwise they're just going to get recycled and they'll go to waste.

If you're not a teenager but your brain is slightly foggy also an option. Good. All right. Let's pray before we start shall we?

Father in heaven we thank you. We thank you for your goodness. We thank you for your love for all. We thank you that we understand that love best of all in the person of Jesus who came to earth to experience what we experience and who gave up his life for us so that we could be with you forever.

Father as we come to this subject of sex we pray Lord that your truth would be clearly heard that your love would be clearly felt that everything that isn't from you would be forgotten. Father as we pray that in Jesus name. Amen.

[1 : 40] Amen. 2017 the Me Too movement hits like a tsunami in the wake of the Harvey Weinstein abuse case and by January 2018 a million women march under that banner in the United States against the abuse of sex.

Especially by men. Especially by men. Why is this such a big deal? Why is this such a big deal? Because there's plenty of abuse in the world that doesn't get this kind of attention. Right?

Sam Albury who's a pastor and same sex attracted says who we sleep with is now seen as the supreme human right.

In other words sex is the meaning of life. Sex has become God. And instinctively we kind of know that's wrong don't we?

Sex isn't the whole story. And yet at the same time Me Too and statements like that kind of reflect just how important this is to us. It really matters doesn't it?

[2 : 47] We all have a deep need for intimacy and acceptance and life giving love. And sex is a part of that. And when we experience sex despite people saying you can just do that casually actually we don't experience it like that at all do we?

It isn't frivolous. It isn't just a bit of fun. And it isn't just functional. Oh it's only a way to have kids. Actually we experience it as deeply significant.

Don't we? That's why when things go well and you have really good sex the way we describe it is the earth moved. Not the bedside cabinet moved.

Trivial. The earth moved. So what we need is an explanation for sex that explains that feeling of eternal significance.

And that offers hope to everybody. Right? Whether they're having sex or not. Whether they're able to or not. So we're dealing with a question that is much bigger than what am I allowed to do?

[4 : 06] And we're much more talking about a question like what is sex about anyway? And the Bible answer is this.

Sex is a signpost to God's intimate love for his people forever. I'll say that again.

Sex is a signpost to God's intimate love for his people forever. We're going to get there by looking at three passages.

And we're going to do it with some breaks in between. So Kath very kindly agreed to come and read to us. And then I'll speak. And then Kath will read. And then I'll speak. And we'll do that three times. But first we need to understand how we got here. How did we get where we are today? Well, when people started to move away from God's way of being human.

[5 : 08] You know the things that Mike was talking about last week. After World War II. That left a big empty space where our identity was. We knew what it was to be human before.

Because we followed God's way. Roughly. Now, we don't. And something called the sexual revolution tried to fill in that empty space.

With our sexuality. So what happened? We changed from talking about, I experience sexual attraction to this person.

To, I am gay or straight. See the movement? This is something that is a part of me.

This is something that is all of me. So we got rid of what the Bible was saying. And the sexual revolution instead said, be true to yourself.

[6 : 09] The sexual part of yourself. And just like me too. The sexual revolution did help us figure out some problems. Right?

Mostly that men treated women like objects for their gratification. That a lot of marriages were about male dominance. And that men frankly weren't keeping to marriage. And that this negatively impacts women most of all.

And the sexual revolution showed us in the church that we hadn't treated women as equals. Or responded to those who experienced same sex attraction with love and compassion.

And we can be thankful that it did that. What were the answers? According to our culture. Well, the sexual revolution said that women should fight this problem by having sex like men did.

Specifically those men. And then they will be free and equal. So we got the pill.

[7 : 15] And we got abortion. And we got hook up culture. One night stands. One night stands. But it turns out, as research shows, that generally women don't actually want to have sex the way those men were having sex.

Casually. So objectifying men didn't solve the problem. Which we all could have known really. Because two wrongs don't make a right, do they?

