

The Reason for Marriage

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn to our reading for this morning, which you'll find in Matthew chapter 19, page 824 in our church Bibles.

And we're going to read a little from this chapter. Beginning at verse 1, we'll read verses 1 to 12, and then a few more verses at the end of the chapter, verse 28 to the end.

We're not expanding this whole chapter this morning. We'll be looking at other scriptures as well. But here is a very important place to begin with the Lord Jesus and his very strong affirmation of the meaning of marriage.

Now, when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any and every cause? He answered, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?

[1 : 19] 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 they are no longer two, but one flesh.

What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

He said to them, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery.

The disciples said to him, if such is the case of a man with his wife, it's better not to marry. But he said to them, not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

[2 : 26] And let the one who is able to receive this receive it. Verse 28, Jesus went on and said to them, truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel.

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last and the last first. Amen. May God bless to us this his word.

Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Matthew chapter 19. And we're thinking about different aspects of love.

Last week we began with the primacy, I think, of real friendship, which is God's primary answer to our basic need to be loved and to belong.

[3 : 43] Psalm 68, verse 6 says, God sets the solitary in a home. We belong ultimately as friends, friends of God, at home in the Father's house.

And real friendship now on earth is a reflection of that. And hence it's so basic and so fundamental. And remember we said that real intimacy, therefore, does not necessitate a sexual relationship.

That's so important. But today I do want to focus on the fundamental sexual relationship, indeed the only, the unique sexual relationship, and that is marriage.

By which, of course, I mean real marriage. That is the lifelong union of one man and one woman in an exclusive sexual partnership. And, of course, the fact that I have to iterate that itself tells its own story, doesn't it?

It tells us that we live in such an age of complete confusion about marriage and sexuality, which is a dangerous and a very damaging confusion.

[4 : 52] And so it makes it all the more important that we are clear ourselves as a Christian church on what marriage really is all about and what it's not. It's important for all of us, since the apostle commands that marriage be held in honor by all.

And, of course, the New Testament letters speak very openly about marriage to congregations, expecting the words to be heard by the young and the old, by the married and the unmarried, by male and female, just as our congregation here consists of all of these.

Now, the New Testament church needed clear instruction, and so do we. Not only because of confusion from the world outside, but because of, well, corruption from within our own hearts.

And we must be real about these things. This is an area of life which, probably more than any, we know is a problem area for a lot of people.

And we know that the church is a convalescent ward in which we're all in recovery. We're all in recovery from our own sin and from the consequences of our own sin.

[6 : 09] And that's a very sobering truth we have to be realistic about. And yet it's also a very wonderful truth. Think of what the apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth, a culture which he says was full of sexual immorality, of adulterers, of men who practice homosexuality, of thieves, of greedy, of drunkards, and worse.

And such were some of you, he said, to those in front of him. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

It was wonderful then that that should be so. And it's just as wonderful today. And it's just as true today. But of course, even recovering sinners will still bear the scars of the past in this life, won't they?

And where there is real ministry, where there is God's Spirit really at work changing lives, always there will be the uncovering of real mess.

In our lives. That just stands to reason. And so we've got to be honest, we need to be real, if we're going to help one another in Christ's name. And help is always needed in these matters.

[7 : 27] That is just reality. And sin is always crouching at the door. For all of us, that also is reality. And so we need to be alert.

And so we need to build healthy thinking into our whole outlook so that we will be people keeping to God's path in the future, no matter how dark or difficult or wrong our past has been.

And of course, we all have a past. And some of us will have a very difficult past in this area. And that will make life harder for some of us. And we have to be realistic.

And so prevention is much, much better than cure, as always. And that's why we need to think through these things together, so we can help one another. And I hope that these sermons will help parents to think clearly about themselves, but also so that we're able to teach and train our own children rightly.

I hope it will help young people. That is the age group whose hormones are most active. And those hormones need to be kept in check and controlled in the right way and channeled into the right things and not the wrong things.

[8 : 41] But I hope also that these sermons will help older folks to be emboldened, to hear Paul's words as he speaks to Timothy and also to Titus, and encourages and commands older people to help younger people, and very particularly in this area of relationships in life, which are often so difficult.

