

THE MAKING OF A GODLY MARRIAGE

In the name of Christ Jesus, dear friends:

It is not often that a pastor preaches a sermon on Genesis 2, and it's generally not on a Sunday. It is rather suited as a wedding sermon.

The subject matter of a godly marriage might explain why pastors don't preach many sermons, and perhaps you haven't heard too many sermons, based on this text. Genesis 2:18-24 is about the institution of marriage, and not everyone here today is married. At one time some of you were married. Others are hoping that someday you will get married. But unless you currently have a wedding ring on your finger, these words don't directly apply. Or do they?

Marriage is a divine institution God established when he brought Adam and Eve together in the Garden of Eden, but it is more than that. With the first marriage, God also established the pattern for every marriage to follow. Marriage is the foundation of the family, and the family forms the bedrock of society. These words are relevant for all because we are all part of society. These words are meaningful for everyone because every one of us is part of a family.

There is another reason for us to meditate on this specific Word of God today. The institution of marriage has come under attack on multiple fronts. And so Christians who appreciate the blessings of marriage and want to honor God's design for marriage, we need to be strengthened. We need to be encouraged. We need to be reminded why we believe what we believe.

This morning God speaks to us through his Word, and his Word provides us with exactly what we need. It encourages our hearts. It strengthens our resolve. In words that are both ancient and relevant, in words that are so beautiful and so practical, the Lord himself lays out what makes a godly marriage...

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The first chapter of Genesis records the details of God's creation. On the first day, he created light. On the fourth day, he made the sun, moon and stars. On the fifth day, he created fish and birds. And after each creative act, God made the same observation. It's a phrase that is repeated again and again: **"God saw that it was good" (1:12 et al).**

This background, along with this repetition, makes readers stop in their tracks when they get to Genesis 2:18 and God's declaration that something in his perfect creation is not good. In the opening verse, the Lord identifies the problem and proposes a solution: **"It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (18).**

What follows appears to be a tangent from the main point of the account, but it isn't. God gave Adam the task of naming some of the animals. On the surface, it made sense because God had appointed Adam to rule over the rest of his creation. But there was another reason, a deeper reason, for this special assignment. As the parade of animals passed by, Adam came to realize that there was no other creature like him, no one created especially for him.

After his work was finished, Adam went to bed, but not necessarily because he was worn out. The Lord caused him to fall into a deep sleep, and while Adam slept God performed a miracle. He took a rib from the first man and used it to create the first woman.

Have you ever wondered why Eve was created this way? Why wasn't she just formed out the ground like Adam? Why was she fashioned out of one of his bones? Matthew Henry came up with an interesting suggestion. You probably have no idea who that is...unless you were in Bible class last Sunday when we were studying Genesis 2 and I quoted him.

Matthew Henry was a British theologian who lived in the 1700s, and here is a paraphrase of his explanation of Eve's creation: *"Eve wasn't created out of Adam's head to rule over him...or out of his feet to be trampled on by him...but out of his side to be near him...under his arm to be protected by him...and near his heart to be loved by him."* Technically, it's not biblical. And I admit that it's a little sentimental. But I appreciated the thought, and I thought you might too.

There is no need for us to speculate about what Adam was thinking. After the Lord presented Eve to him as his bride, Adam expressed his enthusiastic approval when he exclaimed (by the way, this is the first recorded human utterance in history): **"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (23).**

There was no white dress. There was no unity candle. No rings were exchanged either. But there was a man and a woman. Before the Lord stood a husband and a wife. In Genesis 2, in the Garden of Eden, God gives us a glimpse of the first marriage. Everything was perfect, and God intended for that perfect pattern to be repeated when he declared: **"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (24).**

You don't have to be married to recognize that in our sinful world perfect marriages do not exist. You don't need to be a theologian to see that what passes for marriage today bears little resemblance to what God intended. So what happened? Why are so many marriages broken? Why does the institution of marriage itself appear to be broken? And is there anything we can do to fix it?

Let's start by defining our terms. Every year my catechism students learn that marriage is the 1) lifelong 2) union of 3) one man and one woman. Nine words total. Three parts. So simple. So clear. And it is so interesting that three of the greatest threats to a godly marriage attack each of those three parts.

