

Marriage

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[0:00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So I once heard a story about the famous American writer Mark Twain.

! If you've ever read anything by him, you probably know this is going to be a good one. Apparently, once he was in a conversation with a member of the Mormon family, which, once upon a time, used to permit its male members to have multiple wives.

Now, in this conversation, Twain said that the New Testament expressly forbids men from having more than one wife. When he was asked to explain, he quoted directly, A man cannot serve two masters.

Let that sink in for a second. Now, on a more serious note, marriage is an issue of absolutely crucial importance in the church.

And that's especially so now, as the culture challenges the Bible's teaching on marriage. It's one of the most challenged aspects of our faith in the current culture.

[1:13] So it's important. Now, recently, we've seen some developments on that front that the church seriously has to address. Just last year, the Supreme Court ruled that same-sex marriage has to be the law of the land.

Just last week, Anglican leaders from around the globe, including both of our archbishops, met to discuss, among other things, the Episcopal Church's decision to go through with performing same-sex marriages.

What we're starting to see in developments like this is that the culture around us is incredibly at odds with the biblical definition and understanding of marriage.

Now, not only that, but even parts of the church have fallen into falsehood after having fallen under the sway of false teachers on these kinds of questions. Now, more than ever, the Bible's teaching on marriage is under fire.

And that's why, even if our position is unpopular, it makes people think that we're quaint or backwards or weird, we need to know what we believe about marriage, why we believe it, and why it matters.

[2:25] Now, these issues have been on my mind a lot lately, even more so after the Anglican leaders met to discuss these issues just last week.

And then, of course, we have our Gospel reading appointed for this morning, where Jesus performs his first public miracle, changing water into wine at a wedding. Now, I really don't think that it was a coincidence or an accident that Jesus ended up performing his first miracle at a wedding.

It would seem, actually, that he was reaffirming and performing that miracle God's blessing of marriage, God's design for marriage, God's plan for marriage.

But to understand God's blessing of marriage, God's design for marriage, and God's plan for marriage fully, we have to start even further back in the beginning.

Now, if you'd like, look with me for a few minutes at Genesis chapter 2. Genesis chapter 2. Now, in Genesis 2, what we see is God creating man and woman for mutual companionship and help.

[3:52] Starting at verse 20, it says, The man gave names to all the cattle and to all the birds of the air, to every beast of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper fit for him.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib which 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. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Now, here we see God's original design for what marriage is. Now, keep in mind, what we see here is that marriage is rooted in the very creation of mankind as man and woman.

And all of this, of course, is before mankind fell into sin. So we would have to call this God's original blueprint for marriage. What does that blueprint look like?

[5:04] Well, it looks like one man, one woman, in a permanent union. Permanent because, as the text tells us, a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.

One man and one woman for life. That is the blueprint. And we don't see that blueprint in the Old Testament before humanity falls into sin.

We see it reaffirmed and expanded on in the New Testament. Now, some will try to claim that Jesus in the Gospels never actually speaks on the subject of marriage, at least not as it pertains to the areas of controversy and the areas that are under fire.

But that's really just dodging the point. Jesus actually reaffirms exactly what we see in Genesis 2. Marriage is a lifelong union between a man and a woman.

If you can, look with me at Mark 10. Now, in Mark 10, Jesus is responding to the Pharisees who had asked him if divorce is permissible.

[6:15] Now, in response, in order to explain marriage, he goes back to Genesis 2, which we just looked at, to reaffirm God's plan for marriage. Jesus says, But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and cling 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 put asunder. Again, from the beginning of creation, Jesus says, God made them male and female.

Again, Jesus says, For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. And in our gospel reading for this morning, the miracle at the wedding, we've already seen Jesus blessing this definition of what marriage is by performing a miracle there.

In marriage, a man and a woman become one flesh. That is the definition of marriage that Jesus affirms, and not any other.

[7:29] Now there is something that we need to address and to think about. In Mark 10, Jesus brought all of this up because he was asked about divorce and was speaking on that subject.

Now sometimes people will claim that the church is being hypocritical for dismissing same-sex marriage while being tolerant of divorce. I've heard that charge on a number of occasions. That's something we have to think about.

Because there is a real difference. The New Testament does allow for divorce under certain circumstances. Jesus talks about some of those exceptions in Matthew 19, for example.

Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians 7. Divorce, according to the scriptures, is sometimes permitted, but it's always tragic, and it's not the norm. A lifelong union is the norm.

But that said, the New Testament never even allows for the possibility of marriage as something other than the union between a man and a woman. As Jesus said in Mark 10, and I quote it again, from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

[8:43] For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. marriage. Again, marriage between a man and a woman is rooted in creation itself, and it's reaffirmed by Jesus.

So we have to ask, how does that work out in the lives of believers, and what does it all mean?

Well, Paul actually takes up those very questions in Ephesians 5. And if you'd like to look there with me, go ahead.

In Ephesians 5, Paul presents an absolutely beautiful picture here of what marriage really represents. It represents, it is symbolic of nothing short of the amazing loving union between Christ and his bride, the church.

Look at the passage starting at verse 22. In Ephesians 5, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

Now, what we see here is that in marriage, the wife, the woman, the bride represents the church.

