

Prime Rib

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Date: 15 October 2006

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[0 : 0 0] Let's bow our heads and pray. We ask again this morning, our Heavenly Father, that your Word would be our rule and guide, that your Spirit himself would be our teacher, and that your glory would be our supreme concern.

For we ask in the name of your Son, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please sit down. If you can find a Bible in front of you, you might want to open it to Genesis chapter 2 on page 2.

We come today to the creation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to the creation of human sexuality and marriage, and some of this will be almost impossible to hear, I think.

I don't need to tell you that we are living through a profound cultural shift in the way people understand what marriage is, how to enter marriage, whether it's even relevant.

You know that cohabitation has replaced engagement. We have children later, fewer if at all. And we have moved from one extreme of seeing that sex can never be right to the other extreme of seeing that sex can never be wrong.

[1 : 2 5] And I need to say, speaking on this issue from God's Word feels a little bit like being a five-headed green monster from Mars speaking alien. That's a bit of a joke, so I just thank you.

Not so much because the Word of God has shifted, but because our culture has shifted. And these are deep and foundational truths, and I think there's a tremendous confusion in our culture, almost chaos that has led to a kind of a cruelty in this area.

And as Christians, we speak now from the margins to a culture that has a massive prejudice against the Word of God. We believe what we want because we want to do what we want.

And of course, much of the church just trots along behind a few years later. As we come to Genesis 2, there's a lovely restraint and directness about this.

There's nothing prudish or repressed about the Bible's view of sex. And in Genesis 2, as we'll see, God's Word refuses to exalt sex, to be an absolute, or to trivialise it just as one of the other appetites.

[2 : 4 0] As we enter chapter 2 from chapter 1, the camera angle shifts, you remember, and we go back before the creation of Adam and Eve, and everything slows down.

And God now reveals boundaries and blessing for human sexuality. Incidentally, I need to say that the rest of the Bible treats Adam and Eve as historical figures, and also as figures who represent all of us.

And if you know Genesis 2, you'll know from verses 4 to 14 that the scene is absolutely gorgeous and delicious. Every plant is not just good for food, but is delightful to look at.

And in the centre of the garden is the tree of life, and there are rivers, and there is gold, and there is wealth. And then in verse 15 we read this, The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it, literally to serve it and guard it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat it you shall die. We'll come back to that in two weeks' time.

[3 : 54] My point here is that God gives to Adam the task of serving and guarding the creation, and it's in this context that God gives the gift of sexuality and marriage.

It's within the created goodness and delight. There's never any hint like there might be if you watch certain advertisements that the original sin is sex.

Sex is part of what is good, good, and very good. Are you with me so far? Just nod. Thank you very much. Okay.

Verse 18. I think that good, that refrain of good, is what makes 18 so jarring. Seven times we've heard God look at his world and say it's good, good, very good.

And now for the first time he says it's not good. And the reason is because solitude, isolation, and loneliness is a contradiction of why God has created us as human beings.

[5 : 11] We're made by God for friendship and for fellowship with others. And part of the reason for that is that God who made the world is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three in one, in eternal friendship and communion.

That's why to be loved and to love is at the heart of what it means to be the image of God and at the heart of our lives. And there's nothing in life, I think, that is so painful as unchosen loneliness and solitude and isolation.

Yes, we need time on our own, but when it's forced upon us, that's very difficult. So in verses 19 and 20, God forms the animals and he brings them to Adam.

And I think the reason God does that is to increase Adam's sense of loneliness so that he's not going to take this gift of woman lightly or for granted. And Adam names them, but we read at the end of verse 20, none of them is a helper fit for him.

Very important words. And I should point out, helper is most often used in the Old Testament to refer to God. Helper does not imply that the woman is a second grade, inferior, insignificant add-on whose only purpose is there for man's pleasure.

[6 : 33] There's no implication of superiority or inferiority. She is a helper in the task that God has given. Fit, the word fit means suitable, opposite, adequate, corresponding to man.

So in verse 21, we read these words. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and while he slept, took one of his ribs, closed up its place with flesh, this lovely bone and flesh, and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man and the man said, this at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

This shall be called woman because this was taken out of man. This shall be called Isha. She was taken out of Ish.

