

Introduction:

Why marriage? Have you ever wondered that? Why did God establish marriage? And it wasn't just one thing among many that He established along the way, it was one of the very first things He established. At the beginning, He brought a man and a woman together in marriage. Why? If we figure that out, perhaps we can figure out exactly why we should get married today and what it is we are supposed to be doing in our marriages today.

Discussion:

I. Why the first marriage?

- A. In **Genesis 2:18**, God looked at the man He had created and said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (ESV).
 1. Sadly, I have for too long read this sentence through the lens of the Romanticism of the last 300 years and therefore have had a faulty and anemic theology of marriage. I've too often read this from the basis of Wordsworth and Tennyson, Shelley and Austen than from the basis of Jesus, Moses, and Paul. I've read it as if it were saying, "It is not good that man should be lonely, I will make him a friend to help him find fulfillment and felicity." That is not what it says.
 2. Think about this for a moment. Adam was in the Lord's Garden. He communed with God and had an intimate fellowship with God that we can only dream of. Did he need anything more for companionship? Did he need anything more for fulfillment and happiness and self-worth? No. The "alone" here is not about loneliness. Adam was not lonely. He had the greatest Friend anyone could ever have and no created being, woman or otherwise, could ever be greater than the Friend he had.
 3. The problem here is I have often jumped to this verse and not read it in context. The aloneness to which God is referring is in relation to what God had just said.
- B. Note **Genesis 2:5-17**, especially **vs. 15**. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (ESV). Notice especially these two terms.
 1. *Work*: While this is the same term used in **Exodus 20:9** to describe the six days of the Hebrew work week, it most often refers to serving: **Genesis 14:4; 25:23; 27:29; 29:15, 20, 25, 27, 30; et al.** I can't help but get the picture that working the Garden meant to serve the Garden of God. Thus, working the ground was not merely the idea of putting in a day's work of farming and gardening so Adam could get some food when harvest came. Rather, it is a picture of serving the ground, caring for it, providing for it so it can fulfill its purpose of bearing fruit. The curse on Adam, of course, then turned this service from a blessed endeavor of mutual care and providence to a slavery that accomplished little (cf. **Genesis 3:17-19**—notice that the curse is actually on the ground not on Adam himself, but it impacts Adam).
 2. *Keep*: This is not merely another word for "working the ground" or gardening. This word means to preserve and protect, to watch and ward, to give heed and guard. See **Genesis 28:20; 30:31**. It is very often the word used to refer to keeping God's commands or covenant, to observe His statutes. See **Exodus 12:24-25; 13:10; 15:26; 19:5**. However, we must especially note **Genesis 3:23-24**. In these verses, God talks about the ground which man was to work (the same term as "work" above) and then the cherubim which God set up with a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. That word "guard" is the same word God used to describe Adam's job. Adam failed in his job of keeping or guarding the Garden and now God establishes the cherubim to guard it. To further verify this connection, look at **Ezekiel 28:11-19**. Ezekiel is prophesying against the king of Tyre. In this lesson, we are not interested in what this passage meant about the king of Tyre, but about the word picture God used to deliver His message. He relates the fall of the king of Tyre to the fall of Adam. Notice in **Ezekiel 28:14, 16**, this fallen man was an "anointed guardian cherub." That is, he was doing the job that the cherubim did. He was guarding. Adam was supposed to be guarding the Garden.
- C. Back to **Genesis 2:18**: "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (ESV).
 1. It was in the context of man's job of working (serving) and keeping (guarding) the Garden that God said it was not good for him to be alone. When God said it was not good for man to be alone, He wasn't saying it was bad for man to be lonely, man wasn't lonely then. He wasn't saying man needed a friend. And if I

may say this without violating any bounds of propriety, He wasn't saying that man needed someone in order to have a sexual relationship. He was saying exactly what He did say. Man needed a helper.

