

1 Corinthians 7:25-40 PM

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Hello everyone, it's really lovely to see you all. If you don't know me, my name is Aaron, one of the ministers on staff here. It's great to see you. Come and say hi afterwards.

If you are new, I just want to give you a heads up. So we are jumping, so we sort of tend to preach your whole books of the Bible, and we are jumping back into a sermon series that we started last year looking at 1 Corinthians.

1 Corinthians. In this book, 1 Corinthians, Paul sort of talks about topics. So he sort of gives a few chapters to a particular topic. And where we are right now is we're at the tail end of the topic of sex and relationships.

And Paul, what he's trying to do is he's trying to help us think well about this stuff. And you heard the reading, it's a cracker. I know, it's very interesting. So, in this particular section of this section on sex and relationships, he wants us to think about marriage and singleness.

And it's a lovely section of Scripture. He is speaking about stuff. It's quite, I know these topics are quite emotionally charged things, emotionally loaded.

[1:10] But did you notice his tone is, it's really gentle. Like, right from the start, in verse 25, he says, I've got no command from the Lord for you. I just want to, I just want to, like, give you some wisdom.

I just want to give you some advice. And it feels like a bit of an odd way to start this little section, doesn't it? But the church in Corinth that he's writing this letter to had a tendency to over-spiritualize things.

Especially relationship stuff. So, in the first half of chapter 7, the very first verse, there's this really bizarre, he's talking of this bizarre idea floating around in this church.

Where married couples are thinking they shouldn't have sex for, I don't know why, that they thought it wasn't spiritual or something like that. And then there are other people thinking that singleness was the only way to be truly connected to God.

And I think at the start here, Paul is trying to, he's trying to dial down all that nonsense a little bit.

And just saying, hey, can I just talk to you really sensibly about these issues?

[2:16] So, yes, there's this lovely tenderness, tenderness about it. There's no bashing. He's not saying, this is right and this is wrong. You'll notice in the reading, it's like at one point he goes, it's a good idea to do that.

And you know what? It's a pretty good idea to do that as well. That's also a great idea. And then verse 32, he goes, I just don't want you to be anxious. You know, I don't want you to be sort of anxious and weighed down by life.

And right at the end, he's talking to the widows and he says, look, I want you to be, I want you to be happy. Now, before jumping into the kind of the nuts and bolts of the passage, I just want to make a few opening remarks about, in general, about this idea of marriage and singleness.

I do want to acknowledge that I am a married man and I will be talking about singleness and the benefits of it here. So, please forgive me if I say anything thoughtless when I talk about that.

Paul, however, was a single man when he wrote these words. So, I'm kind of leaning on that. He was likely a widow because he was a Pharisee before he became a Christian and Pharisees were married.

[3:32] But at this point in life, he's a single man. So, he's either widowed or maybe he's divorced. We don't know, actually. Sorry if I threw that kind of crazy idea out there. But we just don't know. I mention that because, just to clarify again, he is speaking as someone who lives in that single space.

So, I will do my best just to say what he says. Still with opening remarks here. I also want to acknowledge that some of what he says here is going to sound strange to us. Perhaps in particular when he gives a big nudge to the single life. And he's pretty blatant about it. Like, right at the end of the chapter, he says to widows, so a husband and wife has died. And he says, if you don't marry, you'll probably be happier, actually. Like, he's giving it a really good nudge. And I think we've read it, and other places he talks about that. It sits funny with us. It sits like, what? But what about focus on the family? What about all these radio programs and all these books and all this kind of stuff?

[4 : 42] I think we have idealized marriage in our culture. And I think in sort of Christian circles, we probably haven't been helpful in idealizing marriage.

In church land, we should never present marriage as the only way to live a sort of a content life. The idea that you are only finally complete when you are married is not a biblical idea.

And if I have ever talked like that or hinted in that direction, forgive me. That was my bad. I did a wrong thing if I've ever done that.

If we have ever presented single life as kind of like you're in the waiting room of life, waiting for things to get going, that's not right.

That is not a Bible idea. I asked a single friend of mine this week, what is the thing that married people say to you that annoys you the most? And they said, when people say they're praying for me to get married.

[5 : 57] This person said, I'm quite happy. Like I have no plans to get married. Like I'm good. Like I'm good. But because we have this kind of idealized view of marriage, Paul asking people to consider a single life, I think sounds quite audacious, doesn't it?

Well, it's not audacious when you consider the worldview that Paul kind of sneaks in there as well. He kind of slides these really big theological ideas in this passage as he's talking about marriage and singleness.

And a couple of the really big ideas, verse 29, Paul reminds us, again, this is all introductory stuff. Paul reminds us that life is short. He says life's short. It's a good thing to remember. Verse 31, he says, the world is passing away.

Life is short and it's temporary. And on the other side of that, there is new creation and there will be eternity. And Jesus tells us in the Gospels there will be no marriage.

Now, if that is not true, then now is all you've got. This is it. It's all you've got is now. So take and get as much as you can in life.

[7 : 12] Have sex with as many people as possible as often as you want. Why not? Because that's all there is. But if this life is not all there is, this is what Paul is trying to get us to.

This life is not all there is. And he wants us to bring an eternal perspective to our lives. And if you have that, an eternal perspective, that all these things we're jonesing for right now are temporary and life is actually going to be short.

If you believe that, then you can actually live in the context of a kind of a tricky marriage. Or you can be celibate and single and not think you're being totally ripped off by life.

Because this is not all there is. Last opening remark, very quickly, just a reminder, this is not all there is to say about marriage and singleness. The Bible is full of stuff on this. This is just, he's making a particular point tonight, which we'll get to.

Okay, that's enough. We're going to jump into the passage now. We're going to look at the nuts and bolts of this. And it would be pretty quick, to be honest. Nuts and bolts, verses 27 and 28.