And the sexual revolution said that letting people have sex with whomever they wanted would make us personally happier. And as society, it would make us healthier.

But the statistics show that people are actually now lonelier and less committed to each other than ever. And that levels of sexual satisfaction are actually consistently highest in committed relationships.

So if consequenceless casual sex is really a good thing, why does it leave behind so many hurt and broken people?

[8 : 23] Broken homes. And if the argument is, well, it's fine as long as it doesn't harm anyone, then why is it that since the sexual revolution, women are more prostituted than ever, when children are more parentless and sexualized than ever, and the poor are more burdened than ever.

And that's not my opinion. That is statistically verifiable fact. As a result of the sexual revolution today, we believe that consent should be the standard.

So as long as the other person says yes, and they're not getting hurt, then it's fine. But if consent is the standard, then why does no not mean no?

Consent, which is a good concept, a Christian concept, is not enough in a fallen world, is it?

Because it doesn't mean much if I can manipulate you or harm you or get you fired if you don't say yes.

And that's where Me Too comes in. And what if you don't have lots of sex with whomever you want? Well then according to our culture, you're missing out on flourishing as a human being.

[9 : 46] You're somehow less human. Your life has less meaning. You're one of the have-nots. And what a poor view that is of people who are single and who are waiting.

And what a poor view that is of people who are medically incapable. What a poor view that is of older people for whom the fire is dimmed. And what hope does that offer to those who are married but not enjoying sex?

Or those who are scarred by their sexual experiences? Jason Roach, who's an author on this subject, says, The sexual revolution felt like dancing in a very crowded nightclub. You were trying to enjoy yourself and everyone was smiling at each other, but frankly you felt more shoved than satisfied. So we need a better story, don't we?

We need one that offers hope to all. And God has that story for us. I'm going to explore that story through three questions. Here are the three questions.

[10:57] In order to help us with those three questions, we're going to have three readings. So I'm just going to ask Kath if she would give us the first of those now. Thanks Kath. Is that on?

Which one? This one. It's a new microphone. So we're reading from Genesis. There's three readings in Genesis first of all.

So you need to head to the first chapter, Genesis chapter one, verse 27. And then we're hopping over to chapter two and then to chapter three.

So they're all quite close by. So that's at the beginning of the Bible. Not too hard to find. Yeah. All right. Let's go. So Genesis chapter one, verse 27 says, So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

[12:12] Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. Then we go to Genesis chapter two, verses 22 to 25.

Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man. And he brought her to the man.

The man said, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman. For she was taken out of man. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife.

And they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked and they felt no shame. Finally, we're going to Genesis chapter three, verses six and seven.

When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it.

[13:22] She also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Thanks, Kath. So what is sex for? That's the first question.

What is sex for? Well, the Bible tells us that sex is first of all for procreation, right? The bringing about of the birth of new life.

It's supposed to be life-giving. It's supposed to be creative. It's supposed to carry out that commission we were reading about, to fill the earth. Did you see that? God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Chapter one, verse 28. And that means, God says, union. Becoming one flesh.

[14:24] It means being together. But it also means being different. Because sameness doesn't produce fruit, does it? You need a male and a female.

And it means marriage because giving life doesn't just mean reproducing, as if it was some cold biological process. But it means nurturing, doesn't it?

It doesn't stop at conception. It means continual, life-giving care. So sex is for procreation. But secondly, it's for passion.

Sex is a gift, which is to be enjoyed without shame. Did you see Adam and Eve were both naked? Chapter 2, verse 25.

And they felt no shame. I think sometimes we're a little bit like Peter. Do you remember when he was up on the rooftop and he was praying and the sheep came down? And there were all kinds of animals in there.

[15:23] And God said, kill, eat. This is for you to enjoy. And Peter says, I'm not eating that. That's unclean. But the man and his wife were both naked and they had no shame.

See, we mustn't call unclean what God has called clean. It's to be enjoyed. And look at the delight that Adam has when he greets Eve.