Now, these verses are not an anatomy lesson. I don't remember, as a child, I remember counting my ribs and wondering if my sisters had more ribs or less ribs.

Very stupid. The picture is one of a kind of death. Out of a kind of a death, God creates a helper who is Adam's equal.

[7 : 57] She is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. She's not a different species from him. She is just as much the image of God as him. Humanity has now been divided in two.

Both are the image of God. And you may remember the old answer to the question of why God chose the rib. From 1700, God took the rib because he was not made out of the head to top Adam, not made out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but made out of the side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be beloved.

That's kind of nice, isn't it? Not sure you can get that from the text, but it's very nice. So Adam celebrates with a kind of a dance and he rejoices in the fact that she is his equal, bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh, and she's different.

Ish-ah out of Ish. The obvious question is, why does God create a different sex? If loneliness is the only reason for woman, there's no reason why God should have created her.

There's no reason why God couldn't have created another bloke. Then Adam wouldn't have been alone. He could have gone hunting and fishing. I think the question is, why does God create woman and not another person like Adam?

[9 : 25] Why does he introduce this boundary, this division within humanity? And I want us to see that the text emphasises both the equality of woman and the difference.

She is fully equal. It's not two humanities, one humanity, both as one in the image of God. They share the same status before God.

That's why Adam says, this, this, this. He is breathless before the sight of Eve. He says, she has a nature and an essence that is just mine.

And the text says that she is different. She is woman. She is not a neutral vessel with a couple of feminine attachments added on.

She is woman and that pervades who she is and everything she does. And the reason is given us in verse 24, I think, if we read these words, very familiar, therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh.

[10 : 37] God's purpose for humanity is a particular unity, the unity of one flesh. And when man and woman unite in a sexual relationship, they genuinely unite so that two become one.

So, but why, again, why woman? And I think the key to this is that God is creating a helper fit, a helper suitable for Adam.

He doesn't create a rival to challenge Adam. He doesn't create someone and give them a completely different task, but he creates one to help with the task that God gave to Adam.

See, God chose to create us male and female because of the big purpose that he has in creation. Let me say it a different way. The creation of woman is about much more than a cure for Adam's loneliness.

loneliness. The Bible answer for loneliness is friendship and fellowship. It's not marriage. God places man in the garden for a much bigger purpose, to serve and to rule, to guard and to care for, to be his image, to reflect God to the world.

[12 : 03] And man needs a helper for that, not just another pair of hands, he needs a helper who in God's mind is his sexual opposite. So you see, Genesis 2 is saying that marriage is not the pinnacle of existence.

It's just one arena for serving God and the purpose of marriage is that it is a place for caring for his world and living for his glory and bringing blessing to other people.

This has been a great revelation to me in the last couple of years as I've read on marriage. You know that traditionally there are three purposes to marriage, children, companionship and the public good, all of which are very vital and very wonderful and important, but they're all secondary.

The purpose of marriage is given to serve God. Marriage is not for our selfish purposes. is it a gift, it is a gift from God to bring blessing to others and glory to him.

And it's clear in verse 24 that this gift is intended for more people than Adam and Eve. Ever notice that at the beginning it says, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother, which would have been very difficult for Adam, wouldn't it?

[13 : 23] which means that God is not, God is showing that his intention is for more than just this couple. God is not satisfied with just creating woman and presenting her to man.

He now creates, and I don't like this word but I can't find a better one. He creates an institution, a boundary within which they are to express their sexual lives, form their common life in a lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual union, which is a mouthful.

So man must leave his father and mother because the sexual activity, which is the unification, uniting force, creates a new family and even the close relationship between parent and child is not as close as husband and wife.

And we read through the rest of the Old Testament and God says, the reason I've given this arrangement is that children may be raised in the fear and nurture of the Lord. It's an institution to protect our children and creates a place for the unity of man and wife.

And sexual activity between husband and wife bond the couple together. And in the same way, as the couple builds their relationship together, the more that they build their relationship together, it increases their sexual satisfaction over time.