Now, I cannot do more than cover some very basic and summarizing things in these talks, but I do want to recommend some books to you that I think will be helpful. I mentioned last week C.S. Lewis' book, *The Four Loves*, and that, along with his book, *Mere Christianity*, are excellent helps with some chapters about this area.

I want to recommend to you Christopher Ashe's major book called *Marriage*, subtitled *Sex in the Service of God*. God, that's published by IVP. It's an outstanding book.

It is a thick book. It's 400 pages long, and it's not an easy book. But for those of you who like a challenge, that is, in my estimation, the best book on marriage anywhere.

He also, fortunately for the rest of us, has a much abbreviated version of that book called *Married for God*, which is a book that I give to all of those who are getting married. I think it actually should be read by everybody who is married, and also by everybody who think possibly they might one day be married.

[9 : 59] So that covers a large number of us, and I do want to encourage you to read some of these things. And I want to say that I draw heavily on Christopher Ashe, especially in his large book, because it's such an amazingly helpful resource.

Okay, let's get down to business. Here's the question. What is the reason for marriage? If friendship is the basic answer and provision for solitude, friendship is what makes us truly belong.

If sexual expression is not necessary for intimacy in relationships, then what is the purpose of the sexual relationship that God has given to humankind?

What is God's reason and purpose for marriage according to the Scriptures? Well, we're going to begin here in Matthew chapter 19 with some of Jesus' teaching on marriage.

And I'm sure you will have noticed that when Jesus is asked about divorce, he moves straight away from that to the subject of marriage. And he answers his accuser's question in terms of the purpose and the place of marriage within God's story, within the story of God's kingdom from creation right through to the new creation, right through to what he calls the new world in verse 28 of Matthew 19.

[11 : 29] I'm not going to expand this whole passage this morning. We're going to look at some other Scriptures as well. But I want to simply point out two fundamental truths, which I think Jesus alludes to and makes very clear here.

And that is this. Marriage is from God. It's a gift that God bestows upon his servants. And secondly, that marriage is for God.

That is that it's a gift to be used for God's service and the service of his kingdom. So first of all, marriage is from God.

Look at verses 4 and 5 of Matthew 19. The first thing Jesus does is take us right back to the beginning of human history, to creation itself. Verse 4. Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

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

[12 : 48] Man and woman publicly leave their primary families, and they are united publicly in a new family unit. And because it is God who gives this gift, look at verse 6, so man must not undo it.

And Jesus' point is therefore very clear. Marriage is not just a social convention. It is not just a cultural custom. It is not man's creation, but God's.

And Jesus is telling us that this is part of the whole order of creation. Sometimes we refer to marriage as a creation ordinance. And in that sense, it's quite wrong for us to speak of Christian marriage, for example, because it's not Christian marriage.

It's just human marriage. There's no other kind of marriage. It's a creation ordinance. And Genesis chapters 1 and 2 speak of the creation of a material order in the universe.

But just as clearly, Jesus is saying, these chapters speak of the creation of a moral order. And to reject that moral order that God has created against God's command is not just sin.

[14 : 04] It is therefore complete folly. If human society is created to work this way, then it's extreme folly to seek to subvert that and find another way.

It's just as foolish as us trying to pretend that gravity isn't part of the created order. Well, if you do that and walk off a tall roof, you'll get a big mess. It's not just sinful.

It's foolish. And so it is with marriage. To pervert God's moral order will lead to a big mess. And we only have to look at the history of our own nation or the Western nations in general over the last 50 years or so.

And we look at the social cohesion that there was 50 years ago compared to today. And we can see before our very eyes the effects of all the assaults upon marriage.

And the results are far from pretty. Marriage is God's creation. It is God's gift to all humanity. But it is, therefore, a gift.

[15 : 10] And as such, it is primarily a responsibility that is to be exercised and not a right that is to be demanded. And that's important, I think, because, yes, it explains why it is a natural desire for men and women to want to marry and want to have family and so on.

And yet, for any individual in particular, it can't be a right to be assumed. It may be withheld from some for various reasons.

And sometimes those reasons are known only to God. But if you look at verses 11 and 12 of chapter 19 of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is quite plain, isn't he, that not all marry.

Some, he says, not everyone can receive this. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth. There are eunuchs who have been made so by men. And their eunuchs have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Some people, he's saying, are celibate and must remain celibate for various reasons. It could be reasons of birth, he says. It may be some physical things. It may be to do with issues of personality, whatever it may be.

