

Kingdom Marriage and Singleness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 July 2025

Preacher: Dave Bott

- [0 : 00] Hi everyone, I'm reading from the word today from Matthew chapter 19 verses 1 to 12. From the beginning made them male and female.
- Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.
- They said to him, why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? He said to them, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.
- And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery. The disciples said to him, if such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.
- But he said to them, not everyone can receive this saying, but only to those whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men.
- [1 : 34] There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this, receive it. Well, good morning, everyone.
- It's good to be back. And I just want to say a quick thank you to all the guys who are just working on that floor over there. I know we're a bit keen to sardines today, but just thank you.
- I just love the different gifts in the body of Christ. If I tried to do that, children will be falling through the floor, I think. So I just want to express my gratitude.
- I know people are doing lots else behind the scenes there. Let me pray as we come to God's word. Father, we're coming into a very emotionally charged topic.
- And I just ask for your spirit to be with us this morning in trusting your word and giving us a deeper vision of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- [2 : 46] And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I don't know if you've been up this way, but driving... I go past Lookout Road and the roadworks going on there all the time, changing that bypass.
- And it's fascinating to see the progress. It's really quite impressive.
- We're living in an age of such technology. It tempts us to see this world as raw materials. That mankind, if we work together, we can shape anything according to our will.
- We are gods. And yet, in that same horizon, seeing that impressive work going on, there's another huge project.
- Two huge cranes making this massive expansion to John Hunter Hospital. Now, again, I am... That's impressive in its own right.
- [4 : 00] Modern medicine, I am thankful for it. I thank God for it. It is impressive. And yet, it is this huge monument in our face. We are not gods.

The sickness and death, we are under curse for sin and rebellion. And somehow, we just ignore that.

Together, as a human race, we are under curse. We need healing. Our world needs healing. And the prophets, by God's word, promise a day for healing for the whole world, for the nations.

And so, I don't want us to skip over this story. I was really tempted to just skip over verses 1 and 2, as if it's commonplace. Jesus is heading into Judea, towards Jerusalem.

Crowds are following. And he healed them there. That's incredible. I know we're used to it, if you've been coming to church a long time.

[5 : 05] This one time when Emma, I think she was an intern or a resident working at John Hunter. And you know what the wait time in ED is usually like.

This rare night, for an hour or two, there was so few admissions that doctors and nurses were playing a form of indoor cricket.

It's hard to imagine that there was so few. If Jesus walked past John Hunter Hospital today, all the beds would be emptied. They would be playing indoor cricket in every single ward.

In the mortuary, even. You could easily find a car park, which would be a miracle in itself. And yet, you see the blindness of the Pharisees here.

They're totally ignoring that. And they come to test him. Now, testing, it's not asking a genuine question to get more information.

[6 : 20] That is good. If you're exploring Christianity, for more information, ask questions. Absolutely. He's asking you to give your entire life to him. You can have doubts.

You can ask questions. That's fine. Pharisees have already decided, way back in chapter 12, to destroy him. He's got to go. They've got to get rid of him, out of their lives.

And so they probably picked this topic of divorce because it is controversial, even at the time. Rabbis were debating it. Jesus had already publicly talked about this in the Sermon on the Mount.

Maybe, like John the Baptist, when he spoke about Herod, his head got chopped off. Maybe they're hoping something similar will happen to Jesus. Or maybe they're hoping he will publicly contradict Moses, giving them grounds to get rid of him.

As we come into this topic of marriage and divorce and remarriage and singleness, it is such a sensitive, emotionally high-stakes topic.

[7 : 34] Can I just pause as we come into it and ask us to beware of putting Jesus to the test, like the Pharisees do, on this one topic?

I think many people do when it comes to relationships. If you're investigating Jesus or your situation right now, you feel like Jesus is asking too much of you, don't use this one area of human relationships to test Jesus and evaluate him and disregard the bigger picture.

Right before our eyes in this gospel, the Father is fully behind him. He is bringing healing to the world. Take the whole life and teaching and story of Jesus into account.

He has come to bring healing. Well, the Pharisees, they try to lure him into a controversial argument about what Moses commanded about divorce.

And far from being trapped, his wisdom ends up exposing the Pharisees. He doesn't appeal to Deuteronomy.

[8 : 54] He goes right back to creation before sin entered the world. The argument is the more original to God's design, the more weight should be given.

So Jesus answers verse 4 to 6. Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. The first poem, the first love song in human history.

This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. God's very design of humanity in two biological sexes that correspond to two genders, male and female.

These two complementary natures are designed to be united in marriage. Anthropologists have found a form of marriage in every single culture in the world.

[10 : 15] In some form, obviously the rules and the rituals change. However rural you want to think, whatever time in history, there's a reason for that.

