

A Marriage Made in Heaven - Part 2

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[0 : 00] Good morning, St. Silas. If you don't know me, my name is Martin Ayers. I'm the minister here, and it's great to have you here as we look at this bit of Ephesians together.

If you could keep your Bibles open on page 1176, that would be a great help to me as we look at this. And as always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find that helpful just to see where we're going as we look at this together.

But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we turn to his word together. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you have made yourself known to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We thank you for your word. And we pray that by your spirit, you would meet with us now in your word and enable us to understand what you're saying to us and be moved in our hearts to accept your instruction as a good word and respond with lies for your glory.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So we're looking today at marriage. We started looking at this last week. This is part two. It's such a rich passage.

[1 : 15] It's worth just spending another week thinking about it. So the material from both weeks overlaps. Now we're in a culture that is totally confused about marriage. So in popular culture, we place huge pressure on marriage by the way that we look to marriage for our fulfillment, our happy ever after in life.

Just this year, one of the big movies will be Beauty and the Beast with Emma Watson being remade. Great example of that. Marriage is what will make you happy ever after. There's the movie La La Land that people say is going to storm the Oscars.

I haven't seen it yet because with three little children, cinema trips don't happen very often for me these days at the moment. But people are confused with La La Land about the message it's really giving you about marriage.

But on the whole, it looks like a positive message because you've got this couple. They fall in love. They don't get married. She marries somebody else. And then they're dreaming of how things could have been if only they got married.

On the other hand, because we put so much pressure on our marriages, there's also deep cynicism in our culture about marriage. People are very negative about marriage because it's disappointed them.

[2 : 26] So if you watch BBC One on a Friday evening, Not Going Out is one of the most watched programs on TV at the moment. And the reason it's popular is because it's observational comedy about married life.

And lots of it kind of rings true for people, uncomfortably true. But there's huge negativity in the program about marriage. In fact, that's often what gets the biggest laughs in the program.

Two weeks ago, Lucy and Lee were on their way to their sister's wedding in France. Kids in the back, bikes on the roof, got in a traffic jam, thought they were going to miss the ferry. Very, very late. At one point, Lucy said, stop the car.

And Lee said, we can't. We'll miss your sister's wedding. And she said, I wish I'd missed mine. She was then on the phone to the guy in customer services for the ferry. And he said, you don't have to be crazy to do my job, but it helps.

And she said, it sounds a bit like my marriage. And he said, well, at least I get to clock off. So, you know, we've got a nation laughing at the misery that marriage can cause. Well, we pop off to the cinema and see that if only I could find the perfect spouse, my life would be complete.

[3 : 31] So whichever narrative we're most tempted to be sort of drawn in by, we need God's help to speak to us about marriage. Marriage was his idea. And this teaching in chapter 5 of Ephesians helps us in that.

The longest treatment of marriage in the whole New Testament. But remember as well, it's part of this wider book, Ephesians. And in Ephesians so far, we've already been told so much about the church, how God has made it very clear that it's by his grace that he has saved us in sending Jesus into the world.

He is saving a people to be his people. And now we're being told in the second half of the book of Ephesians about how to live out those truths of God's goodness to us in the Lord Jesus.

The gospel should transform everything, including how we treat our spouses, how we think about marriage, how we raise kids, how our kids treat us as parents. The gospel changes everything.

And that's this section here. Now, I know that for some of us, for all kinds of different reasons, thinking about marriage can be a painful thing. I'm very aware of that. And there are people in our church for whom this is a painful subject.

[4 : 42] But we still need to be willing to listen to God about marriage so that we don't think too much of it, but we don't think too little of it. We understand it. We celebrate it as a gift.

We help our marriages in our church family to flourish. But we also celebrate singleness as a gift as well as a church family. So let's dive in. Last week, we were a bit more verse by verse going through.

This time, I'm just going to answer four questions that the Bible unlocks for us here. What marriage is, what marriage shows, what marriage does, and what marriage needs.

So firstly, what marriage is. When Paul starts talking about marriage here, the apostle Paul who wrote this, he quotes from God's good design in creation from Genesis chapter 2, 24.

So that comes in verse 31, if you just look down there. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

[5 : 42] Be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So it's the language of leaving and cleaving. And that's the language of covenant relationship. The Bible describes marriage as a covenant.

Now, a covenant is a deep, exclusive, personal relationship between two people that's based on ongoing promises of commitment to each other. It's based on promises that are ongoing.

So already, just by that one principle, Christian marriage is radically different from our culture's understanding of marriage. When you watch films and people get married in the movies, they say, I do.

I do take this person to be my spouse today. In Christian marriages, the partners don't say, I do. They say, I will. I will love you.

I will love you. Even when that's not in my best interests. I will love you. Even if you change. I will love you.

