

## **What Is Marriage?—Selected Scriptures—5/14/2023**

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Often on Mothers' Day & Fathers' Day, we focus on God's design for parenting or children or manhood or womanhood.

We do so because the family has been under attack all throughout time & especially in our time.

For example, it's deranged & destructive that many today are afraid to define what a woman is, as if biological reality is evasive or offensive.

So last year on Mothers' Day I sought to honor what the Bible says about women & children & mothers.

I defined women & children & mothers from the Bible to remind us of not only biological reality, but also God-intended beauty & benefit.

We must contend for truth & also celebrate truth to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect, as Titus 2:10 says.

Through the years I've said we should seize these holidays because our culture is headed toward silencing even the celebration of mothers.

That was evident last month as people were offered an option not to receive communications recognizing Mothers' Day.

Some companies decided Mothers' Day could be a trigger that they should allow workers or consumers to opt out of being reminded of.

How tragic that something as valuable as motherhood would be cancelled by the leftist religion of androgyny & sterility!

So we need reminders to anchor our convictions & refuel our actions & proclamations in these vital areas of life.

As common sense is censured or screamed into silence, we must soak in Scripture & boldly speak truth & never cave in.

We want to be ready not only to speak up, but also to live it up—we want to enjoy & portray the glad wisdom of God's design for life.

With all that in mind, I thought I'd focus today's sermon on defining marriage in all its glorious goodness from God.

Since last year I defined women & mothers on Mothers' Day & manhood on Fathers' Day, I thought this year I should focus on the core unit of society that unites a man & a woman in marriage.

As a church, we have the glad & gracious privilege from God to celebrate marriages & childbirths often.

Yet I want to remind you how unique & powerful such blessings are.

You may have heard that the kicker from the Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs spoke at commencement at his alma mater, Georgia Tech & made headlines with what he said.

Do you know the supposedly controversial advice he gave graduates?

He told them NOT to live for themselves, but rather to learn the pleasure of self-sacrifice to serve in the most basic way.

He told them to get married & start a family & not chase selfish dreams at the cost of settling down into the satisfying experience of serving your spouse & having kids.

He said his two Super Bowl rings were not as fulfilling as the opportunity to invest in his wife & the legacy of children.

Of course, God did not intend everyone to be married & 1 Corinthians 7 extols singleness as an opportunity for undistracted devotion to God.

But God started creation by ordaining marriage & He sustained humanity since then by that basic institution of the family.

And God's Word has a lot to say about marriage & He has deeply significant spiritual purposes embedded in it.

So we surely need to study & celebrate biblical marriage.

If you've been to one of the weddings in our church, I trust you've been encouraged by those brief reviews of God's plan for marriage.

I want to do a bit more of the same thing today.

I'll give a broad overview that I pray will help us remember how precious & powerful marriage is.

In the sea of confusion & redefinition & dismissal of marriage, let's recall how important & transcendent & good marriage is.

Our authority as followers of Christ is not cultural trends or political power or supposedly scientific studies or legal decisions.

This is an issue of the authority of God's Word.

I want you to see 4 God-centered descriptions of marriage that root us in the soil of God's Word so that we might bear much satisfying fruit.

These 4 descriptions are vital no matter our situation because we are all assaulted with wrong ideas of marriage every day.

And a major offensive in that war is fighting with God's trustworthy descriptions of purpose & pleasure and profit and promise in marriage.

We need the 4 biblical, God-centered descriptions of marriage that we'll see today to feed and foster right perspectives.

The 1<sup>st</sup> description we see today is found immediately upon opening the Bible—that Marriage is a Design from God—that's point #1.

Open your Bibles with me to Genesis 2 and we'll note that God Himself originated the idea of marriage and defined it for us.

Marriage is not a cultural convention or societal invention that can be discarded or reshaped for the needs of each generation.

Whatever rulers & courts may say about marriage permanence or partners, God's definition stands fixed from the beginning.