[14 : 53] And the chapter finishes verse 25, chapter 25, and the man and the wife, his wife, were both naked and not ashamed, which I take it as a way of finishing like chapter 1 by saying it's just very, very good.

Now, this has huge implications for us and I want to look with you this morning. We need to work much harder in the second half of the sermon than we did in the first.

I want to look with you at the six main ways that the New Testament applies this to us today. And I warn you, some of them are slightly controversial.

That was an understatement. six applications. Okay, the first one is this. Jesus sees this passage as the Magna Carta for marriage.

Let's flip, we're going to flip all over the place. Let's flip to Matthew chapter 19 for a moment, shall we? Matthew 19 on page 19 in the back in the New Testament.

[16 : 04] Speaking about, arguing about divorce as the Pharisees were in verse 4 we read, he answered, have you not read, this is Matthew 19, 4, that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, be joined to his wife and the two shall become one.

You know what Jesus says now, so they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder. You see what's happening?

Jesus looks at Genesis 2 and he says it's not just narrative. The Genesis 2 expresses God's permanent will for marriage and that the sexual differentiation that God created which permeates all of us leads to the true sexual union only in marriage.

Marriage is the thing God has created, if you like, for the purpose of sexual union and all sexual expression outside of that is both disobedient and damaging.

Here is the thing, Jesus views marriage as something which has been defined by God. It is not a social construct. It's built into the fabric of creation by the creator.

[17 : 23] It's a non-negotiable fact, part of the structure of reality, something you can't just throw off without consequences. It's not something that we invented in our cleverness.

It's part of the creator's design. It is a given, an institution. Let me do weddings in church here. I often, the walking down the aisle is a picture to me of the fact that the couple are coming to enter into this status that already exists.

It's not theirs to create and to invent. And Jesus says it's from the beginning, it's universal, it's not a private thing. And I think that means for us that if we are going to be followers of Jesus Christ, this church ought to be a place of refuge for those who have been damaged by the cruelty and confusions of sexual disobedience in our culture.

Jesus view. Secondly, the second way the New Testament applies this is in Ephesians chapter 5 on page 183.

The New Testament sees Genesis 2 as teaching male headship within marriage. I apologise that I cannot deal with this more fully today.

[18 : 49] And I am also aware of how shamefully this idea has been misused to justify all sorts of violence and wickedness against women. But we need to be frank about the fact that the New Testament has a great deal to say about how we conduct ourselves in married life.

And at the heart of the Christian marriage is a profoundly counter-cultural gospel way of thinking. Instead of grasping onto our rights and insisting on getting what we want in humility and lowliness we are taught to give away what we might otherwise grasp.

Look at verse 23 of Ephesians 5. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church his body and is himself its saviour.

Christ is the model. And within the marriage the husband is commanded to love his wife in the same way that Christ loved his church which means giving up his life out of love.

Wives are commanded to submit to their husbands which means choosing to give up power. Both parties are called upon to raise up the other person by choosing to serve the other person.

[20 : 13] creation. And it's based in the apostles' mind upon the fact that there is an order in creation. Again, no inferiority or superiority. But in the Bible's view we cannot read male-female straight across left to right and right to left as though they were reciprocal.

That's the second point. The third point is that headship must be demonstrated in the local congregation. creation. Let's turn over to 1 Corinthians 11 verse 3.

A few weeks ago I had to fly to Chicago on Sunday lunchtime and I left straight after I preached the sermon at the 11 o'clock service and it's very tempting to do the same today.

1 Corinthians 11 3. The Apostle Paul says, I want, this is on page 163, I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ and the head of a woman is her husband and the head of Christ is God.

Now, Bible believing Christians disagree on how we should apply this passage and a number of other passages in the New Testament that speak to this. But we cannot skirt the fact that there is a principle in the New Testament that while God is delighted with women as presidents and prime ministers within the local congregation, a woman should not take preaching headship.

[21 : 48] Bear with me. Two verses later, verse 5, the Apostle Paul allows women to prophesy in church, which I take it to be roughly equivalent to preaching.

