

1. The Purpose of Marriage

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 2007

Preacher: William Philip

[0 : 00] Well, turn with me, if you would, first of all, to Matthew's Gospel, chapter 19, that we read just a few moments ago. And tonight's subject is the purpose of marriage, or, as I think we'll come to see, a subtitle might be this, Marriage is for Mission.

Now, you might balk at the idea of starting a series on this subject of relationships. And I guess some of us might feel this isn't really an appropriate thing for public preaching.

I want to say one or two things about that. First of all, if that is the case, then we do have to have trouble with many of Paul's New Testament letters, because they deal with this subject, and they deal with it in the context of old people and young people, male and female, old and young children, the whole church together.

And since this whole realm is an area of great confusion and problem in society today, it really is important, I think, that we address this as the church and understand clearly the Bible's teaching. Secondly, the New Testament is very clear. When the New Testament talks about worship, it's not talking about singing. It's not talking about church services.

[1 : 19] It's not talking about prayer. It's talking about the whole of life. It's the same word as service. And when the New Testament talks about the meetings of God's people, it talks about us meeting together in order to hear God's word, so that we can encourage one another to respond to God's word together, and so that we can live together lives of real worship.

That is, lives that please God. So, a right understanding of these things is going to be essential, isn't it, if we're going to live lives of worship. And we need one another to help one another do that.

That's very clear. It's clear just from our own experience of life, but it's also clearly told us in the New Testament. But you might wonder, well, why am I starting a series like this now?

Well, first, I think it's always necessary that we regularly think about these things, and that's why they're there so often in the Scriptures. But secondly, it's just something that seems to me to be necessary for us in our fellowship.

Let me just run by you some of the pastoral issues that I've discussed with members of the congregation here just over the last, well, certainly over the last year. I've talked with some of you about weddings, and we've had some weddings, and that's been a cause of great joy.

[2 : 39] I've talked to some of you about engagements, engagements that have been made, but also engagements that have been broken, and other relationships that have begun, and other relationships that have ended.

I've talked to some of you about separation and divorce, sometimes something that's in process and has been gone through, sometimes it's been the aftermath of that, and of course all the other things that flow from that, the issues of single parenthood and the sadness of broken families.

I've spoken about marriages that are in difficulty, about affairs and about adultery. I've spoken to some of you about the whole issue surrounding children.

One of the things that I've noticed is that no children have been born to any of the couples in our church here since I've come as your minister. And there are all sorts of things that lie behind that, some of them very painful.

I talk to people about issues to do with singleness, and all the issues surrounding that, including what seems to be a trend now of internet dating, and seeking partners that way.

[3 : 57] And sometimes I've talked to some of you about the really very complicated sequelae of that sort of thing. And then of course there's the whole realm of sexual difficulties within marriage and outside marriage, previous sexual promiscuity that has an aftermath and problems, sometimes present sexual sin, difficulties with all sorts of things, including pornography and so on, homosexuality, all kinds of other difficulties and abnormalities of attraction, even including things

like bestiality.

I've dealt with all of these things, and many more in fact, just in the last year or so. Now don't be shocked by that.

I hope you're not shocked by that. You shouldn't be shocked. I'm not shocked by that. Because I know my own heart, and I know my own heart is full of sin. And I know that the church of Jesus Christ is, well it's a convalescent ward, isn't it?

Many of us, always, in fact all of us really, are here recovering from sin. And that's wonderful. And it's something to rejoice about that we are in that convalescent ward, isn't it?

Remember what Paul said to the church at Corinth, that city that was full of immorality, that was full of adultery, that was full of promiscuous sex and homosexuality.

[5 : 28] And Paul said to the church, and such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.

And it's a wonderful thing that we are recovering in the convalescent ward of the Lord Jesus Christ. But even recovering and recovered sinners still bear scars in their lives, don't they?

We know that. And where there is real ministry of God's Spirit going on, there will always be things that are unearthed. There will always be mess in our life that's brought to the surface as God is dealing with us.

And things have to be dealt with. And so we do need to be honest and real. We need to help one another. That's something that we all need. But also we need to remember, don't we, that sin is always crouching at our door.

We need to be alert. We need, as a people, as a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, to build health into our whole outlook in the whole realm of relationships and so on.

[6 : 35] So as to prevent ill health in the future. So as to keep ourselves and to keep one another on God's path for our lives. So it is important that we think about these things together.