Read Genesis 2:18-25 to recall that God Himself instituted marriage & led the 1<sup>st</sup> wedding ceremony—2:18-25. [READ]

The first human relationship God gave was the most intimate as He set marriage as the pattern to follow for society.

So whether you are married or unmarried, used to be married, want to be married or think you'll never be married, you need to understand & proclaim that marriage is 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost a design from God.

When people ask how and where we get definitions for marriage and gender roles, we must point to God as the Designer and the Bible as giving His blueprint.

God made us & we depend on Him for definition & direction.

God initiated finding a companion for the first man & God created the first woman from the first man to be his helper.

Genesis 2:24 defined this as God's basic design for all time that was quoted 3 times in the NT, twice by Jesus as the definition of marriage.

The most obvious fact of God's design for marriage is that marriage is between one man and one woman.

A man shall be joined to his wife, literally to his woman.

Marriage is one man being joined to one woman—not a man with another man or a woman with another woman or even a man with multiple men or multiple women or vice versa.

Marriage is God's idea & God's institution & He defined it as a union between one man & one woman.

And as dependent creatures, we dare not redefine it.

God further declared that they should cleave to one another—that marriage partners should be knit so closely that they share a one flesh relationship emotionally, spiritually, & physically.

That does not mean they are the same with no differences, but it does mean that everything one does affects the other & there is no escaping the intimate intertwining of lives.

God made marriage to be an interdependent knitting of 2 lives, not the coexistence of 2 roommates sharing responsibilities.

Do you view marriage by faith in God's design in these ways?

Do you stay closely connected with your spouse so that the plans & pleasures of life are automatically something to share?

Marriage is leaving parents to establish a new household as another basic unit of society into which children are born.

In Genesis 1:28 God blessed both the man and the woman and told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

So God designed marriage to nurture the next generation.

Of course, God's blessings can be enjoyed & children can be raised even when a home falls short of this ideal.

So let me offer some encouragement to those from or in homes where sin or tragedy has left you in less than the best situation.

God is powerful & loving enough to care for you & He may give extra grace & blessing to homes where loss or brokenness has left a need.

The church is to be part of God's care & I pray we faithfully show the humble compassion needed in life's struggles.

And as we uphold and pursue God's design, we need to admit that we all need the grace of God and the help of others.

But as we make such qualifications, we also need to be careful not to lower God's standard or weaken our pursuit of His goal.

We must still affirm that God designed marriage to be the fundamental unit of society & gave instructions in His Word what that looks like.

We don't need a panel of judges or experts or a scientific study or a majority of legislators' votes to define marriage for us.

God has already revealed His wise pattern & purposes in His Word.

And since God is good, God's design is good and marriage must therefore be intended for our good.

Marriage is not an outdated patriarchal relic to be thrown out or a stuffy restrictive burden to be thrown off.

It is a purposeful, pleasurable design from our wise, loving Creator that is also to be viewed as a gift from God to enjoy.

And that is the 2<sup>nd</sup> God-centered description of marriage I want us to recall today—that Marriage is a Gift from God.

Marriage is a design from God & marriage is a gift from God.

This 2<sup>nd</sup> point is apparent here in Genesis 2 because God saw the aloneness of man as not good and fixed it to be very good.

God's very good provision was a wife for the man.

She was a gift such that 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:7 calls marriage the grace—the undeserved gift—the grace of life that husband & wife enjoy together.

Man did not do anything to earn or deserve this gift of a wife.

So men should not think they deserve the blessings of marriage, whether that's companionship or help or sex or anything else.

Each married man should delight in his wife as a gift from God as Proverbs 18:22 says: "*He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*"

A wife is an expression of goodwill and favor from the Lord because marriage is a gift from God in all its wise design and good blessings.

One good design I mentioned is raising children.

Not all marriages are blessed with children but just as marriage is a gift from God, children are also a gift from God.

Psalms 127 & 128 speak of children as gifts and blessings and rewards from God's gracious, providing hand.