Chapter 2, verse 23. This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. What's this? It's the first love poetry.

Chapter 2 of the Bible. And if you want some more of the same, read Song of Songs. He is delighted with her. Sex is for passion.

Thirdly, sex is for proclamation. It's supposed to point to God's faithful, passionate love for his people, married or single.

[16:28] See, our sexuality is there because God wants us to understand the fierceness of his love for us. And his longing for us.

And I think sometimes we know that in our heads, don't we? But it struggles to get down to our hearts. And God knew that. And God knew that to experience it physically in our sexuality would really bring it home to our hearts.

Just how much God loves us. How does that work? Well, it starts with the Trinity, Genesis 1. In the beginning, God. Before there was ever a world, God lived in a perfect circle of love.

And that heavenly love is fruitful. Because it creates the earth. And then you have heaven, which is a masculine word in the Hebrew.

And you have earth, which is a feminine word in the Hebrew. And they're supposed to be together. And part of the earthly expression of that heavenly love is sex.

[17:40] Which involves a male and a female coming together in order to produce fruit. So sex points to and proclaims that. But finally, and Mike was reminding us of this last week.

It's broken. If we were to read on a little bit in chapter 3, you'd get to verse 16. After the man and the woman had rejected God. And it says to the woman, I will make your pains in childbearing very severe.

With painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband. And he will rule over you. See, that fruitfulness now carries pain. And instead of passionate faithfulness, we have male dominance and female desire.

It's broken. But that means that we're not surprised when something like Me Too happens. Even if we are saddened. And it also means we're not surprised when there is sexual failure in the church. Although it should make us sad. We know why. We're fallen. And at the same time we can say that sex stays sacred.

[18:55] Because our bodies are temples. That's why, if we're forced or manipulated or pushed, we feel violated. Don't we? We feel desecrated.

We feel desecrated. So sex is for procreation, passion, proclamation. And at the moment it's broken. Well, maybe you're a teenager sitting here and you're thinking, why should I care?

I'm a teenager and marriage and kids seems about a million miles away. What's in it for me? Well, I think that question reveals two things.

It reveals that you've been sucked in by the individualism that dominates today. That wrong belief that the world is actually all about you. Friend, thank goodness that it's not.

And secondly, it reveals that you believe that your sexuality is entirely about you. But that is too small a vision for your sexuality. As we'll see.

[19:58] God is asking you to cultivate and care for and use your sexuality to point to marriage. You can show God's faithfulness as a teenager by pointing towards marriage.

By keeping it for marriage. You can start loving your future husband or wife now by keeping yourself for them. And then when you get married to them, you can say to them, I loved you before I even met you.

How romantic is that? How romantic is that? You can support marriages in your church family by babysitting. By serving in the youth group.

Because when families win, we all do. If you're a teenager and you've had a happy childhood, it's because, almost certainly, because your parents did sex and marriage God's way.

And now it's your turn. And if you want a campaign to change the world, this isn't a bad place to start, guys. Church, too often I think we're basically taught that being married gets you the best sex.

[21:14] And that's why you should wait. But that's just another way of making sex into our God, isn't it? And too often we've taught that marriage is our reward if we're good boys and girls before.

But sex and marriage are just signposts. They're not the destination. And that means if we're treating single people as have-nots, because we believe that marriage is the reward, then we haven't understood what marriage is pointing to.

And we're pointing at the wrong thing. And that's before we get to Jesus' words on singleness. More of that in a few weeks.

So that's what sex is for. But what does sex point to? Kath, if you could do the next reading. So it's Ephesians chapter 5.

It's in the New Testament. And verse 25. Okay.

[22 : 41] Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

And then we're looking at Ephesians chapter 5 again, verse 31 to 32. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Thanks, Kath. So what does sex proclaim exactly? If sex is about proclamation, what is its link to forever? Forever. What does sex point to?

