

Marriage in the Revolution

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[0 : 00] Look, what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today about marriage and about sex. I've actually already preached twice about marriage this year because we came to it in Ephesians. And those talks are online on our website on Ephesians 5.

But on Thursday, as I just said, our denomination, the Scottish Episcopal Church, voted to allow ministers to opt in and get nominated to conduct same-sex weddings in Episcopal churches. So that will probably start to happen by the end of the year. And it's important that we understand that in doing that, they've departed from God's clearly revealed will, what God says. And so we're going to spend time seeing that. When you look at what the Bible says about sex and marriage, it confirms what virtually every Christian has thought for the first 19 and a half centuries of church history.

But the problem for us is that many of us are struggling with this. Our culture has shifted enormously on these issues, hasn't it? And we are products of our culture.

[1 : 03] We have to accept that our culture shapes what we think, and it shapes how we feel about things massively. So that as Christians, many of us don't know what to think about this anymore.

And even when we do know what to think, we often know what we're meant to be against. But we struggle to think about what we're actually for and say anything positive.

So what we're going to do this morning, we're going to do marriage this week, singleness next week. The following week, we'll look at same-sex relationships. But we're going to trace through this morning how the story of marriage and God's plan for marriage is actually woven into God's big story for humanity, of his dealings with his people.

And that's a story with four acts, creation, fall or rebellion, redemption, and restoration. So first we've got Act 1, creation, marriage and sex in God's good design.

In Genesis chapter 1, God creates the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1 is more like a song than a science book, okay? So science answers questions like what and how, and the Bible answers questions like who and why.

[2 : 18] It's those kinds of questions. And when we look at Genesis chapter 1, the pinnacle of creation is humanity. So in Genesis chapter 1, verse 26, it would help if you don't have a Bible with you, if you take your Bibles up, we'll be flicking through, but some of the verses will come on the screen.

So Genesis 1, 26, So God created mankind in his own image.

In the image of God he created them. Male and female he created them. It's literally, God created mankind, God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him.

Male and female he created them. Just significant that, because it's clear from the very beginning of the Bible that man and woman are not interchangeable. We're equal in the eyes of God, but we are different to one another.

Male and female he created them. In the image of God he created him. So God makes human beings to be in relationship with him. And so, because God is one in many, the one and the three, he makes us as humans male and female.

[3 : 44] And he gives Adam a commission. He gives mankind a commission. If you look at chapter 1, verse 28, So God makes mankind in his image.

And by procreation, because mankind is made in his image, mankind can display the glory of God. And by procreation, if the first people fill the earth with many people made in God's image, they'll fill the earth with the glory of God.

See? That's the idea. And so God designed us like that, sexually. But there needs to be a man and a woman together for that possibility. That's not to say that a man and a woman are not allowed to

marry if children wouldn't be possible for some reason.

But it's simply to say that in the normal order of things, one of God's purposes in marriage, in his good design, was the safe place for the stable upbringing of children and their nurture.

Now, that story gets retold in chapter 2 of Genesis. Adam needed a helper to serve God. And because he's a man and men have weaknesses that many of you will know about, God couldn't just provide another man.

[5 : 02] So he provided a woman. And we read this, Genesis 2.24, very foundational stuff. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

And then we read this, Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. So this is marriage. It's God's idea. And when Jesus was asked about marriage in his age, that's where he came back to.

He affirmed Genesis chapter 2. Marriage is the union of a man and a woman. They leave their families to form a new family unit. It's based on public promises of a lifelong faithfulness to each other.

And that's the place that God gives sexual intimacy. It's all part of God's good design, before anything went wrong. But then things did go wrong, as we know today.

Catastrophically wrong. And that's act two in God's big story, the fall and marriage. Sin is the great spoiler. So Adam and Eve is the first human beings. They disobey God.