We do not deserve the blessing of children—and with some of you we have felt the pains of not being able to bear children.

So we all need to recognize children as one of the many unmerited kindnesses that God may grant as a gift in marriage.

If you are a mother celebrating Mothers' Day today, you are enjoying grace from God that was not an automatic right or earned achievement.

Mothers' Day is a day to give thanks to God—to look to Him with humble honor and joyful gratitude.

It is a day for us to thank God for our mothers but also for mothers to thank God for the gift of children.

Children can be 1 of God's gifts in marriage, but He has many.

Another blessing of marriage was God crafting woman corresponding to man in a suitable, fitting way that no one or nothing else could be as his helper & partner & companion & complement.

Throughout Scripture, God describes your spouse as your life companion. [Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14; Ecclesiastes 4:10]

Our culture is a sea of loneliness & depression & anxiety while being obsessed with so-called social media with supposed 'friends' & 'likes'.

Could such problems relate to the decrease in marriages & especially those with lifelong commitments & children, maybe because society is missing or undervaluing a basic gift of God?

Of course, experiencing the blessings of companionship in marriage requires effort, but it is worthwhile to pursue as a gift to be enjoyed.

God told how to enjoy marriage & we need to study His instructions & follow them & not assume they are optional.

He defines the husband's role & the wife's role & some of that is biologically obvious, but all of it is serious.

God has designed marriage to be enjoyed as a gift & so it only makes sense to study & seek His ways for our own enjoyment.

And we can add that the Scriptures are also clear about the physical pleasures of marriage as the Song of Solomon is devoted to romance.

Proverbs 5:15-17 speaks figuratively & explicitly about the refreshment, satisfaction & exhilaration enjoyed in marriage.

And 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:1-9 warns against neglecting the blessings of the sexual relationship in marriage.

God has made it very clear that He intended marriage to include physical pleasure.

So in many ways and from many angles, the Bible is clear that marriage is a gift from God.

So if you are married, praise God for His gift to you.

Men, celebrate your wife today on Mothers' Day and praise God for all the joys of marriage for all people.

And all of you who are single also have reason to thank God for His gifts in your life.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7 calls singleness a gift of freedom that allows you to be supremely more devoted to God & His service.

Whether you are single for a season or for all of life, you can praise God for the opportunities of not being married.

Yet even in that freedom, you can praise God for the gift of marriage.

Particularly today, you can praise God if you grew up with the blessing of your parents' marriage & the care of a loving mom.

And you can praise God that you can observe God's blessings in marriage through the godly marriages you see in this church.

Our culture has drifted so far from biblical patterns that the norm now is nothing like God designed marriage to be.

So we can all thank God for every solid, biblical marriage we know.

We can all thank God that He has not left our culture without some testimonies and examples of His good design.

Thank God for Christian marriages because they show not only God's good design, but also of God's good relationship with His people.

And that leads us into our 3<sup>rd</sup> description about marriage today:  
Marriage is a Message from God.

Marriage is (1) a design from God; (2) a gift from God; and now (3) a Message from God.

This point is what I often share in wedding messages as two privileges that God gives to a Christian couple in marriage.

For 2 Christians joining together in marriage, their lives can teach at least 2 points of a message from God.

First, Christian marriage demonstrates that God has a solution to the problem of sin.

After humanity fell into sin, the man and woman were cursed especially within the male-female relationship.

But God solves the problems of sin's curse by transforming men and women through new life in Christ.

So the harmony and pleasures of a truly Christian marriage show God's power to overcome the curse of sin.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing I mention in weddings is how Christian marriage models what a saving relationship with Jesus looks like.

Marriage as God designed should illustrate the relationship between Jesus & the body of believers called His church.

Turn to Ephesians 5:22-32 & let's read that & recall that a godly marriage is a message from God about the relationship of Christ with His true church—Ephesians 5:22-32. [READ]

We married people dare not miss the fact that we are communicating something about Jesus by the way our marriages function.

