

# Sex in Paradise

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[ 0 : 00 ] topic for this evening is marriage. How do you feel about that? This passage that we're looking at is one of the key passages that we go to for a biblical understanding of marriage, and that might fill you with dread, that might fill you with joy, one of those. And it's a tricky passage to cover because it's so different to what our world teaches today about marriage. So what I'm going to do is I'm going to pray for us now, and then we're going to look at this passage together.

So Father, we pray for humility as we come to your word. We pray that you'd allow, that we would allow you to disagree with us. Father, we pray that you would guide us in our thinking in this difficult passage tonight. We pray that whatever is helpful that I say, that that would be remembered, and that whatever is unhelpful, that that would be forgotten. And we pray that everything that is said and thought about and considered, it would be for your glory. Amen.

Just a warning, if you're single and you might think this is a passage for you to switch off, don't switch off. It's a good passage to stick around for. There'll be lots that's applicable to you. But just as by way of way in, can I ask you, what is your favorite romantic comedy? They may be falling a bit out of vogue. I'll give you 30 seconds, turn to your neighbor and ask them, what's your favorite romantic comedy?

Thank you. Okay. I'll give you another 10.

Great. And let's draw that back together. A bit old fashioned, I know, but favorite romantic comedy? Someone from my left? Shout out. Emma. Yes. Good one. Very good. Someone on my right?

[ 2 : 29 ] Love Actually. Go on. Johnny Harrier. Brilliant. Cracking. Well, we had a bit of a debate about romantic comedies this week in the church office because we felt that they're a bit out of vogue at the moment. We've gone past the heyday of them and we're a bit more cynical and pragmatic towards relationships these days. We recognize that marriages can be brilliant, but that they can also be really hard. And what we have in our passage tonight is God's ideal for marriage. It's this glittering backdrop that we're going to read the rest of Genesis through, and particularly as we look at the chaos that ensues in marriage in the next couple of weeks. And so we have this glorious picture of what it should be like, God's ideal for marriage. Just to remind us where we are in Genesis. In Genesis 1, we've had the headline statements of God as creator, who's made everything. And we have seen God's pattern for creation in forming things and then filling them. And then he goes on to use that same pattern for the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1. So the man and woman are formed in God's image. And then they are sent to go out and fill and subdue the earth as his image bearers. They're to fill. And having, and what we see is, so we see this pattern in Genesis 1, 26, and then 28. So then God said, let us make mankind in our own image and in our likeness. And then God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over it, the fish and the sea and the birds and the sky and over every living thing that moves on the ground. And so as we approach thinking about marriage, we need to see God's intention and purpose in creating the man and woman.

That they were to fill and subdue the earth as God's image bearers. They were to fill every corner of the earth with God's image. They were to expand the garden of Eden to fill the whole of earth. They wanted paradise to be, God wants paradise to be everywhere. And that's the reason that God created them. That's the purpose that he made them man and woman. And in chapter 2, we have Moses zooming in on the creation of man and woman. And he's unpacking the details of what this picture is going to look like. And it's a beautiful love story. I wonder how you feel about a love story between the man and the woman. And it's a true account. But we don't want to get carried away in looking at the love story, because the hero in this story is God. You see, the main actor in these verses that we've seen tonight is God. God does everything. And so my points all start with God. God, God, God, God. God is the hero in this action. And like every good love story, it starts with a

bit of a hiccup. And so we're in point one there. God's search for a suitable helper, verse 18 to 20. And no sooner than we start our reading, then there is a problem. So just look down at verse 18. Keep your Bibles open if you've closed them.