[6 : 08] God gives them a command, where the only reason to keep that command is because you have to let God be God. And they decide, no, we're going to make up our minds what's right and wrong, and they disobey. And the immediate effect of that is it starts to spoil their relationship with each other.

So in chapter 3, verse 7, we read this. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

They might have said, literally, something has come between us. They're ashamed. And because God is just, he responds to their rejection of his rule.

He has to do that. And he puts the world under a curse. And that curse affects everything. It means that we get old and die. It means that work is grim.

Work should be good. It was there before the fall, but now it's grim. It means that childbearing is painful. But it also affects marriage. So in chapter 3, verse 16, God says to the woman, your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.

[7 : 18] So that is that instead of God's good design for marriage, where in the relationship there will be sexual intimacy and there will be loving, ordered relationship in the marriage, instead there is trouble and anguish in any marriage.

And we live in a world where sin, that rebellion against God, has spoiled everything. So in Romans chapter 8, we hear that the whole of creation is actually frustrated because sin has entered the world.

And in every human heart, sin has led to disordered desire. We don't love God enough. We love ourselves too much. We love the things God gives us too much.

And the Bible uses a word for sexual sin. It uses this word *porneia*, which is the word we get pornography from. And when you look at the Bible as a whole, *porneia* is just any sexual activity apart from God's good design for sexual intimacy in a marriage between a man and a woman.

So here's Jesus in Matthew chapter 5. You have heard that it was said, do not commit adultery, but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

[8 : 28] So the presenting issue for the church in Scotland today is what we do about committed sexual relationships between two people of the same sex.

But we have to acknowledge as Christians that the fall, that rebellion against God, has affected all of us in every way. Our sexual sin is no worse than our other sins.

Sins of anger, of greed, of pride, of gluttony. And sexually, sin is about sexual stimulation outside of the God-given union of one man and one woman.

But what we've often done as a culture and as the church, not all of us, but what we've often done, is treated homosexual sin as though it's especially bad, as though it's worse than other sin.

If you just think about the word straight, what an extraordinary word to use. Straight. Are you gay or are you straight? What do we mean by straight? What does it say about people who are not straight?

[9 : 34] Here's a Christian writer, Glenn Scrivener. It's just the words will be on the screen. He said this, I'm not straight. My desires, he's married by the way, I'm not straight. My desires are twisted in a thousand ways, like everyone's.

Lusting after the opposite sex en masse is not a virtue, and it should never be held up as an ideal against which to judge others as crooked. Lord, forgive me if I ever take refuge in a label straight. I choose never to condemn others who wear a different label. I choose never to feel superior to another human being, simply because my distorted desires are more socially acceptable than theirs.

I choose never to treat someone as inferior for their desires or their behavior. I choose to love people, no matter the spectrum they choose or the place they sit on it.

And I choose to invite the world, whatever their label, to renounce that identity and find a liberating joy of adoption in the family of God. For in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, gay nor straight.

[10 : 36] So this is Act 2. Sin has entered our world and it's spoiled everything. And in our culture, what has happened is God has handed us over to our sexual desires.

So that today, if you would choose to follow God's blueprint, God's design, and you say that sex is just for marriage between a man and a woman, you're considered totally weird.

Aren't you? I mean, you've been considered that for years, for generations. Now, you're also considered immoral for that lifestyle choice. People would say, it's much better to try before you buy, to play the field before you settle down with one person.

And so Christians holding that view have become this very marginalized minority, either to be pitied or to be disliked for what we think. And yet, at the same time, our society is suffering horribly from our rejection of God's design for marriage and sex and family.

One book that we haven't got today on the bookstall, but Glyn Harrison has written a brilliant book called A Better Story. He's a psychiatrist. He uses this phrase, when the parents play, the children pay.

[11 : 54] That's what he says about what we're seeing all around us, that since the sexual revolution in our culture, since the kind of the 60s and 70s, when the parents play, the children's pay.