Someone who has never heard about Jesus can learn of Jesus' love for His church by watching a godly husband love his wife.

That person may have never seen true love in action and a husband's Christ-like love can introduce it.

Similarly, many unbelievers are repulsed by the idea of submitting themselves to God or anyone else.

But a Christian wife's submission to her husband may be the first picture they see that makes submission attractive.

And in contrast, ignoring God's design for gender roles may give an excuse to unbelievers to dismiss God's Word.

That's the gist of Titus 2:3-5 where Paul exhorted women to prioritize ministry to their husbands, children, and home, for the express purpose that God's Word would not be dishonored.

In the OT prophets like Hosea, God also used marriage as an analogy of His relationship with His people, even referring to their idolatry as spiritual adultery.

So a culture's understanding of marriage is not insignificant.

We must believe, live, and proclaim what God intends for marriage because it is bigger than just your home and mine.

Whether you realize it or not, your marriage affects others.

You may think that how you relate to your spouse only affects you, but it speaks to far more people than you think.

And for those who have children, your marriage is preaching one of the most powerful & repeated sermons your kids will ever hear.

So stop & think about your marriage today—what is it saying?

Is it the message from God that God wants others to hear?

Is it one of loving leadership & trusting submission?

I pray that it is and that it will continually grow to be more so as you minister to one another and minister together as couples.

Whatever you are doing, your marriage is saying something.

It is supposed to be a compelling message of the loving relationship between Jesus Christ and His church.

So ask yourself what needs to change to make that message more biblical, powerful, fruitful, and desirable.

And that leads us to our last point today, a 4<sup>th</sup> biblical description about marriage—4<sup>th</sup>ly today, marriage is a promise before God.

Since marriage displays Christ's loving relationship with His people, it should not be unfaithful & it should not end.

God is faithful & we trust His loving commitment will bring us into eternity with Him, right?

And marriage is a model of that relationship.

So we need to remember 4<sup>th</sup>ly that Marriage is a Promise before God.

Marriage is never to be taken lightly.

Just as God invented and encourages marriage, He also witnesses the vows made at a wedding as a couple joins together.

And those vows make marriage a promise before God.

Turn to Malachi 2:13-16 with me to see God's view of those vows—in the last book of the OT, read with me from Malachi 2:13-16. [READ]

God was angry with the Israelites because they had not honored the covenant they had made when they married.

A covenant is a contract, promise, and vow between people.

And God was testifying against the Israelites that He did not accept their offerings because they had not kept their word.

They were breaking the promises they had made in marriage.

And God made His view clear in verse 16—God hates divorce.

From my experience, I've found that people who have suffered through a divorce often best understand why God hates divorce.

There's so much pain and sorrow and brokenness and trouble involved and even after a divorce is over, it's not easy.

So most divorced people will tell you that they hate divorce too.

And we need to believe and preach this truth and yet be ready to humbly weep with those who weep when divorce happens.

Divorces do happen just like lying happens and God hates that too.

Divorce is not the unforgivable sin, but it is not the right option for 2 born-again, Bible-believing Christians.

Real Christians want to repent of sin and reconcile and forgive.

But if a spouse is unrepentant & does not respond to truth & the restorative efforts of church discipline, divorce can happen.

God allows divorce for unrepentant adultery or abandonment by an unbeliever as noted in Matthew 5:32 & 19:8-9 & 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:15.

The believing spouse in such cases is free to remarry just as a widow or widower is free to remarry.

And we should say that Christ always offers forgiveness & help & hope as some of you can testify to God's faithfulness in trials.

As we uphold marriage as God intended, we also want to hold out God's compassion & power to make new beginnings.

But with those clarifications, we still need to affirm this 4<sup>th</sup> point about marriage—that marriage is a promise before God.

That is why God takes marriage so seriously and why He spoke as He did in Malachi 2.

Jesus also emphasized God's involvement in marriage when He was asked about divorce.

After He quoted Genesis 2:24, Jesus said this in Matthew 19:6: *"So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."*

Jesus commanded that no man separate a marriage because God was the One who had joined the two together.