[10:06] The wife chooses to honor and to submit to her husband in love, just as the church chooses to honor and submit to the Lord Jesus in love. And what about the man, the groom, the

husband?

Well, look again, starting with verse 25. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish, in the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies.

He who loves his wife loves himself. Now, in marriage, the husband then is a representation, a symbol of Christ.

The husband is supposed to love his wife just as Christ loved the church, giving even his own life for her. And why is that? So that the bride may be holy and washed in the word of God.

The husband is to love his wife in all things, even to the point of self-sacrifice, especially so that his wife may grow in holiness. Because the two have become one, and the husband who loves his wife loves himself.

[11:32] Now, marriage, when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage, it's in this way such a beautiful picture of that union between Christ and the church.

Paul goes on, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. And this is starting to sound a little familiar. It pops up again and again. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself. Let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Now, brothers and sisters, think for a second about what this really means. Marriage between a man and a woman isn't just God's original blueprint for creation.

Now, if it were only that, that would be enough. But, it's even more than that. It is a sign of the very message of the gospel.

[12:37] Jesus, the groom, loved his bride, the church, and gave himself for her, even gave his own body unto death, and has washed her in the word, washed her in his blood, so that he may present her holy and unblemished, perfect, and the bride, the church, voluntarily submits to the authority of Jesus, the groom, and because of what he has done, the bride will indeed be made holy, washed of every stain of sin.

In this way, God has designed marriage to be a sign of the gospel. gospel. And isn't that amazing? Now, a few months ago, I heard our own Bishop Dave Benna say that a right view of marriage is a gospel issue. It's a non-negotiable. Well, why is that?

Well, because when we distort marriage, we distort the way that marriage is supposed to bear witness to the gospel. we distort the message of the gospel.

Now, think about it for a second, what that symbolism would look like. The symbolism of marriage depends on the difference between men and women, the difference between the husband and the wife.

[14:04] Two husbands or two men, if they were joined in marriage, if it were possible, would signify two lords, not one lord, with no bride, no church. That's not all.

Without a bride, the husband, the Lord Jesus would not be a savior. Think also about what two wives or two women joined together would signify.

Two churches and no savior. Not one church united with one savior. Two churches. Churches without a savior.

Does that reflect the gospel message? No. So just as we see marriage as part of God's design when he created us, male and female in the beginning, so we also see at the end of time marriage again when Jesus comes again to claim his bride, the church, forever.

Revelation chapter 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more.

[15:22] And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.

He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

How is that for a wedding celebration? In the beginning of creation, God created man and woman and in doing so created marriage.

marriage. In the end, there will be an eternal marriage, an eternal union between Christ and his church and it will be glorious.

That glorious reality, what does it mean here and now in our lives? Now, it doesn't need to be pointed out that some believers are married and that some believers are unmarried.

[16:37] It should always be pointed out, though, that neither marriage nor singleness are superior. The church needs the witness of both. Now, for those of us who are married, we live the reality of the message of the gospel in our day-to-day relationship with our spouses where we bear witness to the incredible love and respect that are at the heart of the union between Christ and his church.

most especially, Christian spouses love one another by encouraging each other to grow in Christ, to grow in holiness, to grow nearer to Jesus together.

And if it's God's will for a couple to have children, it's also lived out by working together to bring up the children in the knowledge and nurture of the Lord. Now, I would mention here, as we're talking about marriage in a lofty sort of way, and it should be talked about that way because it's a holy thing, but I'd mention here that a wise mentor of mine once told me that having a strong marriage is one of the most evangelical things that we can do.

And if marriage really does bear witness to the message of the gospel, which it does, then he was right. And that is a noble, beautiful calling.

But we have to admit that sometimes that's messy. This particular mentor of mine, actually, hadn't always had a perfect marriage by any means. He and his wife were separated from one another for a time.

[18:18] But they were eventually reconciled and they have a strong marriage today. Sometimes marriage will be messy for all of us who are married. But as spouses grow together in grace, they will over time reflect the reality of the gospel more and more.

Now, I should say that believers who aren't married have an incredible and noble calling too.

Believers who aren't married have the calling to demonstrate to the rest of the church that the things of this world are passing away.

That Jesus is really and truly all-sufficient. That Jesus is really all that we need. And that nothing compares to eternal union with Jesus, which is what we're all to seek first.

To my brothers and sisters who aren't married, I say thank you for your witness to that reality. But, if we are believers and part of the body of Christ, then in the deepest and most eternal sense, we're all married.

We're all part of the bride of Christ. And we all have a responsibility in a culture that doesn't understand God's design for marriage, doesn't understand the gospel.

[19:50] We all have a responsibility. God has given us marriage as a beautiful sign of the gospel message, and that sign and that message can be distorted.

We need to know what we believe, why we believe it, and why it matters if we're going to be able to reach out to our culture with a good defense and to effectively bear witness to the hope that's within us.

From the beginning, brothers and sisters, God gave us the union of a man and a woman with the design that it would be ultimately a marvelous sign of that great eternal union between Christ and his church.

In other words, a marvelous sign of the gospel itself. And that's why it matters so much. Yes, may I make a comment?

I think it's on the mind of many of us when we keep forgetting. Today is Right to Life Sunday, and that's where children fit into it, that murdering the infants also interferes with marriage.

[21:03] Yes. Indeed. Thank you, Nanette. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.