And I hope that this will help us as, well, as parents, to think clearly about ourselves and also to teach our children. I hope it will help young people, especially those who are in the days of, well, hormonal overdrive, to keep the right perspective on these things.

I hope that it will help older folk to take up their responsibilities, to listen to Paul's command to Titus in Titus chapter 2, to help the younger members of the church to work their way through all of the difficulties and all of the issues concerning families and marriages and relationships and so on.

Because there are some things, of course, that aren't appropriate for public address when we're all here together. And there is need for frank talk, for frank advice, one-to-one and couple-to-couple. There's a real place for that in the church. That's part of what real fellowship means. Not cups of tea and talking about the football, but real fellowship, things that help one another. And some of these things need to be done privately, but many things do need to be said publicly so that we hear together the teaching of Scripture on these things.

[8 : 01] And I hope that we'll cover some of these in the weeks to come. Issues to do with marriage and singleness and children and procreation and sexual intimacy in general and the thorny issues to do with divorce and separation and remarriage and so on.

Now, I can't cover all of these things, of course, in great detail. I want to recommend to you some books that I think are very valuable and helpful. The little book, Truth and Love, that we mentioned a few weeks ago.

There's still some of those, I think, on the bookstore. And that's a very good little introduction and a very sound little book that would help anybody. C.S. Lewis, in particular, his book, Mere Christianity, and also his book, The Four Loves, has an awful lot of wisdom and realism and real sense.

Helmut Thieliker, the German theologian, The Ethics of Sex. That's also a very fine book, but something of a rather heavier tome. And then also Christopher Ashe, who has a book published by IVP called Marriage, with a subtitle, Sex and the Service of God.

That is a very fine book indeed, and I'm going to draw on that and quote from it once or twice later on this evening. And my aim is that in these studies, I'll help you to think these things through, and also that I'll encourage you to discuss these things with one another.

[9 : 21] And also, if this is a need for you, that you will ask other folk for help. If there are areas of these things that you need help in, speak to me by all means.

Speak to one of your elders. Speak to somebody else, a group leader, somebody who you know well, who can give you help in these things. Maybe at some stage we'll have a question time, and

we'll meet some of these questions together.

But tonight I want to start right at the very beginning, and I want to ask the question that is foundational and basic to all of this, and that is this. What is the purpose of marriage? By that I mean God's purpose for marriage, of course, not an idea that we might make up.

So we're going to begin in Matthew chapter 9 where Jesus himself teaches about marriage. Now you'll notice that the question that Jesus is asked is not in fact about marriage, but about divorce. But Jesus answers that question in relationship to God's teaching in the Old Testament about the purpose of marriage itself. And he deals with it in this chapter, Matthew 19, in the context of God's story of the kingdom, right from creation to the new creation, what he calls in verse 28, the new world.

[10:43] And that is the framework in which Jesus begins to discuss marriage. So I want to make just two points tonight, really. First is this, marriage is from God. And the second is that marriage is for God.

First then, marriage is from God. The first thing Jesus does here is take us right back to the very beginning of creation. Look at verses 4 and 5. He who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

So God is the giver, the creator of marriage. He who created humanity created sexuality and commanded the union of the sexes in a permanent public bond of marriage.

The male and the female, Jesus says, publicly leave their previous primary relationship within the family and they form a new primary family unit.

God gives this gift. And notice in verse 6, that is the reason why man must not undo this gift. We'll say more about that in a later study.

[12:01] But Jesus' point is clear, isn't it? Marriage is not a social convention. Marriage is not just a cultural custom. Marriage is not man's construction.

It is God's creation. It's part of the order of creation. Genesis 1 and 2 speak about God's creating a whole material order. But they also speak about God creating a whole moral order.

And marriage is part of the moral order of this creation. And therefore, to reject marriage and the concept of marriage that is given to us in Scripture is not just sin against God's command.

It's also folly, isn't it? If human society is created by God to work in a certain way, then we are fools to try and make it work in a different way. That's just plain common sense.

And by experience, we only have to look, don't we, look at the change in social cohesion in our own society over the last 30 or 40 years to see just how clear that is.

[13:03] Where marriage is put at a discount and disregarded, we shouldn't be surprised when society begins to fall apart right about us. So marriage is God's creation.

It is a universal gift to humanity. But it is a gift from God. And as such, it primarily is a responsibility to be exercised by us and not a right to be demanded in every personal circumstance.