And maybe keep your white sheet to hand to follow along. So verse 18. The Lord God said, it is not good for the man to be alone. And I will make a helper suitable for him. And it's a problem, the man being alone, that God is going to fix. I will make a helper. And the problem here in the context of Genesis is not simply that the man is alone. He clearly was alone. But it's more that by himself, he's got no chance of fulfilling God's purpose for him, to fill and subdue the earth as God's image bearer, to take God's image to the ends of the earth. He's a single man and has the entire world to cover. It's impossible for him to do it alone. And so God sets about finding a suitable helper for the man to bring about God's good purposes, to expand Eden, the paradise, to the ends of the globe, to fill the world with his image. And he does this looking for a suitable helper by first bringing to the man all the different animals that God had made. And the man sets about fulfilling God's purpose by naming all of the animals. So we see the basis of science there. And it's a disarmingly lovely scene. It's almost a bit like a Disney movie. God brings the man a mouse. And it's like a father with a child. And the man goes, mouse. And they look at each other and they shake their heads. No, that won't do. And then he brings the hippopotamus. And the man goes, hippopotamus. And they look at each other and they shake their heads. No, the hippo won't do either. And so on. And so in verse 20, we have that sad verse. But for Adam, no suitable helper was found. There was no animal who would help Adam fill and subdue the earth and fill the earth with God's image. No animal could help him do that. And animals and pets are amazing. I spent most of the afternoon playing with a pet cat. And they should be treated and cared for. But they aren't God's image bearers. And they won't be suitable helpers for us in helping to fill, to do God's purpose for us, and sending his image to the ends of the world. And so what we see in point two there, God's provision of a helper, verse 20 to 23. But despite this problem, we see God setting about to fix it in verse 21 and verse 22. And so the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. And while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. And then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. And the answer that God gives for there being no suitable helper for the man is that he makes a woman from the rib of the man. And it's beautiful. It's heart-achingly beautiful picture.

Just to clarify there, the word helper is more regularly used of God in the Old Testament. So we shouldn't read it negatively. But it also suggests that the woman is going to help the man fulfill his calling. And then the second thing to note there, suitable there, is as one commentator puts it, means equal or adequate. The woman is just the helper, the exact helper that the man needs to accomplish his God-given purpose of filling and subduing the earth everywhere with God's image. And I just want to raise two applications or implications from this under A and B on the sheet. So if you've got a pen, you're going to have to whip out your pen and write these down there. And the first is that the woman is a mutual partner in this task that God has given the man. And so in the creation of the woman, we see a beautiful mutual partnership. God creates the woman for the man, and the man is absolutely delighted. He's gobsmacked. He's blown away. And he sings a little song. [10:35] Joe didn't quite read that with a sing-songy. Maybe next time. And I won't sing it now because that might be embarrassing. But I'll just read it again for us. This is not bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. It's a beautiful love song that the man sings about the woman. Just notice she's a brilliant gift from the Lord. The man's entirely oblivious that he ever needed help. He was just doing his own thing, relaxed, didn't know. God was bringing animals to him, didn't know what he was looking for. And then God made this beautiful woman for him, and it was absolutely brilliant. And he was gobsmacked by it. And she was going to be a helpful partner in fulfilling his task to fill and subdue the earth with God's image. And it's a beautiful picture of partnership. I had a couple of friends before I went to Bible college. I'd just arrived in

London, and they were these married couple. And I looked at the picture of the partnership that they modeled to me and my friends, and I was absolutely gobsmacked by it. They cared for people in their church dearly. They weren't afraid of sharing their heartaches and their struggles. And they openly showed their mutual support for one another. They were a haven to people who had been afflicted and were struggling in life in lots of different ways. And they went on to have three wonderful girls.

I know Martin's got three girls. These guys also had three girls. Three wonderful girls who would one day grow up to trust and know the Lord and move to weird and wonderful places, trusting and believing in God as God's image bearers. And the second implication that we get to, and this is our B point there, and I recognize that in a church as large as this, there are going to be varying degrees of different views on this, and that's okay. But by virtue of the fact that the woman is made from his rib and that she's a God-ordained helper, suitable, the helper that the man needs, there is a burden placed on the man here to lead in some way, shape, or form, or whatever that is. And so under, be on the sheet there, you might write, the man provides helpful leadership. And just note, it isn't a leadership for leadership's sake. It's not a leadership that bosses and lords it over, but it's a leadership that is specifically governed and in the context of God's task that he's given the man to fill and subdue the earth with God's image bearers.

It's not an excuse for ungodliness or abusiveness. It's meant to point the partner to God and show them how beautiful God is and serve them and love them with the love that Christ loves his family. [13:51] It's a mandate for husbands to take responsibility for the spiritual well-being of their families in a big-hearted gospel generosity. I had the wonderful privilege of, on Wednesday morning, I spent some time with a family that I knew from down south, and I'd watched the kids grow up from about this size up to now starting their first year at Edinburgh University. And throughout the time that I've known them, the dad there has been wonderful and in a very joyful, good-hearted way, setting the agenda for spiritual leadership in the house, encouraging the family to get the Bible out, encouraging the family to get the church, saying we're not going to go away for a holiday, we're going to help at our kids' holiday club year and year, year after year. We're going to help with that Friday club as a family all together, year after year. For 10, 12, 15 years, they've done this all the time.