God invented it. It is in our nature. It is not like schools. It's not like sports clubs.

Marriage is God's idea. It is inherent. It's built into male and female to become one flesh. To become one body.

And here we see, Jesus shows us what is the essence of marriage. You can get a lot of trappings, secondary things.

But what's the essence? What is a marriage? What creates it? What is it? It is something that goes deeper than blood.

[11 : 19] It's deeper than the allegiance of parents and adult children. Because one man leaves his father and mother. That's an incredible bond. And yet, it's something deeper than that.

One man must leave and hold fast to one woman. That holding fast is by entering a covenant.

I think some people think at the heart of relationships, our society, it talks about chemistry, doesn't it? The X factor or compatibility. But romance.

But that's not at the essence. That flows out of holding fast. Some appeal to living under one roof and being sexually intimate.

And they claim that they're married in God's eyes. No. God has another word for that. That's sexual immorality. The essence of marriage isn't compatibility.

[12 : 30] It's not feelings. The essence isn't intimacy. That doesn't create marriage. These things flow out of holding fast. That covenant. That covenant.

I've had to run a few weddings now. And I've not had to. It's been a privilege. I just realised my wording there. Now, there are a bunch of details in a wedding ceremony.

Quite honestly, I don't care. I really don't care if the bridesmaids are exactly ten seconds apart as they walk in. If they want to do cartwheels coming down here, that would be quite impressive.

I don't mind. I don't care. But when it comes to the vows, I care. Please don't ask me to do a marriage and then try and tell me what the vows are going to be.

Not everything goes because you and I both inherently know the vows are... That's the moment when the covenant is being made.

[13 : 38] I think we all know it. There's silence in the room. I do not want the photographer blocking your view. This is a solemn, profound moment. And the vows are saying nothing about feelings.

I feel this or that for you right now. It's all future. Promises. Despite how I'm going to feel. Despite what you do.

It's got nothing to do with how well you perform. It's exclusive. It's total. It's unconditional. Giving of oneself.

And it's this solemn in the sight of God. That's at the heart of... That's holding fast. That's what creates the covenant. With all that I am and all that I have, I honour you.

That's the essence of one flesh. And you can even do without... In a good marriage, you can do without the secondary things. And you can still have that essence of being one flesh.

[14 : 47] I heard of a story through the website Desiring God of a couple, Ian and Larissa. And when they were dating, he was about to propose. And he was in a car accident and he got brain damage.

Now, he eventually recovered enough to be verbal enough for them to enter marriage. Now, Larissa says, Ian can't do the secondary things.

Like working. Or making a meal for me. Everything primary, though, he can do. Which is leading me spiritually.

Ian always comes back to the foundational truth of who God is. And if you watch their story on the website, there's just this beautiful moment where all he can say is, talking about God, he's awesome.

That's what Ian can do. I think it's just this beautiful picture of this one flesh holding fast through such adversity.

[15 : 51] And yet, they've got this common bond of worship of God. That's at the heart. That's at the essence. God designed it.

They're no longer two but one flesh. One body. And God doesn't play pretend. He's not pretending.

There's something really profound. All the people in Emma's at home looking after some sick kids. But all of you, if you rejected me one day, all of you together, that would hurt.

Like my parents and my family are in the room. That would really hurt. Put that on one side. Emma has more power.

She does. You know it. She's got more power over me than all of you put together. There's something. God's designed it. There's such a fusion of lives.

[16 : 57] I don't know. It's hard to fully understand. And I think that's why some people find marriage so frightening.

Maybe you're taking it seriously, which is good. Can I just pause to apply this real, in one area?

If you're considering marriage and Christians are advising you, just please stop pursuing someone who doesn't believe in Jesus. We're not being tribal there.

We're not applying this arbitrary rule. Marriage goes deep to the core. Your spouse sees your heart.

And if your heart is love for God and they see that and reject that in you, you're asking for a life of pain. You're asking for deep, divided loyalty between Jesus and this person.

[18 : 08] Because God's design of this, it's not just a social agreement. It really is the fusion of two into one. It's a beautiful picture.

It's a beautiful thing. God has created and Jesus describes here. And it undercuts all the rabbinic debates in Jesus' day of the moral justifications for ending this social agreement.

A better way to phrase the question about divorce is, when can you amputate? Not when can you end an agreement.

When can you amputate? If you went to a doctor and while you're in the waiting room, you see one patient missing a hand and the next one missing an eye and another one with both arms removed, you might get a little nervous when your name is called to go see that doctor.

And yet our society and a lot of so-called friends are so quick to advise leaving. Amputation should be the last resort.

[19 : 30] He does leave a concession here. Sin can be pretty awful, but for survival it can be necessary.