Lifelong. Valentine's Day cards get it wrong when they make claims like: "Our love will last forever." Marriage is only intended for this life, but it is intended for life. Not until you get bored. Not until one spouse becomes a burden on the other. When a couple makes their vows to each other, God is the one joining them together. And the words of Jesus in today's gospel lesson leave no room for confusion: "**What God has joined together, let man not separate**" (Mark 10:9).

In the same lesson, Jesus does talk about divorce. And there are scriptural reasons that allow a Christian to get a divorce. But in our country divorce has become an epidemic. Some states even allow for "no fault" divorces, but not God. Every divorce is the result of sin. And every divorce (at least every divorce I have seen) causes pain and suffering for everyone involved.

Union. Marriage brings two people together emotionally and physically. Both are involved when God talks about the two becoming one flesh. But what happens to marriage when people shortcut the process? What happens when people want to satisfy their physical urges without any kind of binding commitment? You get unplanned/unwanted pregnancies. You get STD rates going through the roof. You find people who are hurting, people with lasting emotional and sometimes even physical scars.

Ask your grandparents what they called it when two people lived together outside of marriage. They called it "living in sin," and there was a stigma attached to it. A couple generations later there are very few people in our permissive culture (and I'm including Christians in that statement) who consider cohabitation to be a sin at all.

One man and one woman. This used to be the one part of the definition most people could agree on...until a couple years ago when the definition of marriage was changed. Not just in people's minds, but in the courts. In our country and many other countries around the world, it is perfectly legal to marry a person of the same sex. And in some of those places, you open yourself up to persecution (or even prosecution) if you raise a contrarian voice.

I wouldn't be surprised if right about now some of you are thinking: "Okay, pastor. That was quite a rant. And we get it. We may not be wearing blue robes, but you are preaching to the choir. We understand what God's Word says. We accept the biblical definition of marriage. We believe in the sanctity of marriage. We are convinced that the blessings God gives to couples in marriage should be reserved for marriage. So what do you want us to do?"

If you are like me, the first thing you need to do is repent. You don't need to apologize for what you believe, but how many people outside of church know what you believe? In a world that is so politically correct, in a culture where tolerance is the greatest virtue of all, having a biblical view of marriage will make you a target. And who wants to be a target? It is much easier to keep quiet, to keep to ourselves, to keep telling ourselves that what other people do is none of our business, that everyone has a right to their own personal beliefs.

It is true that every person has a right to his/her own convictions, but beliefs that ignore God's clear Word, beliefs that blatantly disregard God's will, beliefs that find ways to excuse and accept sin, those beliefs do not constitute saving faith. They will only lead to death.

If you have ever given in to the pressure to conform to the pattern of this sinful world, including the world's warped view of marriage, confess that sin, along with every other sin. Confess your sinfulness, acknowledge your unworthiness, and then rejoice in God's forgiveness.

The Bible describes forgiveness in so many different ways, as a burden that has been lifted, a stain that has been removed, a debt that has been paid. But connecting with the words before us today we see God's grace most clearly in Ephesians 5, where Paul compares Christ's love for us to a husband's love for his wife. How great is that love? How much does your Savior love you? He loves you so much that he gave himself up for you, he sacrificed his life for you, he died on the cross for you, to remove every wrinkle and blemish, to make you holy and blameless (25-27).

Because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven. Because of Jesus, we are headed to heaven. Because of Jesus, we strive to do his will on earth, and that includes honoring God's institution of marriage. If you are a Christian husband, love your wife with a Christ-like love. That means making sacrifices and putting the needs of your family before your own. If you are a Christian wife, treat your husband with love and respect. Encourage him to be the spiritual leader of the family God wants him to be. Single Christians, you glorify God when you respect the guidelines God has given for marriage. Stand out. Be different. When it comes to your relationships, when it comes to living together before marriage, don't be afraid to say: "I know what the world says, but I want to do what God's Word says."

Jesus calls Christians the light of the world, and that is what we are. We are lights shining in a dark place when share our faith, when we live our faith, when we honor God's gift of marriage and with our words and actions encourage others to do the same. Let me encourage you, let God's Word encourage you, to let your light shine. Amen.