And that's important. It explains a tension that we have in our lives, doesn't it? It explains why it's a natural desire for men and women to want to marry and to have family and so on.

And yet, for any individual in particular, marriage is not a right to be assumed because it's God's gift. And therefore, it may be withheld from some for various reasons.

Sometimes the reasons are only known to God. Jesus goes on to say that, doesn't he, in verses 11 and 12 when he speaks about the eunuch, the celibate person, the person who isn't married. It's quite plain, not all marry.

[14:13] Some, says Jesus, are celibate and must remain so. Sometimes he says it's reasons of birth, whatever exact reason that might be. It might be a personality issue. It might be all kinds of things.

Sometimes he says it's just because of life experience. And again, that might be our childhood, our adulthood. It might be a bad thing that's happened to us, but it might be a quite indifferent thing. It might just be plain circumstances. Sometimes there seems to be no good reason at all. Or simply, sometimes he says in verse 12, do you see, some will not marry for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Now you see, that's very important, that last line, isn't it? Because it reminds us, it leads us on to see that marriage as a gift is not just an end in itself.

Rather, marriage is a means to an end. The purpose of marriage, like the purpose of every other relationship, Jesus is telling us, is to serve the kingdom of heaven.

[15:22] Now that's absolutely vital and it's absolutely basic to all our thinking about right relationships. Whether you're married or whether you're not yet married. Whether you're confirmed in singleness or whether you're single but desperately not wanting to be confirmed in singleness.

We must see that marriage is God's gift and therefore it's to be received from him as a gift if he wills it and not snatched from him as a right.

That would turn it into idolatry, wouldn't it? That's what Adam and Eve did, isn't it? They snatched the gifts that God wanted to give them but they snatched it as a right in their own way. Marriage is a gift but it's not just a gift, it's a gift with a purpose.

That brings us to the second heading and the main one. Marriage is for God. Marriage is a gift that God gives to humanity to serve the purpose of his heavenly kingdom.

It's a means to an end, it's not an end in itself. And its purpose is the same as the purpose of human creation in the first place to glorify God.

[16:37] God. That's what man's chief end is. Remember the shorter catechism. To worship God, to serve God and to serve his glorious kingdom. That's the chief end of man and that's the chief end of marriage.

God made sex, that is sexual differentiation and made marriage in order to serve his purposes in creation and in recreation. And therefore the marriage relationship must be defined by the relationship that we have to God's eternal kingdom.

That's the whole context, isn't it? In Matthew chapter 19 we saw that as we studied Matthew's gospel. Our study then was called defining relationships. The whole controversy with the Pharisees was that they wanted to use God's word to serve themselves so they could have easy divorce, so they could have sexual satisfaction for themselves.

But Jesus focuses on marriage and on marriage as proper place in God's purpose for his kingdom. Marriage and our attitude to marriage or to non-marriage must be defined by relation to serving the kingdom of God. It's the kingdom that is the glorious end purpose of marriage, whether we're married or whether we're not.

[17:58] verse 12, it's serving the kingdom of heaven that is important. And that's true for all our relationships and all the way through this chapter he brings up other relationships, children.

Well, for such is the kingdom he says. Possessions, the rich young man, but then verse 21, treasure in heaven. Well, the kingdom must be first. That's what Jesus is saying.

Verses 28 and 29 as we read, all earthly relationships Jesus is saying they're only good if they help and not hinder the kingdom of heaven. That's what matters.

And Jesus' point is clear. It's heavenly relationships, that is the task of sharing and building Christ's heavenly kingdom, it's heavenly relationships that define the purpose and the goal of all earthly relationships and especially the most powerful and intimate earthly relationship, that of sexual union in marriage.

And that is so whether you personally happen to be married or happen not to be married. Marriage is from God, it's a gift, but it's also for God. It's given so that human beings may serve God, our creator and our redeemer in his purpose for creation and redemption.

[19:18] that's the primary purpose of marriage. It's his gift to us, but if you like, it's not primarily a gift for us.

It's a gift for us to exercise for God and his kingdom. And therefore, right marriage is worshipping God, it's serving God. But wrong marriage, well, it's worshipping us and therefore it's idolatry. Now, I want us to see this because it is the foundation of all the other more commonly considered purposes of marriage that we think about. It's the rock that all of these specific benefits of marriage actually stand on.