2. Man was given a job: work and keep the Garden. He needed a helper to accomplish this task. Interestingly, of the 19 other times this word for "helper" is used in Scripture, 16 of those times display God as the helper (see **Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 33:20** et al). Further, one of the other three (**Isaiah 30:5**) is actually rebuking Israel for seeking "help" from Egypt instead of from God. In other words, in **Genesis 2:18-25**, the wife, is the physical embodiment of the help of God given to man so he can accomplish the task God has given him.

D. What was the meaning of the first marriage?

1. It was patently not what we have made the meaning of marriage today. God did not establish the first marriage in order to provide companionship or fellowship; man had all he needed of that from his relationship with God. God did not establish the first marriage because it was an outgrowth of love; Adam did not fall in love with Eve or vice versa and then get married. God did not establish marriage simply so children would have a stable environment to grow up in; the mission was not to raise the next generation of kids (at least not in a material sense). All of these things may be involved in a good marriage, but none of them are the meaning or purpose of marriage. Additionally, God did not establish marriage to give us a hoop of restrictions to jump through to show that we are good enough to enter heaven, or, on the other hand, to make it harder to enter heaven.
2. God established that first marriage because He gave man a job to do, work and keep the Garden, and it would take both the man and the woman to do it. Further, when we back up to **Genesis 1:26-28**, we see that God's intent had been that man and woman would do this work together in such a way that it would fill and subdue the earth. God's Garden was initially merely one location on earth, but man was to work and guard the Garden such that it filled the earth with God-glorifying image bearers of Him. Man cannot do that work alone, he needs a helper. He needs a wife.
3. Sadly, they failed, which we will examine in more detail in a later lesson. Instead of filling the earth, the ground was cursed such that man would not be able to serve the ground and spread the fruitful Garden throughout the earth. Instead of producing fruitful trees good for food, it would produce thorns and thistles, making man only have enough to eat by pain, toil, and the sweat of his brow (**Genesis 3:17-19**). Ultimately, the Garden was likely destroyed in the Flood. But the meaning of that very first marriage was to serve and guard the Garden such that God's glory would fill the earth.

II. But the Garden is gone?

- A. At first, this study may seem to be a wild goose chase. The first marriage failed at its job. The Garden is gone. Does marriage have meaning now? Is it merely a cultural construct that society can define and/or dismiss as it sees fit? Surely, since our King, Jesus, and His servant, Paul, both returned to the text we've just studied to govern marriage (**Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:31**), there must be something in that original marriage that should matter for our marriages even now.

B. What was the Garden?

1. First, the Garden was the Sanctuary of God.
 - a) It was the first temple, if you will. That is, it was the first meeting place between God and man. It was the place of fellowship between God and man. It was the place of God's presence with man.
 - b) Look again at **Ezekiel 28:13-14, 16**. Again, we are more interested right now in the word picture God used connecting back to Adam and His fall. Notice that God relates Eden to the "holy mountain of God." What is the holy mountain of God in a book written to and for Jews but Zion, the mountain of God's temple and holy sanctuary?
 - c) Ezekiel also speaks of Adam and the king of Tyre walking amid stones of fire. Some relate this to burning coals in other passages. Others just say it is hard to know what God is talking about. Certainly, there doesn't seem to be anything like it in Eden, and one wonders what that could possibly represent in the literal city of Tyre. But notice **Ezekiel 40:42**. In Ezekiel's vision of the rebuilt temple, there are four tables hewn from stone (Narnia fans should perk up here) for burnt offerings. The picture seems to be that Tyre's king and Adam were amid the altars that allow for communion with God. They were in God's sanctuary.
 - d) Finally, notice what God claim was profaned in **Ezekiel 28:18**. "You profaned your sanctuaries" (ESV). Adam profaned and defiled the sanctuary, the temple. The Garden was the first sanctuary, temple, or meeting place between God and man.
2. Second, the Garden was the way to the tree of life.

