

The Gift of Marriage – Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31

Two verses frame our message today, taken from the longer passages we just read (Genesis 2:19-25, Ephesians 5:21-33)

Genesis 2:24 **That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.**

Ephesians 5:31 **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”**

They sound quite similar, don't they? We will come back to that in a moment, but I want to quickly dive in the Genesis passage.

The book of Genesis is the book of beginnings, addressing the questions, “Where did things come from and how?” If you want to know where this earth and the universe came from, the answer is there: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

If you want to know where people came from, do not look at the chimpanzees or some kind of missing link creature that somehow morphed from an animal into a human being. Very intentionally God created a man out of the dust of the earth and breathed life into him.

The passage we read this morning from Genesis answers the questions, “Where does marriage come from, and why do we have marriage?”

Genesis chapter 2 is devoted to explaining the origins of the family. It starts with an ideal world created as the home of one human named Adam. Adam is placed in an incredible garden called Eden, and there Adam looked after the garden and ate the fruit of the trees. Sounds pretty good so far, doesn't it?

Then we get to verse 18: **God says, “It is not good for man to be alone.”**

It is out of that declaration that we get the next words: **“I will make a helper suitable for him.”**

Now we usually infer that Adam was lonely and that is why Eve was created. The Hebrew would suggest something else that is missed in our English translations. The original language suggests Adam was not adequate to the task before him alone. Eve was created to be Adam's “partner.”

And what was Adam to do? According to verse 28 in the first chapter of Genesis he was to “be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and take care of it.”

That was a task he could not do alone – certainly he could not multiply alone, but neither could he care for creation. He needed not just a helper, but a partner, an equal.¹

¹ R. David Freedman cited in Alex R.G. Deasley's book, *Marriage and Divorce in the Bible and in the Church* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2000) 14.

The next scene we have in Genesis 2 is God bringing all the animals before Adam to be named (Eve is not created yet). Naming in the ancient world was about knowing the nature and character of something. Adam was allowed to see all the animals and conclude, they were not like him. As wonderful as all the animals were, they could never be a true companion, an equal, a partner for Adam.

That sets up the next scene, where God puts Adam to sleep and while he is sleeping he takes from his side bone and flesh, and from that forms the woman. The solution to man's loneliness was to create someone made from his very own body. As we say sometimes in the wedding ceremony –

Eve was created not from the head lest she Lord it over the man,
Nor from the feet lest he trample upon her
But from his side that they may be equals,
and from close to his heart so he would love her.

The Genesis text goes on to record Adam's response to his partner in life:

**This is now bone of my bone, and flesh of my flesh.
And she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. (v. 23)**

Adam must now name the last of God's creation, God's gift to Adam so he would be complete, and she is called "Woman," which literally means "wife of man." We almost get the impression we are listening in on a wedding ceremony and Adam has just declared Eve to be his wife. Interesting enough, the first part about bone and flesh can be paraphrased, "This is my flesh and blood." But flesh and bone could have another meaning. Flesh is soft, or frail, and bone is hard. Scholars suggest the line bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh could be a covenant formula that could be paraphrased, "for better or worse she will be mine."

And now we come to verse 24, which is one of our text verses today:

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Adam needed someone to be his partner in life – his wife. God in love provided him with Eve, who was not just like him, but was a part of him. Verse 24 tells us what marriage is all about in God's eyes: the two become one.

Note that it says in verse 24 that the man is willing to leave one covenant group – his family of origin – to enter into a new covenant relationship, marriage. Covenants were agreements between people that were binding (it was expected that those who enter a covenant will not break it) and permanent, or as we say in the wedding ceremony, "Until death alone parts us."

We have dug deep into this Genesis passage because this is the place of beginnings. Marriage begins at the dawn of creation between the first man and the first woman. It was God's gift to bring wholeness and loving support to their lives. This was God's ideal for all people, for all time.

Let us recap what we learn here in Genesis: the Biblical definition of marriage, this wonderful gift from God, is a lifetime partnership between one man and one woman. There is no other definition of marriage in the Bible, not even when it is used as a metaphor – which we will see in a moment. Throughout Biblical history we see attempts to redefine marriage, such as adding multiple wives, or mistresses and concubines. You will note that it never went well when they did not follow God’s definition of marriage: one man, one woman for life. This is the foundation of the home, and the foundation of society.