The Pharisees try to spring their trap. Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away? Are you contradicting Moses, Jesus?

Now, they're no doubt talking about Deuteronomy 21, and if you go look that up, Moses is not commanding divorce.

It is a concession. He's saying if a married man marries wife A and divorces her, then marries wife B and divorces her, he can't go back to wife A.

That's his main point, and I'm not going to go into why that's the case. So he's not commanding divorce as if... He's not endorsing divorce as wholly, as if he's just conceding it.

[20 : 40] He's conceding that the human heart is so opposed to God's ways and the very nature of our design as men and women, he gives this concession.

The Pharisees seem to assume that the Mosaic law only functions to tell us what pleases God. The law does that, absolutely, but there's another function of the law.

Very recently, I started giving a children's New City catechism a go with Sam.

He enjoys swiping the app. We were getting a little nervous with some of the questions because question after question, when it was going through the Mosaic law, it started to feel a bit moralistic.

Do what God says and you'll live. But I should have read it ahead. But it was preparing for a climax in question 15.

[21 : 46] Since no one can keep the law, what is its purpose? Answer, that we may know the holy nature of God and the sinful nature of our hearts and thus our need of a saviour.

God and man are so far apart when it comes to relationships. He unites, we try and separate. Like John Hunter Hospital was screaming that we're under curse, the breakdown of human relationships is, should be screaming at us that sin, the effects of sin, we need healing.

We need healing. We need healing. If the essence of marriage really is becoming one flesh, in God's eyes, even if legally divorced, if not for the reasons scripture is given, in his eyes, there's a one flesh that's still intact.

It's committing adultery. He's joined together. I think it can help us understand the exception here where amputation is necessary.

Well, not necessary, but an option. Sexual immorality, it's a broad term. It covers adultery, but it covers all sexual immorality.

[23 : 29] There's something about it that violates and it breaks that one flesh. Now, it doesn't require getting divorced.

Many Christians have found amazing healing and forgiveness and the rebuilding of trust, even with such deep betrayal. So there's the one exception.

Look at 1 Corinthians 7 for another. Now, I just want to say at this point, Christians come to different convictions on this. There's so many passages you need to deal with and it's not my main point today to deal with it and the other part is I'm still working on it.

I want to come to a full understanding myself. Christians come to different places on this. This passage can raise so many questions.

I'm guessing it's provoking different responses. I think it can provoke searching for other justifications for separation.

[24 : 41] It's probably raising the question of the difference between separation and divorce. This passage raises the sense of shame that people feel in the church, either real or imagined, even if you weren't at fault.

Some will be feeling very convicted that you were the cause of a divorce breaking down. That it wasn't right in God's eyes to pursue that divorce.

What if divorce was forced upon you by the person? In 1 Corinthians 7, go read that. There's counsel there. Or come talk to me afterwards.

I think this passage can even provoke a response of pride if you're not. As if somehow, by your own effort, you're superior to other Christians.

I know I've just raised so many things, and I'm not going to deal with them properly. I'm so sorry. Come talk to me. But I want us to see the main thing I believe Matthew wants us to see.

[26 : 00] There is healing. There is healing. There is healing found in union with this king. The past two weeks in chapter 18, we've seen the human heart flirts with temptation.

We flirt with it. I remember someone describing repentance like we turn away from sin, but we keep sin's phone number in our pocket.

We flirt with sin when we should be gouging out our eye, Jesus says. We should be cutting off our hands. And then last week, the human heart is so unmerciful in not forgiving brothers and sisters when we've received so much more mercy from God.

And here, the human heart rebels against our very nature as men and women, this one flesh union we love, and yet we can't do it.

Matthew is painting a picture of the human heart. We are in the final moments of Jesus' life, and he's heading into Judea, and he's moving towards our sin.

[27 : 34] He's moving towards our hardness of heart. We are in a section of Matthew's Gospel in between the three predictions of his death. He knows what he's doing. He's heading into our hardness of heart to go to Jerusalem.

I'm about to be delivered into the hands of men and be killed and be raised on the third day. Mankind loves to think of only self.

Even the disciples react against this teaching. Our God thinks of himself as one flesh with you and me. He moves towards our sin to become one flesh with you and me.

He really brings healing. Divorce is not the unforgivable sin. Repent of anything you need to repent of.

Confess it to God. Mourn for it. But in union with this king, he loves to redeem even the hardest cases. If you look at the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 1, Rahab the prostitute.

[28 : 53] That's Sheba. The Christ came through them. He can redeem. He can cleanse. If you're feeling hopeless in your marriage, considering divorce, stop looking at your spouse and their disappointment.

Look at your king. Despite your hardness of heart, he keeps his promises unconditionally, even to death, to have you.