Let me read to you the section from our Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24, about marriage. Marriage, it says, was ordained for the mutual help of husband and wife, for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue and of the church with a holy seed, and for the prevention of uncleanness.

I call that the three Ps of marriage, personal relationship, procreation, and public order or prevention of sin. Now, notice the first one of those in order that we had in the Confession, mutual help, in itself, it points us to something more basic still, doesn't it?

[20 : 43] It points us to the primary purpose because the question arises, well, mutual help with what? The answer is, help in serving God's purpose for this world, serving the kingdom of heaven.

Remember, in our Confession of Faith, the context is very clear. The whole focus of the thing is on man's chief end, which is to glorify God. If you read the earlier chapter in the Confession, chapter 4, on creation, it speaks about man being in obedience to God's command and having dominion over the creation, that is, the purpose of mankind, serving God's purpose to image him on this earth and to have dominion and rule over his world.

And so, all the subsidiary and the particular purposes of marriage and the ways that marriage as an institution itself serve the purpose of God for man, they're all to fulfill the primary thing, the purpose of God for his kingdom in this world.

And Jesus, in speaking of both the creation at the beginning and of the kingdom of heaven, what he calls the new world, he's clearly bringing together these things. And he's showing us that we're never to think of marriage outwith the context of seeing it existing first and foremost with a purpose. For a task serving God's kingdom. Serving God's purpose, that is, both in creation and in new creation through redemption.

[22 : 21] So having Jesus, having seen Jesus take these things in Matthew 19 and quoting from Genesis, let's turn now to Genesis 1 and 2 because I want us to see for ourselves clearly what it is that Jesus is assuming in his teaching.

I want us to see how these three Ps of marriage, personal, mutual relationship of comfort and help, procreation and public order and restraint of sin, how all of these find their place in the primary context of an understanding of marriage that is clearly purpose-driven, that is goal-oriented, that has a task to do.

first look at the first passage that Jesus quoted, that's Genesis 1 verse 27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.

Why did God create mankind male and female? Not just male or female or unisex. Well, the answer is in the context on either side of that verse.

Look at verse 26. What is the purpose of man's creation? Let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over all the living creatures and the world.

[23 : 46] mankind is made to image God in order to rule as God's vicegerent over the earth and its host. The task of dominion is the context of the creation of man as male and female.

And look at verse 28. The task of dominion is also the context of the command to procreate. And God blessed them and God said to them be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds and every living creature and so on.

So God brings human beings into a world full of life and potentiality and a world that's going to need sovereign rule and dominion and caring. And that unique task is given to man to fill the earth, to subdue it, to have dominion.

And that is a task that can only be fulfilled, it seems, by man's being fruitful and multiplying by procreation. That's the context of man's creation as a sexual being, as male and female.

Let me quote to you Christopher Ashe here. On the one hand, towards the creator, humankind is given moral responsibility. On the other, towards creation, he is entrusted with a task.

[25 : 11] The coordination of both aspects of this orientation is the key to the ethics of sex. So please note then the particular focus in Genesis 1 here on the procreational purpose of marriage is in order that it might serve God's purpose for man, that he might have dominion over all of God's creation.

That's the purpose of procreation. Okay then, let's now look at Genesis chapter 2, the second account of creation that speaks of man as a sexually differentiated being.

It's not a rival account of creation, of course. Genesis chapter 1 looks at it from a cosmic perspective. Genesis chapter 2 looks at the whole world from the perspective of human beings.

Now Jesus, in Matthew 19, also quoted from Genesis 2, he quoted verse 24, which rounds off the whole story of the creation of Eve. And again, I'm very indebted here to Christopher Ashe for the clarity of his exposition of this.

In his book on marriage, he points out that when we read this chapter and this account of the creation of woman, we very often make a big mistake. We look at verse 18 and we take it right out of context and we read into it all of our presuppositions.

[26 : 32] God says, it's not good for man to be alone. Therefore, he'll make a helper for him. And we read that verse and we assume that first of all, alone means lonely, which in fact it doesn't.

And we then take from that that in fact the primary problem that Adam had was loneliness and therefore the main answer to loneliness is marriage and sexual intimacy.

That's the answer for the man who is alone. And therefore the primary purpose of marriage becomes this personal relationship of comfort and companionship. But Christopher Ashe rightly points out that all the way through the rest of the Bible, God's answer for human longing and loneliness and the desire for companionship is not in fact ever met by the provision of marriage or sexual relationships.

