

The Pattern of Marriage

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[0 : 00] The first reading is from Genesis chapter 2 starting at verse 18. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper.

Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon him. And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

[1 : 14] She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. The second reading can be found on page 993 and is Matthew chapter 19, starting at verse 3.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, 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. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

[2 : 27] 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.

Good morning, everyone. Lovely to see you, whether in person or on Zoom. Very well welcome to Grace Church. Do please keep, well, not keep, but turn back to Genesis chapter 2.

And then let me pray. Lovely, by the way, to have lots of people bringing physical Bibles. I think it really helps have a physical Bible to engage with God's words. So if you've forgotten today, do try and bring one next week.

Let me pray for us. Your testimonies are wonderful. Therefore, my soul keeps them. The unfolding of your words gives light.

It imparts understanding to the simple. Heavenly Father, we're conscious that we are spiritually simple. And we're conscious, too, that we live in a dark world.

[3 : 40] And we pray, therefore, that you would grant us light this morning as we look at your words and grant us wisdom. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. A couple of weeks ago, a Malaysian-based tech businessman bought the first ever tweet. Did you know that?

You can buy a tweet. And he paid £2.1 million for it. Twitter founder Jack Dorsey's first post simply read, Just setting up my Twitter.

That is a lot of money for six words. Sina Estavi now has a digital certificate that proves he is the rightful owner. And he was quoted as saying that in time, people will realise the true value of the tweet, just like people now appreciate the real value of the painting, the Mona Lisa.

Well, who knows? Time will tell. Well, today we're not looking at the first tweet, which became the basis for billions of others, but the first marriage.

[4 : 52] Last week, we saw that the purpose of marriage is not to serve ourselves. It's not to be inward-looking, but rather to be outward-looking, serving God in the work that he has given us to do and serving other people.

And then in Genesis 2, verse 23, we see the first ever wedding as the man bursts into song. This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. It really is a marriage made in heaven. But then look at verse 24.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. This is a hugely significant verse in the Bible, because it is the God-given template, the blueprint, if you like, for marriage, the original design.

And although next week we're going to be looking at the pain of marriage, because you and I don't live in the Garden of Eden, we live instead in the world that's turned its back on God. Nevertheless, the original blueprint hasn't changed, as the Lord Jesus himself makes clear.

[6 : 10] So just keep a finger in Genesis and turn, if you will, to that second reading that Catherine read for us in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19. Matthew 19, verse 3 onwards.

You'll see in verse 3, the Lord Jesus asked a question about divorce, and Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

And in answer, I want us to notice how the Lord Jesus goes back to the original blueprint design for marriage that we have in Genesis 2, verses 4 to 6.

He answered, 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 they shall become one flesh?

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. In other words, Jesus regards Genesis 2 as authoritative in the ethical debates of his day, in this case, concerning divorce and remarriage.

[7 : 31] Despite the fact that Jesus is speaking more than 2,000 years later, he doesn't say, well, you know, Genesis 2 was back then. It's out of date.

We need to redefine or change what God says about divorce and remarriage for the modern age. And of course, if this is how Jesus, who is God himself come to earth, regards Genesis 2, then it comes as no surprise that other New Testament writers do as well, and so should we, if we are those who are following Jesus for ourselves.

In the same way that in the United States, there is a constitution. It came into law in 1779. Appeals can be made to the constitution, despite the fact that it's over 240 years old, because it's the blueprints for how the country functions, and it can be appealed to.

And Genesis 2, 24 does exactly the same thing for marriage. And therefore, what we're going to be doing together in our time this morning is to look at the four elements of marriage, which we see in this one verse, and we're going to see how very beautiful God's original blueprint design is.

You'll see on the outline there are four things. Firstly, marriage is heterosexual. Look at the verse. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.

[9 : 12] Marriage is between a man and a woman, not a man and a man, neither a woman and a woman. Marriage can only ever be between two people of the opposite sex, because that is the way God created marriage.