[16 : 27] Sometimes, he's saying it's because of life experience that has made marriage an impossibility for some people. It might be due to damaging experiences earlier on in life.

It might be due to illness or all kinds of things. It might be just due to the passage of time. Or it might simply be, says Jesus in verse 12, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

So not all, plainly, are going to be married according to this creation pattern. And that's very important because it helps us see that marriage is not a gift from God as an end in itself.

Rather, it's a gift which is a means to an end. And the reason and the purpose for marriage is the same as for every other earthly relationship.

It is to serve better the kingdom of heaven. That's so important to grasp whether you're married or whether you're not yet married, whether you're a confirmed bachelor or spinster, or whether you're single and desperately not wanting to be single.

[17 : 35] We've got to see that marriage is not just a gift. Not just a gift and therefore to be received as a gift if God wills.

Not snatching it out of his hand as a right. That would be to turn it into idolatry, wouldn't it? Like Adam and Eve snatching what God had not given. But it's important to see that marriage is not just a gift.

It is a gift with a purpose. And that's the second thing and really the main focus for this morning, to see that marriage is not only from God, but that marriage is for God.

Marriage is a gift that God gives to humanity to serve the purpose of the kingdom of heaven. So 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. It is to glorify God. That's man's chief end.

[18 : 35] To worship God, to glorify God. Which means to serve God in his glorious kingdom. Well, in the same way, that is the chief end of marriage. And God made sex, God made sexual differentiation in humans, and God made marriage in order to serve his purpose in creation and redemption.

And therefore, the marriage relationship is defined by the relationship that we all have to God's eternal kingdom. And if you look, that is the whole context of Jesus' teaching here in Matthew 19.

It's all about what really defines our most important earthly relationships. Are they defined by heaven and God's kingdom, or by earth and our desires?

Do our desires for relationships on earth, either in marriage or indeed with money, which is the second half of the chapter, two very important relationships, do these things define how we relate to God?

Or does our relationship with God and his heavenly kingdom dictate our view of these earthly things, these earthly gifts?

[19 : 48] That's the question. And the whole controversy with the Pharisees was because they wanted to use God's word to get what they wanted. In this case, it was easy divorce and gratification with another partner.

But Jesus points them to marriage's proper purpose in relation to God's purpose in his kingdom. And he says that marriage, and indeed our whole attitude to marriage or singleness, must be defined in relation to how we serve the kingdom of heaven.

Whether we're married or celibate, a eunuch is verse 12, it is all for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. You just need to read through the chapter to see how often Jesus repeats the references to the kingdom of heaven, to eternal life.

It's there again in verse 14. It's there again in verses 16 and 17. It's there in verse 21, he talks about treasures in heaven. In 23 and 24, in verse 28, where he calls it the new world.

In verse 29, eternal life. All through the chapter, he is saying that the kingdom of heaven is what must define all of our earthly relationships.

[21 : 02] In marriage, with children, verses 13 and 14, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. And with possessions, the rich young man, verse 21, treasure in heaven is what matters.

In verse 29 and verse 30, all earthly relationships are good only if they help and if they don't hinder the kingdom of heaven. And therefore, those who have to give up relationships which will hinder the kingdom of heaven will be richly blessed and rewarded by the Lord.

And you see how the context of this chapter makes that so clear. It's heavenly relationships. It's the task of sharing and building Christ's heavenly kingdom that must dictate the goal and the purpose of all earthly relationships that we have.

And especially, therefore, the closest and the most powerful one of sexual union in marriage. And that's true whether you personally are married or whether you're not.

Marriage is from God. It's a gift, but it's also for God. Marriage is given so that human beings may better serve their creator and their redeemer.

[22 : 16] In his purposes for creation and for redemption. That is the primary purpose of marriage, according to Jesus. It's a gift, but it's not primarily or principally a gift for us.

It's a gift for God, for us to use for God. In other words, right marriage worships God. It serves God. But wrong marriage worships ourselves.

And therefore, it is idolatry. And it's really as simple as that. And I want us to be very clear on this, that marriage is for God and for his kingdom purposes. Because actually, that is the foundation for the three more commonly considered reasons for marriage, as they're included in our marriage service.