The answer when the human heart is longing for companionship and friendship, the answer that God gives is the warmth and the fellowship of belonging to God's people.

Psalms 68, verse 6 is just one example. He is the God who sets the lonely not in marriages but in families. Ephesians chapter 2, the whole nature of the gospel explained there is that God has brought the outsider in to belong to God's family, the one family.

[28 : 08] That's very, very important for us to realize. We live, don't we, in a sex-crazed society and we have come to believe the complete fallacy that intimacy and belonging and deep relational satisfaction can only be found really within the intimacy of a sexual relationship.

That's what we think, isn't it? But that's just not true. It's not true if we really think about life. It's not true in Scripture.

And that is certainly not primarily what the marriage relationship and the sexual relationship was created for. No, look again at the context of Genesis chapter 2.

Verse 18 is plain, isn't it? Adam's situation is not good, God says, because he needs a helper. Well, a helper for what? Well, a helper for the task of working God's creation to fulfill God's purpose for it. That's why he needs a helper. Look back at verse 5 of chapter 2. There's no order on the earth yet. Why? Because there was no man to work the ground.

[29 : 26] So in verse 7, God forms man to meet the need of creation. In verse 8, he plants a garden to put him in it, to work it. Look at verse 15. It's very explicit. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

You see, God creates the whole world and he creates a garden as a prototype of the kingdom that God wants the world to be like and he puts man in the garden and he shows him what his world is to be like and then he says to him, go, be fruitful and multiply, fill the whole cosmos and subdue it, make the whole world, the whole of this magnificent creation, make it into the garden of God. Take God's kingdom pattern and take it to all creation. That's what Adam needs help for. Hence verse 18.

And yes, he needs just the right kind of helper, someone who is sexually complementary to him. But primarily, the need for a helper is the need for a partner in serving God's purpose in creation. That's the purpose of the personal relationship aspect of marriage too. It's a partnership to serve the purpose of God's kingdom in the world.

[30 : 48] And the mutuality, therefore, of the intimacy of sexual love isn't the goal of marriage. It serves the goal, but the goal is serving God and serving his kingdom.

So you see how both the procreation of marriage and the personal relationship of marriage are to serve the chief calling of mankind, to glorify God in serving him in his kingdom and serving him forever.

That's the purpose of marriage in the creation. Now, of course, all of this comes before the fall. And sin, as we know, wrecks God's creation.

But the rest of Genesis teaches that the primary purpose of marriage still remains the same. It's just that now the primary thing is that God's whole world needs a rescue through redemption.

That's the primary need now. Dominion by mankind over the whole of God's world can only happen through God's plan of redemption. Just filling the world with progeny won't solve the problem anymore.

[32 : 01] No, God's whole plan is to have a new start with a new family. And so Abraham becomes the one who is the inheritor of these promises to be fruitful and to multiply.

And God's promise to Abraham is that his seed would fill the cosmos. It's a promise now not just of multiplication of humanity but of the multiplication of the people of God.

And that's why from Genesis 12 onwards the focus of the blessings of procreation are all upon Israel as God's people. It's the people to serve God's purpose of redemption through recreation of the world.

That's how dominion will at last be exercised by God's people over the world through his plan of redemption. And it was true that at last it was through the blessing of procreation through the seed of the woman that ultimate redemption for the world did come through the Lord Jesus Christ who alone can totally fulfill God's task for mankind.

He is as the New Testament tells us the second Adam the last Adam. But until the Lord Jesus Christ comes again to consummate his kingdom marriage for us today still has exactly the same task serving God's kingdom in the world.

[33 : 26] Serving God's ultimate purpose for which the world was created. But we serve that task as we serve to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ primarily through the proclamation of the gospel.

Creation's goal after the fall can only be fulfilled through God's purpose of redemption and that's still so today. And it's still the chief purpose of marriage to serve that task.

Through procreation yes. Not just filling the world with progeny but filling the world with godly offspring those who will serve to advance the kingdom of God.

Not just godly children missionary children in fact those whose lives will serve the purpose of God's recreation of this world through the gospel of the kingdom.

That's the purpose of procreation in marriage today. Did you realize that? That's why you're having children. To further the purpose of the kingdom of God. And because God's people now are being gathered into the kingdom from all peoples from every tribe and people and nation then Christian marriage serves that by begetting children who will be heralds of the kingdom.