- a) When Adam failed to guard the Garden, God established the cherubim as guardian (**Genesis 3:24**). But notice specifically what aspect of the Garden was to be guarded: the way to the tree of life.
 - b) When God had planted the Garden in **Genesis 2:9**, the text says in the midst of the Garden were the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. As we see in the failure of the first marriage, because of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the tree of life was in danger. Once Adam and Eve ate from the dangerous tree, the danger was no longer confined to the tree, but had spread through mankind. Man was now a danger to the tree of life. Man had not protected the Garden and the tree of life, now the cherubim would. And the cherubim would protect it from man.
 - c) By the way, it is no coincidence that it is cherubim who guard the Ark of the Covenant (**Exodus 25:17-22**). Nor is it a coincidence that when Ezekiel witnesses the heavenly throne/chariot of God, of which the temple mercy seat was merely a representation, he sees God surrounded by cherubim (**Ezekiel 1:5-14; 10:1-22**). The tree of life and the sanctuary of God's presence are connected.
 - d) But what all this points out is the Garden was the way to the tree of life.
- C. Modern marriage and the Garden of God.
1. While the literal job of protecting the Garden of Eden and the tree of life that was in it is no longer entrusted to man, this does explain the meaning of our marriages. The meaning of marriage, even today, is to serve the sanctuary of God's presence. It is to guard the way to the tree of life. It is to do this in such a way that the glory of the Lord spreads out from our marriages into the whole world, corresponding to Jesus's model prayer that God's kingdom will fill the earth just as it is in heaven (**Matthew 6:10**).
 2. **Revelation 21:22-22:5** gives us a double sense of the sanctuary and tree of life. God's sanctuary and the tree of life are in the bride of Christ, the church, even now (cf. **Ephesians 5:22-33**). But this also gives us a picture of a path this world is following. The entirety of mankind is heading for a meeting with God in which they will either be welcomed into His eternal sanctuary and free to eat from the fruit of the tree of life or they will be cast into outer darkness.
 3. What then is the meaning of our marriages? Brothers and sisters, the meaning of our marriages is not happiness, romance, fellowship, sexual fulfillment, or emotional and psychological fulfillment. Again, all of those things will likely be in good marriages that are accomplishing their meaning. Having all of those things may help in accomplishing the meaning of marriage. But these are not the meaning of marriage. The meaning of marriage is to serve and guard the way to God's sanctuary and tree of life. The meaning of our marriages is to point the way to the tree of life and the presence of God without allowing it to be defiled by the accuser and enemy, that serpent of old, Satan. The meaning of our marriages is to spread the blessings of God's sanctuary and tree of life throughout the world so that the world is subdued by it and transformed because of it.

III. The true Passion Play and the meaning of our marriages (**Ephesians 5:22-33**).

- A. Have you ever heard of a Passion Play? That is the term given to dramatic presentations of the suffering of Jesus at the hands of the Jews and the Romans: His trial, His scourging, His crucifixion, His sacrifice. That name sounds odd to us because just like our concept of marriage, our concept of passion has gone through a metamorphosis due to romanticism. "Passion" comes from the Latin word "passio" which means "suffering," related to the Greek word "πάσχω (paschō)," which means "I suffer." You may have heard of the lamb at the Passover called the "paschal lamb." That is related to this word. It is the sacrificial lamb. Thus, Mel Gibson's movie 11 years ago was entitled "The Passion of the Christ." Not the heated emotion of Jesus, but the suffering or sacrifice of the Christ. A Passion Play then is a dramatic presentation that points to the sanctuary of God's presence with man and the tree of life. Yes, God met man on that tree which seemed to be an implement of death, but is to us who are being saved by it a tree of life.
- B. I don't have a problem with passion plays per se, so long as they get the story right. However, what we need to understand is God actually established a passion play that is to dramatize what Jesus did for His church. It is a play that should be dramatized all over the world, repeated day in and day out. The world shouldn't have to drive to Eureka Springs, Arkansas or Wauchula, Florida to see the passion play. They should be able to look as close as the nearest marriage between Christians. All marriages, of course, are supposed to do this, because this is the meaning of marriage. However, Christian marriages should stand out in this because we are the ones who are supposedly changed by the gospel and the gospel should change our marriages.
- C. **Ephesians 5:22-33** explains. God did not establish marriage, brothers and sisters, so that we could find some kind of emotional or physical fulfillment. The meaning of marriage is supposed to reveal the secret, hidden wisdom of God, the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His church (**Ephesians 5:32**). [I encourage you to read through **Ephesians** and see how that word "mystery" is used in the rest of the book.] As

husbands sacrifice themselves daily for their wives, nourishing and cherishing them, loving them, presenting their wives to themselves as washed and in glorious splendor, they are letting the world see the true Passion Play. As wives surrender in respect to these husbands, obeying and submitting to them because they have first been loved by their husbands, they are letting the world see the true Passion Play.