They are the rock that these specific things stand on. The marriage service says that marriage is ordained for the continuance of family life and for children, for procreation, for the lifelong mutual help and comfort in both prosperity and adversity that one has for the other.

And also, thirdly, for the welfare of human society. Our confession of faith, the Westminster Confession, puts it this way. Marriage 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 prevention of uncleanness.

[23 : 44] Same three things. I call it the three Ps, if you like, of the marriage purpose. Procreation, and that comes first, actually, in the Book of Common Prayer Service. Personal relationships, mutual help.

And public order, prevention of sin. But notice that the mutual help is a pointer to something more basic still, and that is the primary purpose that all of these things serve.

Because the help needed is principally in serving God's purpose for this world, in serving the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must remember the context again. Jesus is lifting from Genesis. That the chief end and purpose of man's creation is to glorify God in all things.

In serving God's purpose to image him on earth, we do that by having rule, by having a dominion over God's kingdom.

[24 : 45] And so all subsidiary, all particular aspects of what marriage does are simply ways that marriage as an institution in itself serves the purpose of God for mankind and therefore fulfills God's good purpose for this world.

And Jesus, you see, here in speaking of both the creator at the beginning and of speaking of the kingdom of heaven, the new world, he clearly brings these things together.

And he's showing us that we're never to think of marriage out with the context of seeing its first and fundamental purpose. That it's a task which principally serves his glory in creation and in new creation through his plan of redemption.

And in Matthew 19, Jesus affirms that. And he clearly anchors his teaching in Genesis 1 and 2. So I think it'd be helpful for us to turn back to Genesis chapter 1 and chapter 2 to see how the three Ps of marriage, how personal, mutual comfort and help, how procreation and public order, how they all find their place in this primary understanding of marriage that is task-driven and that is goal-oriented towards serving God's kingdom from the very beginning.

So first of all, look at Genesis 1 verse 27. It's page 1, I suspect, of the church Bibles. Jesus' first quotation comes from here. God made them male and female, he said.

[26 : 21] So Genesis 1 verse 27, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. But why did he create them male and female?

Well, the answer lies in verse 26 and verse 28, right in the immediate context. Verse 26, let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over all that's in the earth.

They are to image God in order to rule as God's vice-gerent, as the ruler under God of the whole of God's creation. So the task of dominion is the context for God's differentiation of man as male and female.

And look at verse 28. The task of dominion is the context of God's command to procreate, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, subdue it and have dominion.

So God brings human beings into a world full of life, full of potentiality, and which will need sovereign rule and dominion.

[27 : 34] And that unique task is given to man. You fill the earth and subdue it. And that task can only be fulfilled by procreation.

And that is the context of man's creation as a sexual being, as man and woman. Christopher Ashe says, on the one hand, towards the creator, humankind is given moral responsibility.

On the other, towards creation, he is entrusted with a task. And the coordination of both these aspects of this orientation is the key to the ethics of sex.

And please note that the particular focus of Genesis 1 here is on this procreative purpose of marriage, the first of those Ps, in order that man can serve God's purpose for mankind and have dominion over his kingdom.

So that's Genesis 1. Now let's look at Genesis 2, the second account that we have of man's creation as a sexually differentiated being. Genesis 2 is not a rival account of creation.

[28 : 40] It's not contradictory to Genesis 1. Genesis 1 simply describes creation from a cosmic purpose. And Genesis 2 describes it from a human focus.

So we move in Genesis 1 from man as the crown of creation to Genesis 2 where man is the center of creation. And Jesus also quotes Genesis 2 verse 24, which rounds off the whole of this story of Eve's creation from Adam.

Now here again, I'm greatly indebted to Christopher Ashe for the clarity of his exegesis of this, because he points out the mistake that we very commonly make by taking verse 18 right out of context.

Verse 18, it's not good that man should be alone. Now we often assume that alone there means lonely. And so we start to think that the primary purpose of marriage is a cure for loneliness.

But that is not so. It's this personal relationship aspect that is most important. It is the comfort, the companionship that marriage certainly does bring, but that is not the primary focus of what he's saying here.

[29 : 54] We saw last time that all the way through the Bible, the primary solution for loneliness, for needing to belong, is not marriage and sex. It's friendship, it's belonging. The God who sets the solitary in a home.

He brings the outsider into his family. It's so important to keep saying that in our sexually crazed world. Intimacy and belonging does not require a sexual relationship.