And it's especially children in disadvantaged and poor families who are paying for the breakdown in family today in our culture. So, of course, I'm not saying by that, I'm not saying that you can't be an amazing parent if you're doing it by yourself or if your marriage has broken down.

Of course, I'm not saying that. And I'm also not saying that if you're in a marriage, you'll do a great job of parenting. Of course, I'm not saying that. And God is very gracious in families, but across society as a whole, it is still good and right to say that children fare better on the whole when they're raised with a mum and dad at home.

Glyn Harrison, in his book A Better Story, he talks about the growth in our culture of cohabitation instead of marriage. So people choosing to cohabit rather than commit in marriage and how that leads to a much higher likelihood that the relationship will break up.

So that today, 48% of all children born in the UK today will not be living with both natural parents by their 16th birthday. 48%.

[13 : 14] And the Bible itself does recognize there will be exceptions to marriage being lifelong. There are times when separation is appropriate. Yet there are times, biblically, when divorce is appropriate.

Christians disagree on that, but that's what I think. But when parents don't ever commit, they're much more likely to separate. Now what happens to the children then? Well, Glyn Harrison says this, fathers who split from their family home, 27% of them never visit their kids.

31% of them call or email their kids less than once a month. Another 28% only contact their children between one and four times a month.

And he says this in A Better Story, don't let the raw data lull you into complacency. This is simply an outrage. So that's act two, that in the name of freedom, we've turned away from God's good design, and life without God doesn't live up to its promises, and our culture is in pain because of that.

But act two isn't the end of the story, wonderfully. I've called act three redemption in marriage, the possibility of revolutionary sex. God has sent Jesus into the world to save us, no matter how much we've made a mess of our relationships.

[14:36] So when Jesus is staying with Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector in the town, people are looking down on Jesus for spending time with Zacchaeus. Jesus says this, the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

He's the great physician, and he says this, it is not the healthy you need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance. So by his death and resurrection, he's paid the price so that any of us can be forgiven and restored and have eternal life.

He set us free from the penalty of sin, and he set us free from the power of sin so that we don't have to sin anymore. And we live today in this act, act three of salvation history, that the saving news that Jesus died for sins and rose again to rule the world is being spread all over the world by his church. When you put your trust in Jesus, he rescues you, he puts your spirit in his, his spirit in your heart, and the spirit begins this process of transformation in us so that a Christian can say, I'm not, you know, I'm not the person that I ought to be.

I'm certainly not the person I ought to be. I'm not the person that I will be. Certainly not the person I will be, but I know I'm not the person that I was. We stand forgiven, adopted, redeemed, born again into a living hope.

[16:02] And that's the heart of the Christian story. And there's a wonderful implication of that for marriage, for all of our marriages, those of us who are married, it's that our marriages can be redeemed by the gospel.

So to see that, we're going to have our Bible reading now. Kate Pierce is going to bring that for us. If you turn your Bibles to Song of Songs. Thanks, Kate, for reading.

So we'll have a little look at that. We're all used to love songs, aren't we? There are the classic love songs. I don't know what your favorite love song is. Something in the way she moves attracts me like no other lover.

Don't tell me it's not worth trying for. You can't tell me it's not worth dying for. You know it's true. Everything I do, I do it for you. Lovely, isn't it?

There's no beginning there'll be no end because on my love you can depend. Special stuff. And listening to that combination of songs on the radio, especially if you listen to like Heart or Smooth or something, you do get this kind of dream of meeting someone who is the right person to be with them forever.

[17:12] Maybe that there's a Mr. Right and Mrs. Right that's your destiny to be with. But then there are lots of songs in our culture that influence us to desire uncommitted sex.

Sex outside of marriage, aren't there? Met a girl on Monday, took over a drink on Tuesday, we're making love by Wednesday. Interestingly, they took Sunday off in that song. But other than that, it's kind of, you know, it's not God's plan.

Ed Sheeran is a great example of this. You know, biggest songwriter on the planet at the moment. He's a complete contradiction. So he's got this song, Shape of You, over a billion views on YouTube, over a billion listens on Spotify.