Now, that follows from what we saw last week. Just flick back to chapter 2, verse 18. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone.

I'll make him a helper fit for him. And I wonder if you remember, we said, didn't we, that phrase, fit for, literally means a like opposite.

None of the animals are suitable as a helper because they are not like the man. They are not made in the image of God.

And another man isn't suitable because while he would be made in the image of God, nonetheless, he is not opposite. And therefore, he is not able to be complementary in the way in which a woman is.

[10 : 21] And a helper, in part because of the needs for multiplication for more people, which means that for marriage to be marriage, there needs to be a potential for children.

It means that same-sex marriage, which doesn't have this inbuilt complementarity, is not part of God's blueprint design for marriage.

And therefore, in God's sight, cannot be marriage, even if it is recognized by the state. It's why the rest of the Bible sees homosexual activity as sinful, just as it sees heterosexual sexual intimacy outside marriage as sinful.

Now, that was assumed in the Jewish society of Jesus' day, so there's little about the Gospels. But very strikingly, when the apostles take the message of Jesus to the Greek and Roman worlds of the first century, which was much more at ease with homosexuality, they do speak about it.

And like all sin, it is to be repented of and turned away from. I put 1 Corinthians 6, verses 9 to 11 on the outline.

[11 : 44] Let me just read them for us. The Apostle Paul says, Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you, that you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. Notice it shows the Bible isn't homophobic because homosexuality isn't singled out.

What Paul says applies equally to a whole host of other things, which are also sinful. And yet like those things, it is something that needs to be repented of.

And wonderfully, there were those in the church in Corinth who had done just that. They put their trust in the Lord Jesus, the one who died on the cross for sin, they've had their sin washed away, and now they belong to God as part of his people.

In summary, marriage is heterosexual. And yet, as I mentioned last week, the Church of England is currently undergoing a listening process called Living in Love and Faith to consider whether same-sex marriages should be recognized or blessed in some way, and that a vote will be taken next summer in General Synod.

[13 : 18] Now, of course, on the face of it, it sounds entirely reasonable. Society has changed. And so why shouldn't those who love each other and who have committed to each other be given the blessing of the Church?

Surely it's simply a matter of equality and justice. While those who want to uphold the Bible's teaching on marriage are frequently labeled as traditionalists.

And who on earth wants to be one of those? And yet, as we saw in Matthew 19, Jesus upholds Genesis chapter 2 as the blueprint for marriage.

So firstly, marriage is heterosexual. Now, can I just say before we move on, I'm very conscious there's much more we could say about homosexuality, but this is not a talk on same-sex relationships.

It's a talk on marriage. And so we haven't got time to do that, and I apologize for that. I have put a couple of very good book recommendations there on the outline if you'd like to think more.

[14 : 32] And of course, do come and chat to me afterwards or email me during the week if you would like to. Secondly, marriage is public.

Back to our verse. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother. Now, I think it's really easy to overlook this, and yet it's vitally important. Notice, will you, how the man leaves his own family, he joins the woman in marriage, and together they start a new family unit.

Marriage is far more, in other words, than simply living together. Indeed, of course, the very ambiguity of living together is a recipe for confusion, because no one's really certain about the state of relationship and where the two people stand.

And of course, this public nature of marriage is reflected beautifully in the way in which most church weddings take place. So, you know, think of a wedding that you've been to and the bride-to-be, she walks up the aisle on her father's arm.

He then gives her away. They are married. And then at the end of the service, she walks back down the aisle, no longer on her father's arm, but on her new husband's arm.

[15 : 56] It's a wonderful visual aid. Everyone can see what has happened. The married couple, they've transferred their primary allegiance from their birth family.

They've left that behind. And they've started together a new family unit. Now, sadly, that picture of leaving home is often then undone at the wedding reception in the speech given by the father of the bride.

And many weddings I've been to, it seems to go something like this. And be assured, I will not say this about either of my daughters, should they happen to get married.