[6 : 48] Even when that gets really hard for me. In the marriages in the movies, the wedding day is a celebration of everything the couple have had in their relationship to get to that day.

There's a bit of looking back. And we've got to this day, and that's a great thing. In Christian marriages, the wedding day is the start of all that you promise to be for one another until you die, by God's grace, from that day forward.

It's not ultimately based on feelings. It's based on a commitment. It's not chemistry. It's covenant. And it is wonderful that it's like that.

The poet W.H. Auden said this. This is an extraordinary thing. Listen to this. Any marriage, happy or unhappy, is infinitely more interesting than any romance, however passionate.

Amazing. Even an unhappy marriage is more interesting than a romance. Why did he say that? Well, he said this. Marriage is not the involuntary result of fleeting emotion, but the creation of time and will.

[8 : 01] Do you see the differences there? With our contemporary ideas of romantic relationship, there's a real thrill if perhaps you like somebody, and the first time that that's expressed back to you, maybe you hold hands or you realize that they like you.

I mean, partly, to be honest, that's quite self-centered, because really you're just thrilled that someone likes you. But also, there is this excitement about, wow, this person that I really like, they like me back.

And there's this emotional power in that. But it doesn't last forever. It's a fleeting thing to enjoy, but to realize that it won't last. And God created something that builds on that into something far deeper and greater when he gave us marriage.

See, he called us to lifelong covenant relationship. So that if in your marriage, by an act of will, you sacrifice for the other person, over time, something deeper develops in you than romance.

You develop other person-centered love for your spouse. If you don't feel like you love them, you get on and serve them, and the love for them is nurtured and grows.

[9 : 11] So marriage is a covenant. And we need to see as well what that covenant was created for. I'm just going to go back to Genesis 2 and look at that. So it'd be helpful for me if you'd turn with me to Genesis 2.

You might keep a finger in Ephesians 5. But in Genesis 2, easy to find, all through God's creation, he's been creating things, and we're told it was good.

It was good. It was good. And then in verse 31 of chapter 1 of Genesis, you get God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. Everything is really good. And then we get the first thing that's not good.

It's in chapter 2, verse 18. The Lord God said, Now, if you just read that verse on its own, it sounds like the big problem that marriage was made to solve is loneliness, right?

The man is alone. He needs a woman. So marriage is fundamentally, if that were to be right, it's about companionship. But that's not the whole story. You have to think, why was it not good for man to be alone?

[10 : 20] It wasn't actually because he was lonely. It was because he'd been given a job to do. If you just look back up at verse 15, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

Then he's given a command. He's given freedom to eat any tree and told he mustn't eat from the tree of knowledge or he'll certainly die. So he's given this job to do. God has made man in his image to be his representative in the world, to kind of wear his badge and rule over the creation God's given him and relate to God.

And the idea is that by doing that, he will show the world God's glory. And at that point, we're told it's not good for Adam to be alone.

So God doesn't create another man to keep him company. He creates the woman. She's equal with man, but she's created because she's the perfect complement to him. So guys, the reality is that God creates the woman because the first man was stuck.

He needed help. You could even say things were in crisis until there was a woman around to sort everything out. So what does that mean for marriage? It means that marriage was created to help us serve God.

[11 : 40] There's a big book about marriage by a guy, Christopher Rash, and it's just called Marriage, Christian book, and a very technical book. And the subtitle is Sex in the Service of God.

See what he's saying? Marriage was created so that people could serve God better. And that means that marriage is about serving other people in love because you love God. It's about serving your spouse.

It's about serving God by raising kids, if God gives you them. It's about serving God by the husband and wife serving other people together as a married couple.

The way they love and serve other people expresses the fact that they're serving God together. Now that has a big impact on how you spend your time as a married couple.

If you think that marriage is ultimately about companionship, then your single friends will find that you're their best pal until your wedding day and they never see you again. The smug married syndrome.

[12 : 40] If you think marriage is ultimately about serving the Lord, then you will invest in your marriage, of course, because that's one way that you serve the Lord. But you'll also go out into the world together to serve God by serving others.

And your marriage makes you a team to do that. Tim Keller says this, if your marriage is strong, you'll go out into the world in strength. If your marriage is weak, you'll go out into the world in weakness.

So of course it's good to have chemistry between one another in married life. Of course romance is a good thing and married couples need to nurture that as best they can in one another.

But more deeply than that, you marry somebody because you want to serve God with them for the rest of your life. You feel you could do more for God together than you can by yourself.

That's why God gave us marriage. That's what marriage is. Secondly, let's see what marriage shows. We've seen that God made it as part of his good design for the world before anyone had done anything wrong.