It's not that that is only possible within marriage or a sexual relationship. That's what the world thinks, but that is not true. And indeed, that is not primarily what sexual relationships were created for.

That is clear here. Look again at this context here in Genesis 2. Verse 18 is very plain. Adam's situation is not good because he needs a helper.

But the question is, what does he need a helper for? Well, the answer that Genesis here gives us is that he needs a helper for the task of working God's creation in order to fulfill God's purpose for it.

[31 : 02] Look back to verse 5 of Genesis 2. There was no order on the earth, we're told, because there was no man to work the ground. So verse 7 tells us that God forms man to meet the need of creation.

Verse 8 tells us he puts him in the garden to work it. Verse 15 is explicit. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

In other words, that is the same task described, just a different way from Genesis 1, to have dominion and subdue the creation. And here it's called working and keeping the garden.

I think we're meant to see man's task on earth as being to extend the beauty and the order of the garden of Eden right out into the whole of the created cosmos, to take God's perfect pattern and to bring it to the whole of God's creation.

And it's that task that verse 18 tells us Adam needs help in. Yes, he needs just the right sort of helper, a suitable helper, a helper fit for him.

[32 : 11] The words mean a suitably complementary helper, and that's very important. But notice primarily the task is what drives this.

It's a partner in serving God's purpose for a creation that is needed. And that's the primary purpose of this personal relational aspect of marriage, the mutual help and comfort and so on, the second P.

It's a partnership to serve the purpose of God's kingdom in the world. And so that means that the mutuality of sexual love within marriage is not the goal of marriage.

It is there to serve the goal of marriage, the goal being to serve God's kingdom. And that is so, so important.

Because you see, both the procreation that occurs within marriage and the personal partnership of mutual help in marriage are to serve the primary calling of all mankind, which is glorifying God through serving his kingdom.

[33 : 17] That is what Genesis chapter 1 and 2 teaches us. And that is what Jesus affirms. Of course, all of this in Genesis 1 and 2 is before the rebellion of man, before the fall, before sin wrecks God's creation.

But the rest of Genesis teaches that the primary purpose for marriage still remains for humans. Although now, of course, it's the rescue of the world through redemption that is the primary need of this world.

The dominion over God's world by man can only come about through God's plan of redemption. Just filling the world with progeny, with sinful progeny, can't be the answer to this world, can it? But no, God's intervention with his promise brings a new start.

Through procreation, but through the procreation of a new family, through Abraham. Not just multiplying people, but specifically through the promise of multiplying the seed of God.

The seed of promise, not the seed of the serpent. And so from Genesis 12 onwards, the focus of the blessings of procreation are upon Israel as God's people.

[34 : 28] The people called to serve God's purpose in creation and redemption. So that through them, ultimately, the whole world will fulfill the purpose that God created it for.

And it was, indeed, marriage and procreation through the seed of the woman that did bring ultimate redemption in Jesus Christ, who alone fulfills God's great task for man as the second Adam, the true Adam, the last Adam.

And, of course, until Jesus comes again to consummate his kingdom, then marriage, for us believers in Christ, still has the same task.

It is to serve God's purpose for creation and for recreation through redemption. But we serve that task as we serve the advance of Christ's kingdom in the world.

And that advance comes primarily, of course, now through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Since the fall, the goal of creation can only be fulfilled through God's plan of redemption in Christ.

[35 : 36] And so if we are to serve God's creation mandate still today through marriage, and the Bible tells us we must, then it means that our marriages, for those who are married, must have as their primary purposes to serve the kingdom of Christ and its advance in this world.

That's what marriage is for. Yes, through procreation. And not just filling the world with offspring, but with godly offspring. That's certainly one way to grow the church, for sure.

We've been doing that recently. But not just with godly children, with missionary children. Because that's what we're called for. Because God's children today are being gathered to join in his kingdom people from every tribe and from every nation through the spreading of the gospel of Christ.

And so one great task for our Christian marriages and our Christian homes is to serve that missionary task by nurturing, by raising heralds of the kingdom for today and for tomorrow and for the next generations.

And if you're Christian parents raising children, that may very well be your primary role in life, in serving the kingdom of God, in advancing his kingdom. Raising children, teaching them and training them in the ways of the gospel of Christ and encouraging them to be missionary ambassadors for the Lord Jesus.