The Shape of You, he says, the club isn't the best place to find a lover, so the bar is where I go, me and my friends at the table, doing shots, drinking fast, and then we talk slow. Girl, you know, I want your love.

Your love was handmade for somebody like me. Come on, follow my lead. I may be crazy, don't mind me. I'm in love with the shape of you. We push and pull like a magnet do. Although my heart is falling too, I'm in love with your body.

[18:16] Last night you were in my room and now my bedsheets smell like you. Every day discovering something brand new, I'm in love with your body. Then he has this different song, okay, when my hair's all gone and my memory fades and the crowds don't remember my name, when my hands don't play the strings the same way, I know you'll still love me the same and darling, I'll be loving you till we're 70.

And you think, back up a minute, Ed. This girl that you picked up at the bar when you were doing shots with your mates, you're in love with her body, she's not going to look like that when you're 70. This isn't going to work. These things don't go together, okay? Two dreams that don't work together. But our response as Christians has not been impressive to all of that.

So what people hear from the church is sex is bad. It's a bit shameful. It's wrong. So children grow up in churches and start to have sexual desire and they feel very ashamed. And God speaks into this. Here we have a whole book in the Bible inspired by God that is a love song, an erotic love song, between a man and a woman, a celebration and affirmation by God of his good gifts of sexual pleasure and romantic love.

[19 : 44] There are two main characters, so that's why as Kate helpfully read it, she pointed out, the NIV, our translation has added for us the he and the she headings so that we know who's speaking. And they show us the goodness of sexual desire in God's eyes, not to be ashamed of.

Look with me again from verse 1. Solomon's Song of Songs, let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is more delightful than wine.

Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes. Your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you. Take me away with you.

Let us hurry. Let the king bring me into his chambers. There are different interpretations of quite what's going on, so I'm just going to run with one here for the sake of time.

And that's that the couple get married and have sex at the beginning of chapter 5. So at the end of chapter 4, if you just turn over the page, she more committedly invites him at the end of verse 16, let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits.

[20 : 58] And then he says, beginning of chapter 5, I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey.

I have drunk my wine and my milk. And then the friends applaud and celebrate the couple's enjoyment of love. So what's going on? God is showing us here that sex is his idea and that enjoyed his way, it's full of sweetness and intimacy and pleasure.

That's how he designed it. And there's a little snapshot here as well of something very special about God's design for sex. It's that there shouldn't be shame. So remember Adam and Eve, they sin and then they're ashamed and they cover each other up or cover themselves up.

But if you go back to chapter 1 and the bit we had read for us, the bride is self-consciously dark-skinned because in her culture at that time, dark skin would have been a sign of poverty, of being out in the fields working.

So it was unfashionable to have dark skin. So she says in verse 6, do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. She explains why my mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards.

[22 : 15] My own vineyard, her appearance, I had to neglect. That's her expressing her shame that she doesn't look like she'd like to look. Her body is not what it should be in her eyes, just in her eyes.

And his response, well, it's interesting to notice what she does. You see, instead of hiding away from that or having a crisis, she's pursuing a secure relationship of real intimacy where that shame can be taken away so that the response from him is unembarrassed affirmation in verses 9 to 11. I liken you, my darling, to a mare among Pharaoh's chariot horses. Now, obviously, we have to do a bit of cultural contextualization here.

That's what it's called. Because if you're married here, blokes, right, and your wife tries on an outfit this week and says, how do I look? I suggest you don't look her up and down and say, I liken you, my darling, to a mare.

Okay? In chapter 4, he says, your hair is like a flock of goats, right? Your temples are like the halves of a pomegranate. It's cultural what's going on here.

[23 : 30] But the point is that in their culture, he is delighted with how she looks. And he's praising her. In fact, when she says near the end of chapter 1, sorry, the beginning of chapter 2, I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley.