Points to God's love. See, out there, what you will hear is that love is love. But it isn't. God is love, according to the Bible.

[24 : 14] The only reason we desire is because he is the great desirer. And sex points to God's love for us. First of all, to God's fruitful love for his creation.

And we saw the beginnings of that in that passage in Genesis. Do you remember? He loves what his love has produced. And what his love has produced is creation. So sex points us to God's fruitful love for his creation.

It shouts that God gives life. And secondly, it points to God's faithful love for humanity. Do you remember the love story between heaven and earth that started in Genesis?

It goes wrong, doesn't it, when humanity, Earth's rulers, decides that they know better, they prefer other loves. Earth is unfaithful to heaven.

And what's the consequence? And after that, the Bible story is one of God's passionate pursuit of humanity. See, he wants humanity back, even though she was unfaithful to him.

[25 : 23] And that humanity is represented by Israel, because through Israel, he wants to bless the world. And the main metaphor for the relationship between God and Israel is marriage, sexual union.

And Israel is serially unfaithful. And what does God do? He stays faithful. He stays faithful.

He stays faithful. You see, sex points to God's faithful love for humanity. It should shout that God sticks with us always. And all of that history is grounded and explained in the passage that Kath just read for us in Ephesians 5, where Paul says, where Paul says, marriage, the coming together of man and woman as one flesh, is like Christ and the church.

God's love for us doesn't just create life, back to Genesis, but Jesus then creates new life in us, through his sacrificial saving love shown on the cross.

And that's what's going on here. God's saving love for us is passionate. What does it say, John 3, 16?

[26 : 43] God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son. So sex points to God's saving love for his people.

So when you find yourself filled with a deep longing, a physical yearning, to be known, to know, to be satisfied, then tell yourself, this is my body pointing me to the deep love that Jesus has for me. The deep love that Jesus has for other people. The intimacy that he has promised me, which I can begin to know even now. And when we talk to our kids and our friends about sex, we don't just say, don't do that because that's not right.

Because then we risk giving them the impression that I care more about me being right, than about you being happy. Instead, we say, that is not the right way. Because if you go that way, you are ignoring God's love, which is what sex reflects.

You see, doing right and being happy, they go together in the end, and they are about being with the right person. And who is the right person for everybody? Jesus.

[28 : 12] The one who loves us best. So that is what sex points to. God's love for us. Finally, how is that hope for all? Final reading. Thanks, Kath.

So we're turning to the end of the Bible.

Revelation, chapter 19. And we're looking at verse 6. Typo on the slides.

19. I don't want to go wrong in Revelation. Okay, so. Revelation, chapter 19, verse 6. Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like a roar of rushing waters, and like loud peals of thunder shouting, Hallelujah!

[29 : 18] For our Lord God almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean, was given for her to wear. Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints. Then the angel said to me, Write, blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And he added, these are the true words of God. Thanks, Kath. Maybe the most important question of all.

How is that hope for everybody? Well, where does the cosmic love story end according to Revelation? In the end, heaven and earth, God and his people will come together at the great wedding feast, where we each will be dressed in white, pure and clean, if we're his.

So the cosmic love story ends with us, his people, being completely one with Jesus, forever.

[30 : 36] And that is hope for all of us, because what? Because it means anyone can experience the ultimate fulfillment of human sexuality. And you don't have to be married, or ever to have had sex, to experience that.

Right? Sex is like the trailer. You might enjoy watching the trailer. But when you watch the film, it won't matter anymore. And if you didn't watch the trailer, it won't take away from your enjoyment of watching the film.

And this is hope for all of us, because being one with Jesus means all of our sexual mistakes will be wiped clean. Did you see that?

Revelation 19. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. White robes. Washed clean. Even when we get our sexual oneness wrong, Jesus still wants to be one with us.