[36 : 59] So if you're a harassed mother who's just about demented by your young kids who are just driving you crazy and you think you can't do another day, well, you're in a great calling.

And the Lord God will help you if you ask him to raise heralds of the gospel of Christ in the future. Surely, as a church, that should be our prayers, shouldn't it, for our young ones, for those that we are teaching and training.

Because marriage and family life is to serve the kingdom of Christ. And we serve the kingdom of Christ still through procreation that way.

And also, of course, through the partnership aspect of marriage, through the mutual help and companionship of marriage, which is still task-oriented. It's still to serve the kingdom of God.

The face-to-face that we spoke about last week, of erotic love, of romantic love, that is there to serve the side-by-side, which is the task of kingdom service together.

[38 : 03] And by the way, the third P of the marriage purpose, public order and decency and the prevention of sin, obviously, that is something that became needed and necessary after the fall of man.

Marriage can't survive without protection from human sin. Just need to read on in Genesis 3 a few chapters, and you find adultery and rape and incest and goodness knows what else.

And that's why the marriage service says that society can only prosper when the marriage bond is held in the highest honor. Where it's not, and where we remove proper protection for real marriage, when the dignity and protection of real marriage is eroded in law, as it is happening, well, there will be disaster.

That's the problem. Our secularist liberal politicians, they're fools because they don't understand sin. And how can you possibly understand how to govern sinful people properly if you don't understand sin?

Marriage must be protected publicly. The systematic demolition of marriage as an institution will be and already has been disastrous for the health of many nations.

[39 : 18] But that's another subject, and we don't have time to go into all of that today. I could say a lot more about what happens when we as Christians don't put marriage in its proper context, proper purpose.

If marriage and sex is primarily for God and for his service, if it's for worship, then you see, if we make it primarily about us, and when we look to it only to satisfy our desires, whether it's our desire for love and companionship or our desire for procreation and family, but when we make it all about us, we make it anti-worship.

We make it idolatry. And that is largely what our society has done today. And we in the Christian church are so affected by the mores of our society, we have to be very careful.

And it is when we do that and make marriage about us and not God that we find it is the root of every single problem in marriage that there will be, whether you're married or you're not.

Because we've made marriage an idol, and idols cannot deliver. But I just want to think through some implications of what I've said, because this must change the way that we think about marriage, whether we're in it or not, whether we're wanting it, or whether we're quite satisfied not to have it.

[40 : 42] Whatever state we are in, Jesus says marriage is for the kingdom of heaven, and non-marriage, singleness, is for the kingdom of heaven. And Christopher Ashe says, it's very striking in the Bible, and especially the New Testament, how little there is explicitly about marriage and sex, and how much there is about God's purpose to rescue a lost mankind.

But he asks, does our thinking about our own lives go the same way? We expend an awful lot of thought, don't we, about marriage and sex, our needs, our feelings, our desires for companionship, perhaps our desires for children, and so on.

But how much thought do we give to these things within an understanding of the task of what marriage is all about, and what it serves, God's rescue of a lost world?

If we understand the purpose, the reason for marriage, that it is primarily for serving the kingdom of God, then that will affect our thinking about every aspect of marriage. It will affect our thinking about the personal relationship aspect of marriage.

That will be transformed. Because it's not primarily about meeting our needs for intimacy. It's not an answer to loneliness. It's for partnership, better serving the kingdom of Christ.

[42 : 00] And that means that the answer to those who are lonely and miserable is not to pin all your hopes on a sexual relationship and upon marriage. That's not what marriage is for.

And if that is where you are looking for the answer for all of these desires in your life, then inevitably you will only face a big disappointment, whether you do get married or whether you don't.

And that's one of the reasons why many marriages today fail, even Christian ones, because people are looking to marriage to give them something that marriage was never designed to give. It's God's gift to you in marriage.

And if it is that gift to you, it's not for your salvation, but it is for your better service. So the answer is not to seek salvation in marriage, any of us, but all of us to seek the service of God's kingdom.

And if marriage will truly help you in that service of the kingdom and is necessary for you, God will give you that. And you can trust him. But at the same time, the church is the family of God.