[34 : 55] That's how procreation in our marriages serves the kingdom today. And it's also how the partnership of marriage serves the kingdom today. The personal relationship, the intimate aspect of marriage, it's still task oriented.

That's why we get married, to serve better the kingdom of God. Not otherwise. And by the way, the third P, the public order and decency in preventing sin, that aspect of marriage, obviously is a result of the fall.

That wasn't needed before the fall, was it? Marriage can't survive without protection because of human sin. That's why we have laws, or we used to have laws at least, that promoted marriage. You just need to read on a few chapters in Genesis and you begin to see that society begins to be full of adultery, of affairs, of rape, of incest, of all sorts of things.

And that's why when you read the Old Testament laws about marriage and chastity, they are so very clear and so very severe because marriage must be protected. Of course, if you start to remove the protection of marriage, if you make it easy for marriages to collapse, well, it's disastrous, isn't it?

[36 : 10] We're in the mess we're in because our liberal politicians don't understand sin, they don't believe in sin, or if they do, they don't take it nearly seriously enough. They don't realize how even faithful people, even godly people, need the protection of the civil order.

I could say an awful lot more about this and what happens when we don't put marriage in its proper context. sex. If marriage and sex is not primarily for the God that we serve and for the service of his kingdom, if we make it primarily for us, and that might be for companionship or for procreation or whatever else, then we turn it from being with the worship of God, the service of God, into the worship of us, into idolatry, into anti-worship.

We'll talk about more of that another time, but that is our problem, isn't it? That's why we have so many disasters in people's relationships, because they turn the relationship or they turn sex or they turn the companionship into an idol, and they're looking for salvation from that idol.

I'm looking for salvation and meaning and identity from my marriage. But when you pray to idols, they don't answer. Remember the prophets of Baal? ranting and raving all day, but no answer. No one listened, no one heard, no one spoke. Idols can do nothing. They cannot save. And if you make your marriage or your desire for marriage an idol, they'll never answer.

[37 : 49] It won't save you. But to finish tonight, I just want to think about a few of the implications of this. If we really think of marriage as the Bible teaches us, to think that it's for a purpose, for a task, it will change our thinking about all sorts of aspects of our marriage.

Whether we're in marriage or not, whether we want to be in marriage or not, whether we're desperate for marriage or whether we're content in our marriage or outside of it. Whatever state we're in, Jesus says marriage is for the kingdom of heaven.

It's for God. God. I quote Christopher Ash again. It's very striking in the Bible how little there is explicitly about marriage and sex and how much there is about God's purpose to rescue a lost world.

That ever struck you? So does our thinking about marriage and relationships reflect the Bible's emphasis? How much is there in our talk and our thinking about marriage and relationships and sex and the need for companionship and feelings and relationships and so on?

How much is there in that that's all about what we're looking for and how much is there that's really about God's plan to rescue a lost world? It's a question we need to ask, isn't it?

[39 : 20] If we've really understood the purpose of marriage as primarily serving God's kingdom, it will affect every aspect, won't it? It will affect how we think about the personal relationships in marriage.

In other words, it's not primarily about meeting our need for intimacy and our cry of loneliness, but it's for partnership in the service of God. And therefore, that means that the answer to those who are lonely and who are crying out for intimacy must be this.

Don't put all your hopes in marriage and in a sexual relationship. Because that's not primarily what marriage is for.

And if you're looking for all your desires to be fulfilled in marriage like that, you're in for a very big disappointment. And that'll be true whether you get married or whether you don't.

Because marriage is not a God. Marriage isn't for your salvation. Marriage is to enable your better service of God if God chooses to grace you with that gift.

[40 : 34] So don't seek salvation in a relationship. friendship. Seek to serve God and his kingdom. And if marriage really will be a thing that will help you in your service of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, then God will not deny that to you.

But if you will be a servant of the kingdom better without being married, then God may ask you not to be married for that reason. But at the same time as the church, we must realize that the church is the family of God and that the church is the place where God puts the lonely into families.

And that shouldn't mark us out. We as the Christian church should be a place where people can belong, where people do not have to be isolated and lonely and lack intimacy. And one big purpose of marriage for those of us who are married is that our homes should be open.

to those who may be lonely. If our marriage and if our home is closed, then we're not serving the purpose of God's kingdom in our marriage, are we?