- D. Brothers and sisters, what is the meaning of our marriages? The meaning of our marriages is the gospel itself. The meaning of our marriages is evangelism, that is, the proclamation of the good news that is in Jesus Christ. Not simply by verbally sharing the information of the gospel, but by the purposeful and committed living out of the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ and of the respectful surrender and submission of His church day in and day out. The meaning of our marriages is the spread of the sanctuary of God throughout the entire world, to provide a picture of the way to the tree of life to everyone.
- E. Brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, may I respectfully say this is why living together outside of marriage is wrong? This is why premarital sex is to be avoided. This is why multiple sexual partners, even serial monogamy is wrong. Because they distort the picture of Christ's covenant relationship with His church. They set an expectation of having the blessings of the covenant without surrendering to the covenant. Further, they deny the exclusivity of Christ's covenant with His church as if He showers His salvation and covenant blessings on any and everyone instead of just upon His church.
- F. May I respectfully say that this is why divorce is, in general, sinful? Because it distorts the picture of Christ's commitment to His church and the church's surrender to its Savior and King. It provides a picture that Christ's loves His church so little that her shortcomings, struggles, weaknesses, and sins would cause Him to abandon her. And it provides a picture that Christ's love for the church is so weak that the church does not appreciate it or long to surrender to it and come under its covering.
- G. May I respectfully say that this is why same gender sexual relations and marriages are wrong? Because they distort the picture of Christ's relationship with His bride the church. Christ did not sacrifice for Himself or for one like Himself. He sacrificed Himself for the church, His bride. Nor did Christ pursue personal satisfaction in a relationship because it was merely what attracted Him. Further, the church cannot be saved by one who is merely like her, but can only be saved by Jesus, the Christ, one who is different from her.
- H. Men, when we cheat on our wives, lie to our wives, mistreat our wives, look down on our wives, patronize our wives, lust after other women, rage at our wives, browbeat our wives, belittle our wives, blame our wives etc. we mar the image of Christ and His gospel for the world. When we do not protect our wives, care for our wives, build up our wives, serve our wives, sacrifice for our wives, lead our wives, support our wives, etc. we mar the image of Christ and His gospel for the world. In these moments, we, like Adam, fail to guard God's sanctuary of meeting with man.
- I. Women, when you cheat on your husbands, lie to your husbands, undermine your husbands' authority, cuckold your husbands, henpeck your husbands, fantasize of other men, belittle your husbands, disrespect your husbands, etc. you mar the picture of Christ's church to the world. When you do not respect your husbands, support your husbands, surrender to your husbands, honor your husbands, etc. you mar the picture of Christ's church to the world. In these moments, you, like Eve, fail to help guard the way to the tree of life.
- J. This is the meaning in our marriages: that the God-glorifying gospel be represented in such a way that the way to the sanctuary of God's meeting place with man and the tree of life are protected, preserved, and propagated such that all men and women can be changed by it and it can be spread throughout the entire world.

Conclusion:

Brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors, do you want real meaning in your marriage? Quit chasing elusive personal fulfillment and meaning. You can't get that from marriage; you can only get that from God. If you want real meaning in marriage, make your marriage meaningful. Make it mean what God intended it to mean from the beginning. Let it display Christ and His church to the world. Let it be the real Passion Play on the world's stage that God intended. Let the world see the gospel played out again and again and again in your marriage so it can spread to your children, your neighbors, your co-workers, and throughout the entire world.