She's saying, I'm very ordinary, really. And he says, like a lily among thorns is my darling among the young women. Just as guys, if you're a husband here, we should delight in praising our wives. And the result here in Song of Songs is that she feels secure in her commitment to him and his commitment to her. And sexual intimacy can follow. It's lovely.

And that's what our culture needs to hear. The sexual revolution was meant to be in the name of freedom, taking off the shackles of tradition. Let people choose who they want to be and who they want to sleep with.

But our culture is in appalling trouble. Pornography is wrecking relationships. The sexualization of children is robbing them of their childhoods. Our culture is full of sexual shame.

[24 : 36] We're having to write new laws because of revenge porn on the internet and webcam blackmail. There's a crisis in mental health and low self-esteem, self-harm and eating disorders, especially among young teenage girls.

Now, the causes of that are, of course, very complex, but our rejection of God's design for marriage and for sex is part of the mix in that. Facebook and Snapchat are making people obsess about how they look, miserable about how they look, and here in Song of Songs we see God's good design of one man and one woman committing to each other, choosing to delight in each other, affirming and enjoying each other's bodies without any feeling of shame and without the fear of being rejected when someone better comes along.

So we need to recover our confidence in that, that God knows what's best for us. Marriage is good and as God's people in the power of His Spirit, we can redeem it.

So the aim in thinking about all that is that we can recover our confidence in God's good design for sex and marriage, but there is obviously a danger as we read that and we hear that that we feel criticized or condemned by it because we've been married and our marriage broke down or we're still married but we're thinking my marriage doesn't look anything like this, I'm not the spouse I should be or we're single and we're thinking well that's all very well but what about what's in this for me?

So that's where we need to remember that Act 3 is about our forgiveness. It's about realizing that God has a plan, we've all fallen short and we can all be forgiven no matter how badly we've fallen and on top of that it's not the final act.

[26 : 23] Act 4 is consummation and marriage a match made in heaven. So the consummation of God's kingdom comes when Jesus returns to judge and he's going to put the world right and human marriage and sexual intimacy are only ever designed to be a pale shadow of what's coming next.

In Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, God again and again is called the bridegroom and his people are his bride. Never the other way around but always that God is the bridegroom so that in the complementarity of God's design of men and women the way they come together in marriage gives a display of the gospel.

It's a picture of the gospel relationship between God and his people so that when Jesus arrives he announces to his followers now the bridegroom is here and we his church are his bride.

Then Revelation pictures the new creation that we're being made for as a wedding banquet between Jesus the bridegroom and us his people as the bride. We're just going to watch a video now that helps us think about that great picture.

Thank you. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall be a marriage.

[27 : 58] A theology of homosexuality it has a theology of marriage and it's a lifelong union between a man and a woman to display the relationship between Christ and his church.

Even the most fulfilling happy marriages are only ever a very pale shadow of the big marriage that we're all part of and the wedding day we're all looking forward to when we'll be married to Jesus forever.

That's God's plan and it's really really good. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father for the ways we have gone wrong in our relationships and sexually we thank you for your forgiveness won at the cross.

For the times when we have commended ways of living and behaviour that are not your will we thank you for your correction in your good word.

For the times and ways that we ourselves have been sinned against and hurt by others we thank you for your healing and for your good design for your restoration of your people.

[29 : 33] And so we pray that whether we are married or single our sexual behaviour and our relationships and friendships will glorify you and point people to the glorious future hope that we have in the Lord Jesus.

We ask for his name's sake. Amen. We're going to respond to God's word by singing again and before we turn to the Lord's Supper as well let me just mention that we'll have prayer ministry as normal so there'll be two groups offering prayer ministry over to my right one at the front here and one by the cupboards at the back there and if you'd like prayer for anything whether it's something

that this morning is provoking that you'd like prayer for or whether it's something different you'd like prayer for yourself for healing for somebody you know then do go up for prayer that's an offer to you.
To the prayer God