Well, we know that creation and the story of Adam and Eve are ancient history. Certainly we are not bound by something that happened so long ago, are we?

This is why I wanted you to hear the word of God through the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:31:

³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

Sound familiar? The same covenant relationship that prompts a man to leave his home to start a new home and family with his wife is found in the New Testament. In fact, Jesus himself cites this verse in Mark 10, and adds something to it: listen -

...⁷“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”...

So marriage is a gift from God not just for ancient history, but for our day as well. Marriage is God’s idea, and God has never had a bad idea! As we noted last week, because God is love, everything He does flows out of that love. Giving us the opportunity to be married to one person for a lifetime is a gift of love from God.

True, building a good marriage relationship is not easy. We start at the altar on our wedding day all starry eyed and sure love will conquer everything – until the first unkind word is said, or the first surprise bill comes to you, or the health scare changes everything, or the job disintegrates before your very eyes... suddenly the happy ever after is a lot of hard work, and sacrifice. We live in a fallen world where the fruit of mankind’s sin is all around us. This attacks the marriage relationship, and far too many have seen their once happy home dissolve into a battle ground.

Yet it does not have to be that way. This is what God is saying to us through His Word. When God says, “Love never fails” or “love covers over a multitude of sins” he meant it. Still, it will take a great commitment from both the husband and the wife to make it a happy home.

So we look quickly at the passage we read from Ephesians again.

Note that it starts with a call to mutual submission, “**submit to one another.**” The men usually like to skip verse 21 and move on to verse 22 where it says, “**Wives submit yourself to your own husband.**” And many times the men do not get to verse 25 where we read,

“Husbands, love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy....”

My guess is, if a wife saw her husband love her as Christ loved the church, she would have no problem submitting to him. He would not be lording it over her but giving himself to her in any way he could to help make her life better. He would cherish her, as Christ cherishes us. Paul would go on to say that husbands should love their wives as they love their own bodies (v. 28) which makes sense since God has made husband and wife one.

What I hope you see in this passage from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians is that marriage is so precious to God that he uses it as a metaphor to describe his own relationship with his church. Jesus loves the church – not the building, but the people who have through faith found salvation in Jesus – Jesus loves the church like a husband loves his bride. In fact, Jesus gives us the example of what a good marriage should look like, saying, “Look at how I treat you – now treat each other this way.”

To use Jesus’ own words, ³⁴ **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35)**

And want to conclude this brief look at where marriage comes from by highlighting those words from Jesus in John 13:35: **“By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

The loving relationship of a God blessed, God honouring marriage is a witness to the world that there is a God who can bring love and life to our relationships. When we truly love our spouse and have a strong marriage, it honours God and witnesses to a watching world.

So what happens when our relationship is struggling? Does God still love us? Absolutely, and He wants to help you deal with the troubles so you become his holy people even in your homes. What if our relationship breaks down completely, or one person simply does not want to work at rebuilding what we have lost – will God still love me? Absolutely yes.

Today many people are avoiding marriage saying it does not last. They say it is too hard to make it work. They do not like the idea of committing to a one person for a lifetime. They do not want to commit to the hard work necessary to grow up and learn to love someone more than they love themselves.

But on the authority of God’s Word we can say, “Marriage is still a good gift from God.” Let our children know you are happy to be married. Let them see what love should look like. Let a world looking on see that doing things God’s way still brings peace and joy and fulfilment.

And for those not married – or not married yet – what can you take away from today’s message?

If you are a Christian – married or single – you are part of the church. And the church is called the bride of Christ in scripture. And someday God is going to bring to an end life as we know it. For the Christian it will be a day of rejoicing. And listen to how the story ends: (Revelation 19:7-9)

7 Let us rejoice and exult

and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;

8 it was granted her to clothe herself

with fine linen, bright and pure”—
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

9 And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God.”

As we partake of Communion this morning we look forward to a greater feast called the marriage supper of the Lamb. Looking at all that is happening around us today it feels like the table must be set and our invitation to come is close at hand!

But until that day let our lives be a testimony of the grace of God, and let it start in our marriages.

Before we close, I want to pray for every couple here today – in person and on-line. Please take the hand of your spouse and bow your heads with me as we pray.