We're serving ourselves. We're not drawing people in. And so there's a message for the married among us and the single among us in the church of Jesus Christ.

[41 : 51] There should not be lonely people in the family of God. God has. And that's a challenge for all of us. If we are married, we should not be self- preoccupied with ourselves, with our marriage relationship, with our own children, with just our own families.

We are to be open. But if we're single, we're not to be self-pitying either. We're not to say, well, I can't have the company and the friendship and the intimacy because God hasn't given me this.

God has. He's put you in the family of the Lord Jesus Christ in his church. The church's focus on marriage also must be guided by this in all of our marriage preparation and talk about preserving marriage, enriching marriage.

It's not all to be about personal and relational development and sexual development. So many Christian marriage courses are focused on that, getting a better marriage, developing closer intimacy and all these sorts of things.

Nothing wrong with those things, but the church's task is not to focus on needs-centered enrichment of marriage relationships. It is to focus on task- centered preparation of people within their marriages for partnership of serving in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[43 : 14] That's what marriage is for. Second, our attitude to procreation marriage will never then be just about wanting babies or not wanting babies.

Certainly our focus will never be to become pedocentric as so much of the world is today, totally child-focused, child-centered, focused on them and all their achievements and so on.

No, our thinking will be so different. Child-rearing is for the purpose of God's kingdom and its furtherance.

Therefore, we must think about nurturing our children towards serving that purpose, begetting and training Christian soldiers, Christian missionaries, Christian kingdom builders. We'll come back to that another time.

Finally, public order and the preservation of society. That too will be governed by our view of marriage and its purpose. It's not just a private relationship, is it?

[44 : 15] It's for the service of the kingdom and the world. And that will, of course, make us think very differently about the struggles that we might be having.

And everybody will have struggles in their marriage from time to time, sometimes very often. If we think about the purpose of marriage, then we can't put our own personal happiness and emotional well-being at the center, can we?

We can't even put at the very center of our thoughts about that, the welfare of our children. Because primarily, marriage is about something much, much bigger.

It's about the preservation of society, that there can be a society in which the gospel can be preached. It's about the preservation and the health and the integrity of the church as a witness in the world of the ethics and of the ways of heaven.

So we can't just think of an easy solution that will suit ourselves. It's much, much bigger than that, isn't it?

[45 : 19] Even though that's hard. Well, there's lots more things to be said, but that's enough tonight. Just let me say, though, one thing before I finish. I know these things are deeply personal.

And I know they may be painful, and I know that for some of us, maybe tonight, this kind of subject lifts a lid on all kinds of issues, maybe past sin, past mistakes in our lives, maybe present sin, things that need to be addressed in our lives.

And that is very painful. I just want to say to you as I finish, if that's so, remember the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus will never hide the truth from you, because there's no cheap grace with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He will put his finger right in the heart of that relational sore, and it will hurt when he does that, as you have to face up to his teaching.

There will be pain. Remember the woman at the well in John chapter 4. You've had five husbands, and the man you live with now is not your husband.

[46 : 39] Don't you think that must have hurt her? Jesus won't hide the truth from you, but he will point to the truth and flag up the truth for you to deal in your lives with it, only because he does it to bring healing and to bring restoration.

He will do it to you to draw you to his living water, as he offered the living water to the woman at the well and said, whoever drinks of this water will never thirst again. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, come to me, all of you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. He will put his finger in the place of pain.

He meant sinful people like you and me with baggage in the present, with all kinds of things that make us hurt and squirm and be ashamed of and even be angry about. For the Lord Jesus Christ said, come to me when you labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

He will put his finger in the place of pain, but he does it that that wound may be healed. And he heals that wound when you come to him and when you hear his voice and when you follow his ways.

[48 : 08] So let's come to him now. Our Lord Jesus Christ, we come before you and we bring to you the issues of our hearts.

We bring before you our marriages, those that we have, those that we long for, those that we have known and which now are not, for whatever reason that might be.

And we thank you, Lord, that you know the thoughts and the desires of our hearts. And we ask that you would take the thoughts and desires of our hearts and bring them into your presence and make them subject to your healing touch.

That all of us here in our human relationships of love, whatever they may be, and we're whatever they shall be, may serve the purpose of your glorious kingdom now in this world and forever and ever.

Amen.