Anyway, this is how it generally goes. Today is one of the happiest days of our lives. We're delighted to welcome, you know, John or Steve or whoever it is as members of our family.

And I have to say that at that point in a wedding reception, I'm wanting to jump up and interrupt and say, no, were you not observing what happened in church?

[17:00] A wedding is not about inviting or bringing a new son-in-law into your family. No, what's just happened in the wedding was that you said goodbye to your daughter as they, together with her husband, as she starts a new life together.

And the marriage service is deliberately a wonderful visual aid of that so everyone can see what has happened. In fact, it's been very striking, actually, when Rachel and I have done marriage preparation or when we chatted to couples experiencing difficulties in their marriage life, how often this seems to be the most common cause.

In other words, when one partner, although, of course, they've left home physically, they haven't really left home either relationally or emotionally.

And, you know, they're forever on the phone or messaging their parents, which, of course, is in turn very undermining of their other partner. Or it may be parents who are trying to control things behind the scenes.

Indeed, in some cultures, it's customary for in-laws to make the most enormous demands on their daughter-in-law and for sons who, although now married, their primary allegiance remains to their parents.

[18:33] I hope we can see that in such cases, God's marriage blueprints actually provides protection from the demands of the extended family. The challenge for the husband, of course, is to act on the blueprints.

And to establish clear boundaries. So, one, marriage is heterosexual. Two, marriage is public. Three, marriage is permanent. Back to our verse again. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. Marriage is designed to be permanent.

And again, the marriage service brilliantly reflects this. To have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death has due part, according to God's holy law.

And once again, it's clearly very different, isn't it, from living together. I gather the average length that a cohabiting couple live together is two years. And with it, all the uncertainty and heartache.

[19:40] Now, the permanence of marriage is reflected in Matthew chapter 19, which we looked at earlier, where the Lord Jesus asked about divorce. Interestingly, in the first century, there was a very similar culture of divorce to what we have today.

Not quite no-fault divorce, but certainly divorce for what really are very trivial reasons indeed. And yet Jesus stresses that the original blueprint remains in place.

What therefore God has joined together, let's not man separate. Now, in a world in which all a man had to do was to write a certificate of divorce for such trivial things as having burnt the meal or because he fancied someone else.

Can we see how Jesus is safeguarding the position of women and providing for them legal protection? And yet, in a sinful fallen world, Jesus also goes on in Matthew chapter 19 to allow for divorce in a limited number of circumstances where there is sexual immorality.

Now, I just want to pause around to that point and just consider the implications of this for women and the entirely right demands that they be protected from violence and abuse by men.

[21:10] Because it's often suggested that biblical Christianity is, in a sense, part of the problem on the grounds that the Bible supports the abusive patriarchy that allows men to dominate and to abuse women.

However, nothing could be further from the truth. A patriarchal concept of marriage is not the teaching of the Bible. Rather, it is the product of different cultures over time.

Instead, marriage in the Bible is meant to be a place of safety and protection in which women can flourish. Now, the permanence of marriage is part of that.

But also, the provision of divorce in certain situations is also part of that protection. Indeed, the right to divorce and remarry without any stigma afterwards are ways in which the power of quality in marriage is maintained.

A woman has every right to leave her husband where she's been abused or where he has cheated on her. And it's important that we support and honour those at Grace Church for whom, sadly, that has indeed been the case.

[22 : 31] Fourthly and finally, marriage is physical. In other words, it is sexual. Have a look at the verse again.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. Now, one of the paradoxes of our culture is that on the one hand, it's completely obsessed by sex.

But on the other hand, it hugely undervalues sex. It sees sex just like any other recreational physical activity. But sex is far more than that.

It binds two people together in a one flesh union at the very deepest possible level. Physically, emotionally, psychologically.

That is the way God has designed it. It's why the order in verse 24 is so important. First public marriage, which then leads to an exclusive sexual relationship.

[23 : 39] It's why in the very next verse, in verse 25, we read, and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed because marriage is the only safe space for nakedness and erotic love.