And it wasn't burdensome. The wife is incredibly gifted and able and talented, a double doctorate, a doctorate in immunology and pediatrics. But she recognized that her husband needed to set the spiritual vision for getting this family loving and serving the Lord. And then what we go on to see, and just listen to what Matthew Henry writes on this, that the woman was taken from the man's rib, not made out of his head to be top of him, and not out of his feet to be trampled by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected by him, and near his heart to be loved by him. Well, next turn to verse 24, point three on our sheet there, God's pattern for marriage. And verse 24 is noteworthy in that it's the narrator isn't telling the story, he is giving a comment. And when you see that kind of thing in the Old Testament, that's bold headlights. Pay attention to what's going on here. And so Moses says here, I'll read verse 24, that is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

And this verse is the pattern for the biblical view of marriage. And it's quoted four times in the New Testament. And the first thing that we see there is A, it's between a man and a woman. So throughout these verses in 22 to 25, we see a repeatedness of the man's manness, and of the woman's womanliness, if you want. And so verse 22, and the rib he made into a woman and brought her to the man. And she shall be called a woman, for she was taken out of a man, and so on and so forth. And so marriage, and therefore sex, is something that is only to happen between married couples, between a man and a woman. And I realize that's a hard teaching, particularly in our day and age, to hear. And there's lots of debate over this from all sides of the equation. But it's incredibly encouraging to my same-sex attracted friends when I do teach this teaching, when I hold to biblical truth. They're incredibly encouraged by this and hold to this likewise. The next thing that we see be there on the sheet, a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife. You see, marriage means a change of relationship with one's families. And we get a picture of this. If you've been to a wedding, maybe you've been to a wedding. How do weddings go? The bride walks down the aisle with her husband, but she walks up the aisle. The bride walks down the aisle with her dad, and then she walks up the aisle with her husband. There's a change in relationship.

[18:13] See, marriage means that my primary devotion is no longer to my parents or my siblings, but to my spouse and the new family that I'm forming for them. And I suspect that for some of us, the umbilical cord of our families is quite strong, and that our parents might still have a very strong hold over us and over their children. And while sometimes it can be an absolute joy to have a deep and strong relationship with our parents, it's not something that everyone enjoys, sadly, and it's something to be enjoyed and delighted in. But sometimes it can be unhelpful and a stress on the

marriage. So if you're a parent here, may I ask you, are you holding too tightly to your married children? Married folk, do you recognize that your primary devotion is to your spouse and not to your parents or siblings?

And although they are still there, and are you still managing to honor and care for your parents appropriately in that new context, that new relationship that you find yourself in?

Single folk, is your relationship to your parents stopping you from getting married? I was watching Ambulance this week, and there was this heart-aching story about how they went to visit a crew. The crew went to visit an old lady who'd never had children because she was always busy caring for this family member and that family member and one or another parent. And while that's incredibly honorable and noteworthy, you did wonder, is that maybe a hold that's too strong? Is there something going on there that was slightly incorrect in the family dynamic there that caused this great heartache for her?

And on the flip side of leaving parents is that spouses are to be united together. And so, and we see that there, and is united to his wife. And so, united here in verse 24, we mean holding on to fast, being utterly devoted to, only having eyes for your spouse, not daydreaming about, I wish they would dress slightly smarter, I wish they'd get more muscles or something. I wish she was a bit pretty or whatever it is.

And so, Jesus, when debating divorce from the Pharisees in his day in Matthew 19, he quotes from this verse, but he says, it's not Moses speaking here in verse 24, but God, the Creator. And he draws the lesson that marriage is meant to be permanent. And then he says, therefore, what God has joined together? Let not man separate. And so, when you get married, if you get married, maybe you are married, and you might look back, you might remember those lines that you said, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and health, till death does part, this is my solemn vow.

[ 21 : 30 ] And what you're saying is that come what may, you're going to stick with your marriage partner, no matter what. You might have doubts coming down the aisle, but as soon as you leave the aisle, those doubts are gone. As soon as you're married, God's choice is clear. The job then is to build the marriage healthy, to build the life you want, and to best honor God as you seek to show his love and kindness to all the world around. I grew up on the beach in South Africa, and the coast that I grew up on is the wild coast. And it's wild because it's littered with shipwrecks. But all across this coast, you find these little mussels growing on the rocks there. And mussels, they're attached to a rock with the strongest glue known to man. It's incredibly strong. The labs try to copy it, they can't. And the storms may rage, and the waves beat on these mussels, but they will not let go for anything.