[8 : 25] What does Paul say? He says, if you're married, stay married. If you're single, you don't need to get married. Which is lovely, I think. And then he says something I'll come back to.

He says, but you should know, if you do marry, there's going to be drama. And I want to spare you that drama.

You could actually spare some drama in your life if you don't. So I think that's quite interesting, isn't it? Then in verse 32, he talks about this. Look at it. He says, I want you to be free from anxieties.

And these are good anxieties. These are like good stresses in your life.

Verse 33 and 34, he talks about how married people will have to worry about each other. But the unmarried will be worried about the things of the Lord.

Okay, so what does all that mean? I've just thrown a whole lot of controversial stuff out there. What does all that mean? Simply, he's saying, if you're married, you are rightfully committed to the

flourishing of that other person.

[9 : 26] And that's good, and that's right. And that takes time, and it takes resources, and there'll be setbacks, and it'll be hard. For example, when you get married, your personal time gets cut in half straight away.

Every kid you have after that divides that personal time you have in half again. So I had this much, and I have this much. Now, three kids later, so I have about this much, which equals about 45 minutes to myself a day, desperately trying to stay awake at 9.30 at night, lying on the couch, just trying to get through one episode of whatever I'm watching at the time.

You're also one broken person married to another broken person. You have twice as many strange relatives. And what Paul is trying to get at is, your life will be rightfully taken up, rightfully taken up, attending to lots of things when you're married.

I'm not trying to make it sound terrible, because I know singleness can be very, very hard. I was always one of the last of my friend groups to get married back in the old country, and I'd go to their weddings, and usually they'd get me to emcee stuff and be involved with stuff, and I always found it a bit depressing, to be honest.

Now, Paul here does not tackle so much the difficulty of singleness, but we know in other places that he really struggled with depression. We know in other places he talks about people really letting him down and not having that kind of one-to-one support that others have.

[11 : 06] Here he's trying to make a particular point in this passage, though, and it's this. It's very simple. It's this. He says, A single person has more freedom and flexibility in their life.

And this is key, what I'm about to say here. He's not saying, live the single life, it's great because you have more time on your hands. No. He's saying, you have more flexibility and freedom for Jesus. So it's not, isn't it great you have less responsibility?

That's not the point. The point is, you have less responsibility to another person you've made a covenant relationship with, so you're freer to be more responsible to give your time and resources to Jesus.

He explains it in verse 35. He says, And I say this for your own benefit. I don't want to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. So the lay any restraint bit, that's like a word picture in the old language. It's like lassoing an animal, like tying a rope around an animal and leading it somewhere.

[12 : 11] He's saying, I don't want to do that to you. I'm not trying to force you, Paul. I'm not trying to force you to get married. I'm not trying to force you to be single. His great longing is that single people and married people, we both serve Jesus.

We are both daily dealing with Jesus. Everyday dealing with Jesus. But he makes the very practical point and loving point. He just says, But just folks, just remember, singleness does have some advantages.

And he's at pains to make it very practical. Isn't he? The Corinthians, as I said earlier, had weird ideas around singleness that had led them to over-spiritualize it.

And Paul says here, singleness does not mean you are holier, but it does have some practical advantages in terms of the time and resources you can commit to Jesus. And again, I just want to make this point.

He's not being all fundy about this. He just says, in verse 36, he does say, Look, if you want to get married, you want to have sex, fantastic. Go, have at it. Fantastic.

[13 : 16] The main thing is, we're just all serving Jesus in whatever state we find ourselves in in life. Daily dealing with Jesus. But also, if you're single, there's a bit of an advantage there in terms of your resources and your time.

Finally, at the end, he speaks to widows in verse 39 and 40. And he says, Look, you're free to marry. Have at it. But consider singleness. But if you do get married, he says, Do it only in the Lord, which means marry another Christian.

Because again, the priority is our devotion to Jesus. So, you know, marry somebody that's going to be devoted to Jesus and can help you in that. Okay, folks, I know this is short, but this is the guts of it.

This is the guts of what Paul is saying. If you're, so if you are, if you are married, or wanting to be married, you need to be devoted to your family and the Lord, to both of those things.

And, you know, that can be, that can be tricky. And sometimes we go in an extreme, the extremes of that, and we kind of lose it on the extremes. Like, I was reading this week about missionaries who basically abandoned their families to serve overseas.

[14 : 35] I was reading about, actually, particularly in Sweden, during the heyday of their missionary fervor, there were these orphanages for the children of missionary parents. The missionary parents hadn't died, but they weren't caring for their kids.

They weren't parenting them. So they had to establish these orphanages for these children. This is not godly behavior. These missionaries probably should have stayed single.

So, if you're single, Paul says, your life has a bit more agility about it. But it's not time. It's not just your time. It's not just your time.

It is your time. But it's not just your time. It's the Lord's as well. Remember, verse 20 of this passage, it says, you are not your own.

For you are brought at a price. So glorify God in your body. Okay, I'm finishing up here. Paul has been talking about choosing the single life.

[15 : 38] And I acknowledge for lots of people, it's just not a choice that you've made. It's just what is. And that's hard. But the principles of what the Bible says here are the same.

And Paul assumes the following. First, he assumes that Jesus, is enough for you in whatever situation you're in. Even in a tricky marriage or unchosen situations.

Secondly, all the things that we think are so important right now are fleeting. They're temporary. our world will pass away one day and we will be with Jesus for eternity in a new creation.

And if you can hold on to those ideas, hold on to those truths, I think what it does is it can free our hearts to serve the Father. For some of us, we'll have a bit more space in our life to do that.

but for all of us, we are all called to deal daily with Jesus. All of us.

[16 : 55] No matter the circumstance. Amen. Amen. Thank you.