

Marriage in the creation Gen 2:18-25

Tim Anderson 30/12/2018

We're beginning a new sermon series today.

It's a bit different from normal.

Normally I preach sequentially through a book of the Bible.

I do that because God gave us the Bible in books,
and those books make the most sense
when you consider them as a whole.

There's a great danger in a preacher bringing their own agenda
to a text of Scripture.

And when you preach topics rather than sequentially through books,
you are at far greater danger of bringing your own agenda to the text.

Well there are many other reasons
why it's best to preach sequentially through books.

I could talk about it for some time.

But I won't and one reason why

is because that's not what we are doing for the next few weeks.

Occasionally, I think it is good to address topics.

Sometimes there are topics about which people have burning questions,
and if you left it till those topics naturally came up
in the course of preaching a book,

it might be many years before an important topic was addressed.

It's also good sometimes to be able to tie together
the teaching of different parts of Scripture on the one subject.

So that's what we are doing over the next few weeks.

Our subject is sex and marriage.

Now this is a subject

about which Christians have some burning questions.

Generally,

people spend quite a bit of time thinking about sex and marriage.

A person who was very sexually active

might spend about 2% of their life having sex.

That means they would spend 98% of their life not having sex.

For most people it would be far more than 98% of their life.

But it still is a major item of interest for most people.

You only have to look at what things feature on the news, what percentage of the internet is devoted to sex, what is the staple subject of television comedies, or what kids talk about in the school yard, to establish that sex is a subject of major interest. Generally, all the time.

But right now, marriage is a subject of heightened interest. The community has moved to allow same sex marriage. That contradicts the entire practice of human history both in cultures influenced by Christianity and those not influenced by Christianity. It contradicts the clear, uniform, unwavering historic teaching of Christianity.

Because of this, many Christians have some burning questions about marriage. Do we need to re examine what we've always believed to check that is what the Bible really teaches us? We might after all have unquestioningly accepted something just because we'd always done it that way. When you are prohibiting people from doing something they really want to do, you'd better have a better reason than we've haven't done it that way before. You would want to be able to demonstrate that there's a good reason for the way we've always done it.

Well I'm getting a bit ahead of myself. We aren't going to get to the controversial topic of homosexuality today. That will be in a few weeks time. Today we are laying the foundation. We are looking at marriage in the creation. How did God make marriage to be in the first place? It's when you have the foundation of how things were meant to be, that you are in a position to explore your response to how things are now.

So turning to our passage for today,
the first thing to notice is where it is in the Bible.
Genesis 2 comes before Genesis 3.
Which is more than saying 2 is a smaller number than 3.
God gave us marriage before Adam and Eve sinned.
Marriage is part of God's good creation.
God didn't give people marriage after the fall,
as if to say,
"Now you've turned away from me and this world is going to be cursed.
Now death is going to come into the world,
you are going to need to reproduce,
so here is marriage as a way to deal with the problem."
No it wasn't like that at all.
God gave us marriage before the fall.
As if to say,
"There are only two of you.
I want this world filled with people who can enjoy my creation,
and can enjoy relationship with me.
So here is marriage so you can multiply on the earth
and there will be a whole world with people praising my name."
It's important that marriage was given before the fall.
It means that marriage is something to be celebrated;
something that is part of God's good plan for humanity.

Now when we look at God's good plan for humanity,
that starts right in first chapter of the Bible
with humanity being made in God's image.
This is what it says,
"So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them."
God made us with two genders.
There are not 50 genders or whatever Facebook lets you choose from.
You can't be gender fluid.
You are created with a specific gender,
to be clear, your gender is your biological gender,
there's no such thing as a man trapped in a woman's body.

and that gender is closely tied up with our being in the image of God.

There was an early church father named Tertullian.

He said that man is created in the image of God,

and woman is created in the image of man.

But that's a distortion of Genesis 1.

The Bible says,

"In the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them."

It's together as male and female that we bear the image of God.

Each of us are individually made in the image of God.

But together we can reflect God even more fully.

Aspects of our being that are typically male

say doing discipline in the home or exhibiting courage

and aspects of our character that are typically female

say showing compassion or nurturing children,

these are all part of God's character.

So together we are able to more fully reflect God's character,

together we are able to more fully be image bearers.