But when we come to 1 Timothy 2, the Apostle permits no woman to teach. Again, I know this has been abused in the past. And if you're visiting with us for the first time you've been in a church, this would be absolutely inconceivable, I would think.

But we have to acknowledge that within the church at Ephesus, we can't avoid this, that the Apostle Paul urges that the office of teaching elder be reserved for a man.

In the Old Testament, women were prophetesses, they received and spoke God's revelation, but they were never priestesses. In the New Testament, God reveals himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not as parent, child and vital life force.

And we must speak about God the way he is revealed. And just as there is no inferiority or superiority within the Trinity, but their roles are different, our life as a church needs to reflect this difference.

[23 : 01] That's the third area. The fourth area of application is to homosexuality. The last time I mentioned homosexuality in this pulpit, I did a search yesterday, was in 2001.

And I've got to say, we've got to be aware that, again, the Bible's teaching on this has been twisted and misused to justify homophobia and violence against those who claim to be homosexual.

homosexuality. But we need to be clear about the fact that while the Bible tolerates, doesn't approve of divorce and polygamy, homosexual behaviour is regarded in the scriptures as a contradiction of creation.

It's explicitly prohibited and I think it's against Jesus' understanding of Genesis 2. I preached on Romans 1 in 1997 and I think that recording is still available.

The reason I mention that is because in Romans 1, the apostle applies the creation narrative to homosexuality. In idolatry, I reject the otherness of God to worship something in my image.

[24 : 16] And in homosexual behaviour, I reject the otherness of the opposite sex. Both are an elevation, a divinisation of myself.

Instead of mirroring God to others, I turn the mirror back on myself and I worship myself. And if that is true, we need to be the kind of church that people can look at and say, such were some of you, but something has happened to you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the fourth area of application. The fifth area of application is singleness. I'm very aware when we speak about marriage that there are those who feel left out.

And I think it is particularly painful for those who struggle with unwanted singleness. And I want to say that creation is very important for you if you are a single person.

Because, you see, neither marriage nor sexual intercourse are indispensable for you to be fully human. Neither of them are needed for your fulfilment.

[25 : 29] The Bible says that there are two ways to faithfully serve God. One is as a married person living in faithfulness. The other is as a single person living in celibacy.

The path of singleness was walked by Jeremiah and the apostle Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ himself. And we don't have time to look at it, but the whole of 1 Corinthians chapter 7 tells us that there are a number of practical advantages in being single.

So I want to say that to live a full Christian life you don't need to be married. And the reason the New Testament says that is because we are already married to Jesus Christ.

Whether you are married or whether you are single is of low importance to Jesus. But whether you and I remain sexually pure is of high importance to him. And we need to be a church where those who are single can be content and find friends.

And that leads me to my sixth and final application. And I have to leave very quickly afterwards. In a way, all those first five are less important.

[26 : 47] The sixth is the great significance of Genesis 2. And I think it is a bit of a surprise. The New Testament tells us that Genesis 2 is actually a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church.

And that is the point, Genesis 2. Let's go back to Ephesians 5 for just a moment. This is the last flip. In Ephesians 5, in verse 31, the Apostle Paul quotes the Genesis 2 verse.

And then he says in verse 32, this mystery is a profound one. And I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

It's not that Paul is looking around for an analogy to explain Christ's relationship with us and he stumbles on marriage. It's the opposite of that. He says Christ's relationship to us as a church is the real thing.

And human marriage is just an analogy to that. Two becoming one, that is about Christ and the church.

[28 : 03] And the real marriage that you and I were created for is the marriage with Jesus Christ. We are the bride of Christ. We are the body of Christ. Christ. And everything in this world is moving to that day of the great wedding feast of the Lamb.

And our sexuality and our gender can only ultimately be met by Jesus Christ himself, the one who loved us and gave himself for us.

We are all fragile. We are all damaged. We are all disobedient in this area. And as Christ's body, we long for the day when God will make all things new, don't we?

When he'll wipe away every tear from our eyes and he will say to his son, these words, come, he says, I will show you your bride, the wife of the Lamb.

Amen.