He stays faithful. Thirdly, this is hope for all of us, because if sex points to something bigger than us, being one with Jesus forever, then it means our identity isn't defined by our sexuality.

[32 : 02] It isn't defined by whether we're having sex or not. And that's good news. That gives us hope. We're more than our sexuality.

We're created, broken, capable of being restored in Jesus. And if you're a Christian, you are one with him forever. How is it hope for us all?

Because it means that everyone's sexuality has beautiful meaning. We can all express and proclaim our sexuality by being passionately, faithfully committed to Jesus and his way.

And for all of us, that will mean being faithfully single and celibate at some point in our lives.

Because for all of us, there is a time when we are not married.

And that time may come again. And for some of us, it will mean being faithfully married for a time. But everyone's sexuality has beautiful meaning in God's plan.

[33 : 14] Where is the hope for us when our sexual desires flow a certain way, and we find that way is not permitted by God's loving boundaries? A desire has to find a path, doesn't it?

What if Jesus Christ is that path? I am the way, the truth, and the life. What if we can learn, as part of God's family, to use our sexual desires, our sexual longing, to understand the love of God who made those longings?

And we train ourselves together to say yes to him. And not just say no to false lovers. And we can train ourselves to run towards joyful obedience without treating sexual desire as if it's embarrassing, or functional, or just plain wrong.

You see, we don't just say no to that form of sexual expression, or this form of sexual expression.

We say a much louder yes to Jesus. His love and the fulfillment that he promises.

What does that mean? Well, I think it means practically that intimate and faithful love must be more than sex.

[34 : 36] Right? Because there is no marriage in heaven, according to Jesus. So it means we also have to value all kinds of intimate and loving relationships which aren't sexual, or which aren't sexually expressed.

It means we need to value friendship. It means we need to value faithful singleness. And if there are single people walking around our churches starved of physical affection because of the unhealthy culture we have created around sex, that should make us sad, and maybe just a little angry.

What does Paul say five times? You know Paul's reputation. What does he say five times? Greet one another with a holy kiss.

So let's not deprive one another of all physical contact in the name of purity. And when people have gotten this wrong, as every human being apart from Jesus will have, we need to offer them the love of that Jesus, and point them towards the forgiveness of Jesus.

So if you get pregnant without being married, this church will not pretend that that is the best thing. But we will not react with disgust or rejection.

[36 : 01] We will love you, we will care for you, and your child. And we will offer you the hope of being one with Jesus forever. And the same applies to everybody who has made sexual mistakes.

We need to finish. Just a few more things. If we're not a follower of Jesus, then our horizontal relationships will never be right until our vertical relationship is right.

Please don't believe the lie that you are your sexuality. And that you're somehow less if you don't keep up. Be the human that you are meant to be, and like Mike was saying last week, look up for your identity.

Put your trust in Jesus. Because for those who do, there's forgiveness for all mistakes. And the Bible promises eternal pleasures at his right hand. Nobody is going to be missing out.

It turns out, doesn't it, that a good relationship isn't one that makes you happy in the moment, or even one that makes you both happy. That's too small.

[37 : 18] A good relationship is one that helps you to be passionate and faithful in this broken world, and that points other people to the ultimate passion and faithfulness of the Lord Jesus.

Now that is big enough, isn't it? Because it points to the biggest thing that there is. And that is how sex is a signpost to God's intimate love for his people forever.

See, sex is the blueprint. God's love is the building. This is the negative. That is the full-colour poster that we're heading towards. This is the tabernacle. That is the temple.

This is the dress rehearsal. That will be the show. Do you get where I'm going here? This is the trailer. That's the film. So enjoy the trailer. Or not.

But either way, Jesus promises you're going to love the film. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that sex and marriage are a signpost that you're going to be introduced to the eternal future that you promise each one of us.

[38 : 35] And pray that you would help us to hold on to you. That we would see our sexuality and sex as signposts towards your deep, intimate love for all of us who follow you and love you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.