There's the love you're craving. And if you've been rejected, that is deep pain.

But here is healing too. Your king sees himself as one flesh with you. He wants you. Even this truth is the power against sexual morality.

I really want to spend longer on 1 Corinthians 6. The preach to yourself. I'm united to him.

[30 : 09] That's the power to break the fake fulfillment that sexual morality offers. There's healing in this king. Moving towards our hardness of heart.

In verses 10 to 12, we see the depths of this healing that he can bring to our souls, if you're willing to see it. The unconditional love of our king not only redeems human marriage.

It not only gives that inner peace that can actually maintain a human marriage, that one flesh relationship. He fulfills marriage.

Human marriage will one day be as obsolete as the ancient temple and the sacrificial system. If you've tasted, if you've tasted the love of God in Jesus, the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus, if you've tasted, dare I say, the surpassing intimacy, you're not bothered by the fact that in heaven we're told there's no marriage.

It should make us wonder and yearn. Like, how many stories grip our imagination about romance?

[31 : 36] We binge watch them, the songs, and yet it's going to be obsolete because something better is coming. It's already arrived in part.

His disciples react against this whole one flesh thing, saying, gee, I want to, better not to marry. Now, they're just thinking of themselves, but Jesus takes their phrase and goes, you're right, it is better.

It is better. In ancient times, eunuchs, high officials in the royal court, they were sexually altered so that they couldn't spoil the royal bloodline.

Now, I've used this before, but Chez gave me the country metaphor of a bull becoming a steer. The alternative to the one flesh marriage is living a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Marriage is God's good idea. It is good, but it was always pointing forward to the real thing, the better thing. Singleness, devoted body and soul to Jesus is better. Someone who's engaged, there's a glow about them, isn't there?

[32 : 55] There's just a warmth of excitement. I don't know what it is. I think it's because they know they're loved.

It's a public love. There's this future excitement. You can barely keep them in the present. Just, hello, I'm right in front of you.

They're just thinking of the wedding day and their future and all their preparations. It's not work. It's a joy to all their preparations. Now, you come across some weird Christians.

A lot of you are weird because you come across these weirdos who, they're not engaged, and yet they've got this, they've got that glow.

They've got that excitement. Their mind is in the future. You can barely keep them in the present. They see serving Jesus as a joy. Obviously, it's mixed with trials, but they're counting union with Jesus as better, as enough.

[34 : 11] Now, our secular age has no idea of the foretaste of heaven we've got. When we behold the glory of Christ by faith.

But please notice here, it's voluntary. Who have made themselves eunuchs. Now, like gouging out eyes, I'm hoping you take that as a metaphor.

But in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says each of us has a gift. Marriage is a good gift. Singleness is a good gift. Different gift. It's not wrong to pursue marriage with someone who belongs to Jesus.

But Jesus is inviting you, if you're single, to choose to see singleness as a gift, as better. Sam Albury.

He's a same-sex attracted pastor and author in the UK. I think I've talked about him before. He's counted the cost of following Jesus.

[35 : 24] He knows it's a life of celibacy. He's still, in his book, he talked about attending friends' marriages.

And they keep getting married and there's an ache there. There's a desire there. He kept praying for God to do something. He still longed for that romantic fulfilment. By the by, I know of some Christian couples who, one, is same-sex attracted and they sought lots of pastoral counsel, but they know marriage is fundamentally friendship.

I think there are situations where it is possible to have marriage in those cases. But Sam Albury, he prayed for God to do something.

But there was this passing comment in his book that really stuck out to me, that over time he realised he wasn't praying to God to fulfil that desire in him. He just realised, it's not like it was a conscious decision.

But over years he realised, I'm not praying for that as much anymore. If you ever thought of a situation where God is imposing celibacy, it's Sam Albury's kind of situation.

[36 : 41] Same-sex attracted. What else? No hope. But it was still voluntary. Over time he was choosing, without even realising it, he was choosing to count knowing Jesus and serving him as better.

That's enough. So can I just finish with saying, whether you've never been married, whether you're single again through divorce or widow, this bridegroom is shooing you, despite our hardness of heart, he is inviting you to come and find that he is better.

Come find out how deep that healing is that he brings, that you can even count him as better. Will you pray for me?

Let's pray. Father, I pray that you would work in each of our hearts.

You know where each of us are at. Some of us are really deeply hurting. Others are complacent. Others of us are proud. Lord, please speak to us where we're at and fill us with the beauty of your design, not only of human marriage, but that you always intended to unite yourself with us.

[38 : 23] Lord, I pray for those who are struggling with sexual immorality. Father, I pray that we would know the forgiveness and the transforming power of knowing that you accept us, even as we are.

And I pray that you would change us, knowing that you love us, even despite that. Lord, do all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.