There's another part of God's character that we can reflect
is that God is a God of relationship.

The Father loves the Son and the Spirit.

The Spirit loves the Father and the Son.

The Son loves the Father and the Spirit.

We can't reflect God's character properly if we are alone

because we are made in the image of a God of relationships.

Our passage says,

"It's not good for the man to be alone.

I will make a helper suitable for him."

God gave us marriage because we are not designed to be alone.

As well as being useful for filling the earth and subduing it,

marriage gives us companionship.

Now I should make a couple of comments about singleness at this point.

First of all, I haven't got a sermon in this series on singleness.

I probably should have but the roster is written now.

So I'll restrict myself to a few comments.
Because humans are designed for companionship,
and many people have significant portions of their life
when they are single,
we need to become better at creating companionship for single people.
People have significant lengths of time as single prior to marriage.
In the current time,
far longer periods on average than a few generations back.
People also can have significant lengths of time single
following the death of their spouse or divorce.
And single people need companionship too.
So what should we do about that?
We need to recognise that marriage is designed to be sexually exclusive.
But not relationally exclusive.
It's good for married people
to create deep friendships with single people.
Wes Hill, who is a prominent thinker on this topic at the moment,
suggests that people could even form committed friendships.
Committed to a non sexual relationship with one another
and marked with a promise to be committed to that friendship for life.
I wasn't aware of it,
but apparently this happened in prior centuries.
If you want to follow his thinking further,
it's in his book "Spiritual Friendship".

OK back to marriage.

We've talked about being a better reflection of the image of God
as male and female together.

We've talked about being made for relationship.

Now we've got the tricky topic of a 'helper suitable for him'.

It's tricky because the word 'helper' sounds like it has lower status.

You can probably remember the primary school teacher asking you
if you would like to be their 'little helper' on some important job.

What does it actually mean that the woman is made as the man's helper?

Well like it or not,

and for most Australians in the 21st century,

it will be 'not',

the Bible doesn't view marriage as symmetrical relationship.
In our Bible passage,
the man is given the job of naming the animals.
That is God's way of showing
humanity has authority over the animal kingdom.
But wait a minute,
the man is also given the job of naming the woman.
It's a sign of authority in the marriage relationship.
Now we can't go in the Tertullian direction.
Women are equally in the image of God.
There is mutuality in the relationship.
The woman is made as a suitable companion for the man.
They are designed for one another.
I think the best way to understand it
is to say that husband and wife are equal in value before God
but they have different roles in the relationship
and part of the difference in the roles
is that the husband has some leadership role in the marriage.

Now that's a conclusion that sits well with this passage,
it makes sense of the word helper,
and of the man naming the woman,
but it's actually developed from other passages as well.
So I'm just giving you my conclusion not all the working out.
That's a thing about topical sermons,
sometimes you can only give the conclusion.

Now while the conclusion sits well with the passage,
it doesn't sit well with 21st century Australia.
If you say that the husband has a particular leadership role in the family
not shared by his wife,
that is the equivalent of secular heresy,
and secular opinion will judge you accordingly.
How should Christians respond to that?
Well I don't think we can just brush it off
and say "Who cares what the world thinks?"
There are deep issues that trouble people like justice and equity.

And those are issues that Christianity shares a great concern about.

I think the beginning of a response

is that this is a picture of marriage before the fall.

The distaste that people feel towards the leadership of husbands probably has a lot to do with the poor exercise of that leadership by men who have abused power.

If instead we pictured a marriage where a woman was married to Jesus, then most Christian women wouldn't have a problem with allowing him to exercise leadership in the relationship.

Well that's the beginning of a response.

Next week our topic is 'marriage spoiled'

where we look at marriage after the fall.

So we will have more opportunity to explore how leadership works in a world where leadership like everything else is broken.

But for the moment,

we will head back to the world where everything was still good.

And in that world,

Marriage was a source of great joy.

When the Lord God brought the woman he had made to the man, the man cried out for joy.

"This is now bone of my bones

and flesh of my flesh;

she shall be called woman,

for she was taken out of man."

Adam was wrapt that he wasn't going to have

to look to zebras or wombats for companionship.

He now had a companion who is suitable for him.

