

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost – October 7, 2018

Genesis 2:18-24

18 The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” 19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

It you want to see the state of marriage in our world today, you need only search online for headlines from recent years. There are stories like “Who Needs Marriage? A Changing Institution”; “Why Do People Still Bother to Marry?”; “Is Marriage a ‘Dying Institution’?” and “The Marriage Apocalypse May Be Coming.” The general consensus would seem to be that traditional marriage is a thing of the past and either needs to be drastically updated for modern times or thrown out altogether. But of course the opposite is true. Marriage is the single greatest institution to affect the lives of everyone in this world. Even if someone wants nothing to do with marriage, they still were born to parents whose marriage or lack of a marriage had a direct influence on their lives. And so this morning we will look to make a defense of marriage by going back to the very beginning with our verses from Genesis 2. We will look at God’s Design for a Perfect Marriage and see why marriage as God intended is still so important for our lives today.

Genesis chapter 1 describes God’s work of creation, establishing the patterns and laying out what he created on each of the six days. Chapter 2 then is a not a separate creation account, but a topical recap of certain things he did on those days, in particular day six and the creation of man and woman. Verse 18: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.’” The first thing to note here is that it is the Lord God who is speaking. He is the one who gives the evaluation that it is not good for the man to be alone and so he is the one who institutes marriage. Contrary to popular opinion, marriage is not a human creation. God set up it up and laid out the simple blueprint—one man, one woman for life. Over the centuries and millennia people have done many things to change the plan—whether the participants or the timing or the purpose—and so it should come as no surprise when such marriages do not work and the institution of marriage seems to be failing when God’s design is not followed.

Focusing then on God’s evaluation, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” it is interesting to note the timing. This is all happening during creation week when at the end God gives his assessment: “God saw all that he had made and it was very good” (1:31). It is easy to think of reasons why it is not good for one to be alone—whether it is loneliness or fear or failure to get things accomplished or temptations to lust. But all of those reasons are the result of sin. God’s evaluation is made in perfection and so then demonstrates how there is a real need for marriage. The statement could be made that in a perfect world everyone would be married. That

is how God designed us to function at our best. But of course sin and its effects have changed that so that not everyone is married. Of course it's not a sin to be unmarried. Death may have taken away a spouse. Sin and unfaithfulness in a marriage may have led to divorce. We may not be able to find the right spouse because not everyone is marriage material, again a consequence of our sinful nature. At the same time though it can be a sin to be unmarried. When one is living together to enjoy the benefits of marriage outside of marriage. When one is intentionally choosing to remain single for selfish, self-centered reasons rather than following God's design for men and women. The point here is not to judge someone for being married or unmarried, but simply to acknowledge that God designed men and women for marriage in perfection and recognize that sin and its effects have corrupted that design.

Verse 18 ends with God's plan: "I will make a helper suitable to for him." The helper concept brings up the roles that God has established in marriage and are further described in Ephesians 5—the husband as the loving head, the wife as the submissive helper. It is good to remember that these roles too were established in the perfection of creation. The roles are intended to complement each other—nothing will work well when there are two heads or two helpers. The issue that many have with these roles is again the result of sin. Sadly there are husbands who use their authority to dominate and rule their wives. Sadly there are wives who resent their husbands' authority and are not willing to submit. But the best example for this design is always Christ and his church. As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, the church will then gladly submit to his will and ways. This is the model we are to follow in marriage as well. A husband will love his wife and sacrifice himself for her. A wife will willingly submit to a husband who has her best interest at heart. Repentance and forgiveness will always play a key part in this because two sinful human beings will always fail to live up to God's design for these roles.

The other part of God's plan was a helper who was suitable. To demonstrate this need God brought the animals to Adam for him to give them names (vv. 19-20). The point was to show Adam what he was missing. While a dog has often been called man's best friend, no animal could meet Adam's needs on a physical, emotional, or intellectual level. Companionship is one of the great blessings of marriage. It is more than just having a friend and someone to spend time with. In our sinful world it is having someone always by your side through the ups and downs that this life brings. One of the other great blessings of marriage is children. Here as well in God's design two are better than one in raising up the next generation. Father and mothers each have different roles and abilities to take in this important task. It is again no surprise that when marriage is being laid aside, those who are being hurt most are the children who are forced to deal with the situation. Being a single parent is also not a sin, but it is certainly harder to raise children alone than within the design that God has intended.

Verses 21 & 22 recount the special care and creation God took in the creation of Eve, forming the woman from the rib of the man. There is this close and intimate connection that God intends for marriage. At the end of verse 22 it mentions that God "brought her to the man," another point that emphasizes God's institution of the marriage. In perfection Adam was willing to submit to God's plan and choice for his wife. He said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (v. 23). This was really a love poem of sorts; Adam was rejoicing at the gift that God had brought to him. For us today this is not saying that arranged marriages should be the norm or that we should just wait passively for God to drop a spouse into our lives. But God does have a hand in bringing us the spouse we have and we should treasure them as God's gift to us. None of us are perfect Adams

or perfect Eves. But we can rejoice in the gift that God has given us just as we rejoice in the forgiveness that Jesus won for us and that we can share with one another.

Verse 24 closes our text: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” These words highlight again the importance of marriage. If one is married that is to be one’s primary relationship, superseding even the relationship with one’s parents and also with one’s children. The connection between husband and wife is so close that two people become one flesh. Two individuals are willing to sacrifice their own selves for the good of each other. The blessing of a sexual union helps to cement this bond and draw the couple closer. This is another area where many do not follow God’s design and so it is no surprise to see marriages fail. With a self-centered, me-first attitude it is hard for two to become one. When sex is used outside of marriage that only harms relationships and confuses them. The bonding that takes place only complicates things when the lifelong commitment is missing. But when it is used as God designed, this one flesh union is a great blessing for a husband and wife in their marriage.

We could spend much more time talking about God’s design for a perfect marriage with all the details and applications that could be made in specific situations. Will anyone’s marriage be perfect as God intended? No, not when it is the union of two sinful human beings. But that doesn’t mean we give up on trying. The more we follow God’s design, the more we use repentance and forgiveness when things break down, the more the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to help us show Christ’s love, the better our marriages will be. While in a perfect world everyone would be married, we do not live in a perfect world. So whether you may be married or single, when you will be married someday or not, we can all work to defend the institution of marriage against those who would attack and tear it down. We will give it the honor and respect it deserves as God’s perfect plan for husbands and wives. Amen.