[13 : 41] But knowing that mankind would turn away from God and knowing he'd send Jesus Christ to redeem his people, he designed marriage with this richer, deeper role in mind.

Just look with me again, back in Ephesians 5, verse 31. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church. So God created marriage to display the relationship between Christ and his church.

It is gospel reenactment. Marriage is gospel reenactment. So when in Revelation we hear these vivid descriptions of the future for God's people when Jesus comes in glory, we're told that the church is like a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

When Jesus tells parables to describe the relationship between him and his people and what heaven will be like, he talks about the great wedding banquet for him as he's united to his people.

[14 : 57] I don't know what you think about that, but I think it gives us a much more exciting, greater vision for marriage than many of us often have. My marriage is not about me. The way that I relate to my wife is one of the most powerful ways that we can display the gospel to the world.

And because of that background, God gives us some principles for married life. Now we're just going to touch on them now. If you want to hear more about them, we looked at them last week, we thought more about them.

They're on the website, the sermon's on the website. I know this is a really controversial section of the Bible to look at. Again, we thought more about this last week, but I just want to say, if you find this hard to accept the teaching about different roles in marriage, we need to think to ourselves, when will we allow God to disagree with us?

I told last week about the film, *The Stepford Wives*, where there are these husbands in this suburb in America, Stepford, and they've got fed up of their wives disagreeing with them, so they just replace them with robots that will just say, yes, dear, yes, dear, yes, dear, all the time.

The problem in churches today is that we make God into a Stepford God. As soon as he disagrees with us, we say, oh, well, he can't really mean that, because we just want him to agree with everything we think.

[16 : 16] Well, surely, if anywhere, we need help from God and God to speak and disagree with us, it's in the area of married life, given our culture's disastrous approach to relationships, family, and marriage.

So here are the principles. Verse 22, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. So part of the wife's Christian life as she submits to Christ is that she submits to her husband.

Why? Verse 23, For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

That word head is a word that, whenever it's used, carries with it the idea of authority. Jesus Christ is in authority over the church. The husband is to model that in the marriage.

He is the leader. How far does that stretch? Verse 24, Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

[17 : 23] So again, we looked at this last week, asking how does the church submit to Christ? So then how should a wife submit to her husband? That's half the story. The other half comes in verse 25.

Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

So the husband is called to use his leadership, that role in the marriage, for his wife's true good at great cost to himself. He lays down his life every day for his wife, making his decisions and living his life selflessly for the benefit of her growth in godliness, her growth in her faith and hope and love.

Those are the principles and every marriage is different. So the Lord gives us freedom to work out those principles in our own marriages for how they apply to us.

Liberals want to deny the differences and say, no, men and women are the same and we can't do that. Conservatives want to take a principle like that and import lots of cultural baggage so that you know that the wife has the cookbook and the husband has the checkbook and that sort of thing, but God's word doesn't let us do that either.

[18 : 52] It gives us principles and tells us the husband is the spiritual leader sacrificially for the spiritual good of his wife and the wife joyfully submits to her husband in everything.

We did more on that last week. Let me just give another implication of that truth that's especially important in our times. If this is God's big idea for marriage, marriage has to be one man and one woman.

See, the arguments that are being made today for the doctrine of marriage to be changed in churches, they tend to completely miss what we're told here that God made marriage for.

See, if marriage is nothing more than a committed, faithful, loving relationship, then you perhaps could make the argument, well, let's say that marriage could be a committed, loving, faithful relationship between two men or two women or one man and two women or one woman and two men.

But God's design for marriage is that it displays the gospel, modeling Christ and the church to the world because the man and the woman have an asymmetrical relationship in the way that Christ and the church have that.

[20 : 14] So you have to have the complementarity of one man and one woman in a marriage, a Christian marriage. It's important because since the 1980s, St Silas has been part of the Scottish Episcopal Church, a member of the Scottish Episcopal Church and the SEC, that wider denomination, is voting this summer on whether to change its definition of marriage.

And we see here that that can't be right. Any church that says that marriage can be two men or two women has departed from the truth. So we've heard what marriage is and what marriage shows.

Thirdly then, what marriage does. what marriage does is it makes you more like Jesus. That's God's agenda for all of us, whether we've been given the gift of marriage or the gift of singleness.

It's that by His Spirit we're being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. And that's even true of husbands and wives in their different roles in married life.

So husbands are called to be like Christ in the sense of Mark chapter 10 verse 45. Jesus says, the Son of Man who's got authority, Jesus has authority over the world, the Son of Man didn't come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

[21 : 34] So as the husband uses his spiritual leadership sacrificially for his wife, he's being like Jesus. Galatians 2.20, Paul says of the Son of God, God's chosen divine King, He's the one who loved me and gave Himself for me.