And Adam's joy should reflect in our joy at marriage.

Marriage is a great gift for those blessed to be married.

Often you hear jokes when people have been married for a long time.

"How long have you guys been married for?"

30 years.

30 years, wow. You only get 20 years for murder."

It's clever but it's wrong.

We shouldn't make jokes like that.

We should honour those relationships

that have been the bedrock of stable families, of well adjusted children, of loving homes that have had love to share with others.

Demeaning that even in a flippant way is inappropriate.

Marriage is under sustained assault in our community and we need to be self consciously pushing back against that.

Cherida and I have been married for nearly 22 years now.

Both of us would say that's been a great joy.

We love and appreciate one another more than we did 22 years ago.

God has blessed us with five children as fruit of our marriage.

We have great joy in them too.

And together we are able to serve God

in ways that we couldn't have had we not been married.

Which is not to say that God doesn't use single people powerfully.

He does.

Often most powerfully.

But in our case, marriage has enabled service in God's kingdom.

We

(I'm talking about Christians generally now not just Cherida and me)

need to affirm marriage publicly

because God has given it to us as a great gift.

It is a wonderful blessing.

And people are robbed of that blessing

when marriage gets a whole lot of unjustified bad press.

Marriage is such a joy that our reading says,

"That is why a man leaves his father and mother

and is united to his wife,

and they become one flesh."

I guess we often think about this in a literal way.

When you get married you move out of home

and rent a new place to live in with your wife

because you couldn't possibly afford to buy a place.

But actually in the ancient world,

they didn't physically move out.

They wacked up an extra room on the house

or made the tent a bit bigger,

and get this,

the woman left her family
and came and lived with the man and his family.

So what does the Bible mean?

I think it's talking about our primary loyalty.

Family was a big thing in the ancient world.

In fact, family has been a bigger thing in just about every culture
compared to our own.

But such is the great gift of marriage,

that even in a culture

where children and parents were unshakably committed to one another,
when you get married,

your first loyalty shifts your spouse.

The loyalty to parents and other family members becomes secondary.

Your unity with your spouse is so close,

that you can be said to have one flesh.

Things will test that out.

Sometimes his family or her family

will try to get back the loyalty of the son or daughter they lost.

I've seen that done to the point that it destroyed a marriage.

Kids will certainly try to drive a wedge between Mum and Dad.

That's how they try to manipulate the situation to get what they want.

But what they need, rather than what they want

is Dad and Mum to be one flesh:

united.

In a fallen world, that unity is such a blessing.

I often wonder how I would cope with some of what life throws at me,
if I didn't have Cherida at my side.

No doubt, God could give me the strength I would need.

But marriage is a great blessing.

One last thing about marriage at the creation.

"Adam and his wife were both naked,
and they felt no shame."

This is probably not an image you would like to visualise,
so let's keep it hypothetical.

But image I was up here preaching in my birthday suit.

You would be revolted.

I would be ashamed.

What is it about nakedness that makes us feel ashamed?

Well it must be to do with our sexuality.

Because it's our sexual organs that we cover up with clothing.

I can swap my trousers for shorts without feeling the least bit ashamed.

But if I expose myself in the sense of the legal term 'indecent exposure', then I will feel tremendously ashamed.

What this is telling us is something of God's design for sex.

God designed us so that sex is an action that requires trust and vulnerability.

In the broken world that we live in,

you only want to be that trusting and vulnerable

with someone who is committed to you in marriage for life.

And that's how Christians and Jews have come to the understanding that sexual activity should be restricted to marriage.

So often it's painted as puritanical kill joys

who are out to spoil people's fun.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

It's about God giving a way for sex to be life giving,

literally and metaphorically,

rather than being a destructive violation of trust.

Don't think that just because two people are consenting adults means that there's no violation of trust.

Unless they are committed to one another for life,

then there will be a violation of trust,

it may just take a while to become obvious.

"Adam and his wife were both naked,

and they felt no shame."

God gave us marriage for many reasons.

One of them was so that there would be a place for sexual expression that brings joy rather than shame.

Let's praise God for the joy

rather than railing against limitations that keep us from shame.

Let me finish by thanking God for the great gift of marriage

and praying that the marriages in our church

would be a blessing for us

whether or not we are married.