Now, of course, our culture has completely reversed the order of Genesis 2.24. So firstly, sex, and then a kind of gradual process of commitments, getting to know each other, and finally, getting married.

But I hope we can see from this blueprint that actually, if we're not ready to commit to someone in marriage, then we're not ready for sex with them either.

And therefore, it's not surprising that the Apostle Paul, again, in 1 Corinthians 6, in the context of fleeing sexual relationships outside of marriage, he says this, do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

For as it is written, and here's our quote from Genesis 2, the two will become one flesh. You see, I wonder what the Apostle Paul's diagnosis would be of our culture if we asked him.

[24 : 54] I imagine it might be something along the lines of that we don't value sex enough. We see it as a kind of cheap, disposable item, rather than the valuable one flesh physical union that it really is.

Some of us, I guess, will know Christians who are unmarried and want to sleep together. Others will be faced with that temptation ourselves.

At which point we need to ask, do you really love each other enough for sex? If you do, then will you show that love by firstly making the public commitments of marriage?

And if you're not ready to do that, then you are not ready for sex either, however much you may feel that you love each other.

Marriage is by design God's provision, a safe place for sex. Now, of course, that in turn explains, I think, the pain of separation.

[26 : 08] The 1990s TV programme Sex and the City is about to have a rerun later on this year. The Telegraph recently carried an article by Zoe Strimple reflecting movingly and honestly on her own experience of living the kind of lifestyle that was depicted in the original series.

And she wrote this. The right to casual sex for women was a no-brainer, just like our right to wear whatever we want to without being assaulted.

But the reality does not always meet expectations. I adopted a more is more approach to men. The trouble is, I wasn't cut out for it. I had feelings.

I was incapable of being totally fine with being cut dead after sex, whether I liked the man or not.

She finishes, it's only recently that I've come to realise how very unhealthy it was.

Marriage is physical. It is the only safe space for sexual intimacy. And therefore, while the application of this point for some of us is going to be stop or wait, for others the application is going to be go.

[27 : 36] So in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 the Apostle Paul says to those who are married that they shouldn't deprive each other. And yet all the evidence suggests that during lockdown and COVID of the last year that is precisely what has happened.

Perhaps it's the exhaustion of having children around the whole time or the kind of always on nature of working at home and finding it very difficult to establish boundaries between work life and private

life.

Sex nurtures marriage. The danger otherwise is that one or both partner will end up finding what they need elsewhere.

either in pornography or masturbation or in someone else a relationship with someone else.

Marriage is heterosexual it is public it is permanent it is physical.

But and it's a big but it is also designed to to disappoint. Because Genesis chapter 2 is also quoted in Ephesians chapter 5 as we saw in our growth groups just before Easter where we see that marriage itself is based on another blueprint the relationship between Christ and his church.

[29 : 04] It means that human marriage between a wife between a husband and a wife it should leave us longing for more. A longing that points to the ultimate reality which the best of human marriages is simply a scale model.

Jesus the perfect bridegroom who loves his church and gave his life for her. Which means as well there is also hope.

each one of us have failed in the area of relationships. For some it might be the faded dreams of a wedding photo.

For others a series of relationships full of expectation which have failed. For others perhaps we're living with the baggage of the past. For others it might just be actually the disappointment of marriage or others who aren't married who long to be so.

And we'll be thinking more next week about the pain of marriage. Let me lead us in prayer. Let's pray together. A few moments for reflection first.

[30 : 25] A few moments for reflection first. Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

Heavenly Father thank you that in a confused world that your blueprint for marriage stands firm and we're conscious too that our own hearts and minds are so often confused as well.

And therefore we thank you for your goodness and kindness. We thank you that this is simply a small scale model of the great love the Lord Jesus has shown for the church.

Thank you that there is full forgiveness in him. And we pray Heavenly Father as a local church and as individuals please would you help us to uphold your good wise blueprint for marriage.

And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.