So the more a wife supports her husband in his role of leading his family well and lets him lead as a servant leader, the more he is imitating Jesus Christ.

But the wife is called to be like Christ as well in the way that he joyfully, voluntarily submits himself to God the Father. So in Philippians 2, we're told this, being in very nature God, Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage, rather He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

So in doing all of that, Jesus was still fully God but He submitted Himself to His Father's will. In Gethsemane, He even says, not my will but Yours be done. He's still God but He is submitting joyfully to God the Father's will.

So the more that a wife submits herself to her husband, the more she is imitating Christ. In fact, the husband's objective in the marriage is that by His leadership, she'll more and more become the person that Jesus made her to be.

[23 : 04] I remember being at a friend's wedding and the groom and the bride were at the front and she was looking dazzling as they often do and the minister asked her to stand up and said to the bridegroom, she looks wonderful today, of course, she looks beautiful.

Your ambition now, your job now for the rest of your life is to prayerfully and sacrificially do what you can to make sure that's how she looks spiritually when Jesus comes back.

And so marriage can be a great means of grace for a married couple in helping each other become more like Jesus. But because of that, marriage is hard. We should expect that there'll be conflict in our marriages.

Marriages can be really intense because your spouse sees you when other people don't. It's like the classic journey into church, you know, the effect of those red doors as you walk in.

You know, it's Sunday morning, you've got kids, you can't get them out of the door, you tell them four times to put their coats on, you argue with them, you argue with each other, you can't get the car parked near your church, you blame each other, you're muttering.

[24 : 15] As soon as you walk through those red doors and people say, how are you? You say, we're fine, everything's fine. The perfect happy family. But it's a lot harder to hide your sin from your own spouse.

They see you when you've let your guard down. And that's a really good thing because it brings our sin out from the darkness into the light so that we can confess it to God and to each other and repent and grow by God's grace.

It's very humbling to do that. The motto for everyone in your marriage should be, if you're married, the biggest problem in my marriage is my selfishness. And it means that our biggest ambition for our spouse is that God uses me to help them become more like Jesus.

We were looking at this passage in growth groups last week or the week before, depending on where you're up to. And in our growth group, Kathy, my wife, said this. She said, I think in my marriage I'm called to be Martin's biggest fan and his worst critic at the same time.

So she wants to encourage me, she wants to appreciate my strengths, but she also wants to be my worst critic and be able to point out to me the ways that I'm ungodly.

[25 : 30] There are lots of ways. Another implication of that is that it means you never really know the person you're going to marry. You might go out for quite a long time and feel like you know them quite well, but even then you only know what they're like at that moment and we all change.

In fact, you don't even know yourself as you get married. Because marriage will expose things about you that you hadn't predicted as you cut the corners off each other. So we've heard what marriage is.

It's a commitment in the service of God. We've heard what marriage displays. It's gospel reenactment. We've heard what marriage does. It makes you more like Christ. Finally this morning, what marriage needs.

What it needs is two people with a spirit-wrote captivation with Jesus Christ. Christ. Paul started this section in verse 18. He said, be filled with the spirit in verse 18.

At the end of chapter 3 we had the prayer that Paul prayed as he started to go into this practical application of the Christian life. He said, I pray that you would be strengthened with power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for you.

[26 : 44] So that's what we need. We need the spirit to saturate our souls with a grasp of how much Jesus Christ loves us in having come and died for us so that we have the strength to love others sacrificially.

So in the gospel we learn that in Jesus Christ we've got a savior who sees far more than our spouse could ever see, who knows the very depths of our sin, but because he is perfect and because he is overflowing with love he loves us anyway and he paid the price to make every day a day when we're completely forgiven by God and we need the spirit of God to imprint that on our hearts so that we in turn can love selflessly in our marriages.

If you love your spouse more than you love Jesus Christ you won't love them well because you'll expect too much of them and you'll burden them and they'll disappoint you. But if you love Jesus Christ more than you love your spouse you will be able to love them well serving them because the Lord first served you and remembering that even the greatest human marriage is just a picture of the marriage to come between Christ and his people whom he loved so dearly and so deeply that he bled and died to make them holy.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven we praise you and thank you for the mysteries that you've made known to us in this book Ephesians.

We marvel at the mystery that you have blessed us in the Lord Jesus with every spiritual blessing in Christ that whoever we are and whatever we've become however we've failed in our marriages in our personal lives we can stand forgiven in the Lord Jesus with a fresh start.

[28 : 36] we pray Father God that you will indeed strengthen us with your power to grasp the dimensions of the love of Christ for us and so we pray that the marriages in our church family at St. Silas will display your gospel will serve you and fulfill your purposes will be enriched and strengthened in love and will enable us to serve one another in strength for the glory of your name.

Amen.