They cling absolutely dead tight onto the rock. And that's the pattern that we are meant to follow as we think about our spouses and our relationships. And then finally, we consider there God's pattern for marriage verse 24.C there on the sheet, becoming one flesh. And so finally there, the glue that binds marriage partners together, becoming one flesh, is sex. So just note, and it's a glue that works. When I was at university, I forever remember the pastor standing at the front, and a number of times he'd give the illustration of super glue, of how sex is a super glue that works.

You put it together, you put it, and when you try to pull it together, pull your fingers apart, invariably, skin pulls off the one finger onto the other finger. And so sex is a super glue that binds us together. And when we rip them apart, when we try to dissolve that relationship, it's invariably painful and distressful. And so sex is something to be enjoyed within the marriage relationship exclusively.

So just notice the pattern of marriage that comes from verse 24 there. Leaving the family in that public ceremony of holding fast to the wife as you say your vows, and then becoming one flesh in the marriage bed. And so what we have in these verses is God's ideal for marriage. And it's a heart-achingly beautiful picture. We see how God creates a suitable helper for the man. He creates what he loves to see, and he creates this beautiful woman to be with the man. And the man sees her and falls in love with her, and he sings this beautiful song. And they are devoted to one another. And then verse 25, we have this wonderful picture of sex in paradise, of life in the garden. Adam and his wife were both naked.

They had no inner visions. They were completely open with one another. There were no secrets. There were no things that would keep them separate. And they felt no shame whatsoever.

[ 25 : 03 ] They were always forthright with one another. They were always open. They were always honest. And so I recognize that as we come here tonight, many of us will come from different places

with different struggles and different regrets. And if we do mess up, the good news of the gospel is that there is a hope in Jesus, and that Jesus, every sin, every mess up has been washed away.

And in the future, we'll be made perfectly again. We'll be fully redeemed. And then notice, secondly, also, that lots of here tonight might be here longing to be married.

And we might recognize that we might never get married for some reason or other. And there are tons of reasons that we might not get married. All sorts of reasons. We might have a physical deformity that might stop us.

We might be struggling emotionally. We might be mentally not ready there. And that's absolutely fine. But what we can recognize here is that God's mandate for sharing the gospel with our friends, for filling the earth with His image bearers, is just as applicable to us as single people.

As we gossip with our neighbors, as we invite them to the quiz night, as we call them on the life course, they can come to believe and trust in the Lord Jesus. And they, too, can fulfill their calling to be God's image bearers.

[ 26 : 42 ] And that way, they become our spiritual children. And we fill the earth with God's image bearers, even to the ends of the earth.

And the great promise of the gospel, Revelation 19, is that one day, there will be a glorious wedding banquet, a wonderful wedding party, that we're all invited to, if we trust in the Lord Jesus, where we'll be dressed beautifully, more handsomely, more stunningly beautiful than you could ever imagine.

And you'll be wiped, washed, spotless, clean. And your husband, Jesus, will be there. And He'll love you perfectly forever.

Well, if we have any struggles tonight, if anything has struck you tonight, and you'd like to chat about it more, Martin, Amy, and myself will be around.

Or maybe chat to a friend. We'd love to hear from you. We'd love to hear what you think I got wrong, what you think I got right. I'm fine with that. I've got a thick skin. I'd love to chat to you.

[ 27 : 50 ] Or maybe just chat to you in general and get to know you a bit better. I'm going to close in a word of prayer for us. And then I think, do we have a song next? Is that right? I'm going to invite the band up. So I'm going to invite the band up now.

And then I'll close in a word of prayer for us. So, Father, we thank you for this heart-achingly beautiful picture of sex in paradise, of what your ideal for marriage looks like.

And we realize that our world is so far from this, Father. And we pray, Lord, that we would still stick to your task of filling the world with your image bearers.

If we are gifted with marriage and raising up children who love you, who serve you, who long to know you. If we aren't gifted with marriage and speaking to our friends and family, and telling them the good news of Jesus wherever they are.

In Jesus' name, amen.