Taking that marriage covenant seriously involves active cultivation of faithful love & active protection against attacks.

Married couples need to take time to nurture and develop and promote their faithful love relationship on every level.

And we all also need to guard against lusting after others whether that is romantic imagination or desirous looking.

A person's marriage is foundational to overall faithfulness.

And since God defined marriage as a commitment & message, we dare not diminish it by condoning cohabitation.

Living together is not marriage because it lacks the vows before God that marriage is & it devalues the intimacy & partnership that only comes in vows before God & each other.

It's even helpful for married couples to review their vows to recall what we've committed to before God.

That can help us in the transcendent gravity of our marriages.

And remember that marriage is evangelistic ministry.

If you long for significant eternal impact, don't forget your marriage.

Scripture gives the first line of ministry as the home such that other ministry is undermined if it doesn't start there.

So I'm thankful for people who love to study & share sound doctrine & answer questions & lead people to Jesus and the Bible.

But we must first practice the sound doctrine of Titus 2, which is the responsibilities of manhood & womanhood with a focus on marriage & the family.

We are distorting sound doctrine if we do not practice the most basic level of sound doctrine in the Gospel ministry of the home.

And similarly, I'm thankful for people who love their kids, but just remember how to love your kids first—men, love your wife; and ladies, love your husbands.

Live out the roles that God has designed and do not neglect the priority of love & commitment & relationship in marriage & our roles.

Do not think that chasing every dream or skill or success or toy for your children is what is best for them if you are neglecting your marriage or living in sin in your marriage.

What's best for the kids is to have faithful parents, so please don't lose sight of that.

And let's just be clear again that I know there are no perfect husbands or wives or parents or marriages or families.

There's 1 perfect man & He is God & man, the mediator between God & man, & His name is Jesus Christ.

We worship & look to Him alone for right standing before God.

He has chosen to be gracious to save sinners through broken people that may or may not have faithful marriages.

He has chosen to rescue souls for His glory no matter what the background or trouble or current status is.

But He has said that He uses His means of the church and the home to bring blessing now and forever into eternity with Him.

Marriage is to model & proclaim His grace & glory in stable nurturing of generations to come.

So we want to be that means even while we depend on Christ to forgive our sins & to empower us to follow Him.

Let's make sure all that's clear because, first & foremost, we need the Savior so we can live in light of His Word by His grace for His glory.

And we should also note that none of this guarantees the salvation of our children either.

It does not guarantee the salvation of anyone around you that sees the glory of the gospel in your marriage.

That is up to God's sovereign grace to give new birth.

But we can be the means He uses & so ask yourself today—how are you doing in all these biblical, God-centered descriptions of marriage?

What can God transform today that He has shown you?

Are you avoiding marriage or disconnecting in your current marriage?



If so, can I plead with you to study God's Word on marriage & embrace it as truly a gift to be enjoyed if God has granted it?

And can I remind you that our view of marriage DOES matter regardless of the life situation we're in?

Others' views of God and your relationship with God are affected by how you talk about marriage and how your marriage functions if you are married.

Many in our society have witnessed wrong views of marriage and had their trust broken and lives shaken, so we don't need more of that.

Instead, we desperately need Christians to model and teach and enjoy God's beautiful, compelling design for marriage.

And if you have been hurt by the heartaches of life in a fallen world, then I want you to know that God can heal and help.

God's ways are good because He is good and He can show you His goodness no matter what you've suffered.

When we look to God's Word, we see His goodness revealed in that Marriage is (1) a Design from God, (2) a Gift from God, (3) a Message from God, and (4) a Promise before God.

Especially today on Mothers' Day, we need to affirm & reaffirm these truths for our practice & proclamation.

I pray that God will encourage our hearts with the beauties of marriages particularly as we honor Mothers' today.

And I also pray that God will use His Word on marriage in our lives today and every day for His glory and for our joy.

Pray with me as we close.