[43 : 09] If that is the way that God does bring the lonely into families and answer people's needs, then that should mark us out as churches, shouldn't it? It should be a place where people belong. And therefore, one big purpose of marriage for those who are married and who do have families is to have open marriages and families towards others.

If a marriage in a home is closed and closed in on itself, then it is not likely to be serving the kingdom of God and serving others, is it? Neither the married nor the single should be lonely in the family of Christ.

And that's a big challenge for all of us. It means that the married must not be self-preoccupied, taken up with their own relationships in a way that excludes others. That often happens. And it means, I think, that the single mustn't be self-pitying because that attitude can make it much harder for others to include them and to help them be part of a family that belongs.

It also means that the churches focus on marriage, for example, in marriage preparation or in counseling and preservation, that that focus must be right. It's not just all to be focused on the personal relationship or the sexual aspect of marriage.

So many marriage courses, virtually all secular ones and even many Christian ones are so introspective, all about developing intimacy, all about better relationship and so on.

[44 : 37] Well, that's all good and true up to a point. But the church's task is not to foster an approach that is need-centered and me-focused. Rather, to teach that marriage is task-focused and we're to prepare people for that task of serving God's kingdom in the world.

So our whole attitude to the personal aspect of marriage will be transformed when we see the Bible's focus on marriage's true purpose and reason. And secondly, our whole attitude to procreation in marriage will likewise be transformed.

It can never be just about us wanting babies and wanting families, natural as that is, or indeed of not wanting them. will not be pedocentric, totally child-focused and obsessed as our culture has increasingly become.

Obsessed with children, obsessed with their achievements, obsessed with all sorts of things like that. No, our focus as Christians in a real church will be child-rearing for the purpose of serving God's kingdom.

We'll be nurturing our children and concerned with the nurture of all children in the church, training them to be kingdom builders for the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the task because that's marriage's purpose.

[45 : 57] And of course, our understanding of the place of marriage for public order and preservation of order in society will be very clear as well. We'll understand, won't we, that marriage is not just a private relationship. It's a public one.

It's for the service of God's purposes of grace, both his common grace in blessing this world with order and not chaos, but also his saving grace through the mission of the church.

And that will affect how we think as Christians about our marriages, especially when we're facing struggles in our marriages, especially if we find ourselves starting to think about separation and about divorce and these things.

It's not just about me and my personal happiness. It's not even just about my children's welfare. though my marriage is about something much, much bigger.

It is about God's primary purpose for creation and redemption. It's about the preservation of society. And it's certainly about the health and the witness of the church in society.

[47 : 02] You can see how understanding marriage's reason and purpose in Scripture transforms the way we ought to think about all of these things. Well, there's lots more we could say, but that's, I'm sure, plenty to begin our thinking.

But let me say one last thing. I know that these things are deeply personal and I know that for some, perhaps even here this morning, they're also deeply painful.

And perhaps for some, what I've said, might lift the lid on a great deal of pain. Maybe even a great deal of sin in the past or even in the present.

Something that needs addressing. And so the last thing I want to say is this. Just two words. Remember Jesus. Remember Jesus. Jesus will not hide the truth from you, nor will he let you hide from the truth.

There's no cheap grace with the Lord Jesus Christ. He will put his finger right on the painful sore that is making you very uncomfortable. Think of the woman at the well.

[48 : 10] Put his finger right on the issue. You've had five husbands and the man you're with now is not even your husband. But when he does that, friends, he does it only ever to bring healing.

To draw you, like that woman at the well, to the life-giving cleansing of his living water. Come to me, he said, to all who are like that, all who labor and are heavy laden, come to me and I will give you rest.

And he still says that today. And if anybody here finds what I've said this morning to be deeply painful, remember Jesus.

Remember Jesus. Let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ, Lord of love and Lord of life, we do bring ourselves to you, all of our thoughts, all of our desires about marriage, whatever state we are in personally.

And we ask that you would help us all to be those who honor marriage by treating it rightly as from you and as for you.

[49 : 24] so that all of us, whether young or old or male or female or married or single, so that all of us might better and more wholeheartedly serve your glorious kingdom here on earth.

And then also to inherit eternal life in the glory of the new world where all of us will know fully and completely and intimately the true glory and the joy that our earthly marriage is but a pale shadow of and points to and indeed makes us long for.

So hear us and help us as we long for the new world together. For Jesus' sake. Amen.