

Marriage

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to Genesis chapter 2.

Genesis chapter 2. And we'll read a few verses there. I will read first of all in verse 18 and then from verse 21.

Genesis 2 at verse 18. Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. And then verse 21.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man.

Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man.

[1 : 0 4] Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. And they shall become one flesh. This evening I just want to begin a short sermon series called Marriage, Ministry and Mistakes.

Marriage, Ministry and Mistakes. Now the reason I'm doing this is because at a recent presbytery meeting, a committee of the presbytery were asked to produce a paper on the subject of marriage, ministry and mistakes.

As you know, the Western Isles Presbytery has been through a rough time in the past year or so. And a lot of it revolved around this subject, the subject of marriage, ministry and mistakes.

And so the presbytery wanted to have a paper written on the subject for their use and for their reference. And as the paper that is to be presented at presbytery, as it has to be biblical and confessional, and because I'm part of the committee writing this paper, I thought the best thing to do is preach about it.

So I'm sorry I'm preaching about it. But it's good to learn about these things and think about them. To think about the subject of marriage, ministry and mistakes. So this evening we're going to focus upon marriage and ask what is biblical marriage.

[2 : 3 0] Then next week we will consider ministry. And we'll consider what is biblical ministry. And then the following week, God willing, we will look at some of the biblical examples of men who made mistakes in the ministry.

And see what we can learn from their experiences. And of course, this subject on marriage, ministry and mistakes, it doesn't just apply to ministers and their marriages.

It relates to all of us. Because the beautiful thing about the Bible is that the Bible addresses all of us. And it applies to all of us. And so we can all learn from the Bible so that we will live more Christ-centered lives for the glory of God.

And so this evening we're asking the question, what is biblical marriage? What is biblical marriage? And it's biblical marriage because, well, none of us are experts on this subject.

I'm certainly not an expert on marriage. I've only been married about seven years. Some of you have been married for a lot longer. Some for 30 years, some for 40 years.

[3 : 33] Sandy and Etta, they've been married for 50 years. They had their 50th wedding anniversary recently. And so when it comes to marriage, I'm a novice. But when we come to the Bible, we're presented with biblical marriage.

And I'd like us just to consider biblical marriage under three headings. Creation, Covenant and Christ. They are the three headings. Creation, Covenant and Christ.

So we look first of all at creation. We're looking at creation and we'll read Genesis chapter 2 and verse 24. We were told there, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

And so we begin at the beginning in the book of beginnings, which is the book of Genesis. And what we see here is that marriage is as old as the creation itself. It's mentioned here on the sixth day of creation when Adam and Eve were created by God.

God created the world, as we all know, in the space of six days. And on the sixth day of creation, Adam was formed. Adam was formed as the apex of God's creation.

[4 : 47] The Lord God, he had made everything. He had made the birds of the air, the fish of the sea and all the insects. But Adam was the apex. He was the climax and culmination of God's creation.

And the Lord God, he created Adam from the dust of the ground and he made him in his own image and in his own likeness. But the problem was, as we read, Adam was alone.

There was no one in all creation fit to be his helper. And so the Lord, he provided Eve. And when Adam saw Eve, he said in verse, as we read in verse 23, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. And, you know, I love that quote by the Puritan Matthew Henry when he speaks about the creation of Eve and her relationship to Adam.

Matthew Henry, he said, And what we see there is that marriage was part of God's order of creation.

[6 : 08] That a man and a woman should become one flesh. And verse 24 reads, as we read earlier, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

And so what we see is that there is union and unity in the act of marriage. But, you know, what's clear from the creation account in Genesis is that the church doesn't define marriage.

The state doesn't define marriage. It's God who defines marriage. And God defined marriage so that mankind could enjoy the world that God created.

Marriage was part of God's order of creation. And marriage was God's plan for procreation. That's what we read in Genesis 1 verse 28.

It says, And so marriage, it was instituted, it was defined and ordained by God.

[7 : 13] Marriage was instituted, defined and ordained by God. In fact, often at a wedding service, well, I often quote from the reformed book of Common Order.

And in that book, it states that marriage was ordained for the lifelong companionship, help and comfort, which husband and wife ought to have for one another. Marriage was ordained for the continuance of family life, in which children who are the heritage of the Lord may be duly nurtured and trained up in godliness.

Marriage was ordained for the stability and welfare of human society, which can be strong and happy only when the marriage bond is held in honour.

And so marriage was instituted, defined and ordained by God at creation. And that's why we often refer to marriage as a creation ordinance.

In fact, there are three creation ordinances. And what we mean by a creation ordinance is that they are rules which God instituted, defined and ordained at creation.

[8 : 17] And these creation ordinances, they are binding upon all creation and they're binding upon us until the end of time. And these three creation ordinances, they're to be found in Genesis chapter 2.

The first creation ordinance is the Sabbath. And it's mentioned at the beginning of chapter 2. It says in verse 1, Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

So the first creation ordinance is the Sabbath. The second creation ordinance is work. That's mentioned in verse 15 of chapter 2. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and to keep it.

Adam wasn't created to be idle. He wasn't created to be lazy. Adam was to work the ground and keep the garden, the garden that God had placed him in.

[9 : 22] And then of course the third creation ordinance mentioned in Genesis chapter 2 is marriage. And so there are three creation ordinances, three rules which God has instituted, defined, and ordained at creation.

The Sabbath, work, and marriage. And these three creation ordinances, they are binding upon all creation until the end of time. Which means that we can't remove them, we can't redefine them, and we can't alter them.

They're binding upon us. But as we know only too well, these three creation ordinances have been completely undermined in our day and in our generation.

The Sabbath, it's no longer a priority in the life of our nation. Sometimes I wonder if it's a priority in the life of the Christian. Because we've neglected the Sabbath. Work has taken over our life.

We work seven days a week instead of six days, which God ordained and showed to us by his own example. Of course there are, of course, certain jobs that require people to work seven days a week.

[10 : 28] We know that works of necessity and mercy. But there are many jobs that don't need to be working, need people to be working 24-7. And you know, when you think about it, with these three creation ordinances, the Sabbath, work, and marriage, our neglect of the Sabbath, it has led to a demand to overwork.

And that demand to overwork, it has had an impact upon marriages and family life. Because there's no denying it, the demands and pressures of work, the need to pay bills, the pay childcare, juggle children, it all puts a strain and a pressure upon marriages and the family home.

And in one sense, we are protected from it in our island. We have this great privilege where most things are still closed. But it's not the same on the mainland.

And as a nation and even as a society, we have neglected all these things. We've neglected the Sabbath, work, and marriage at our own peril.

We've removed the Sabbath, we've increased work, and we've redefined marriage. And ultimately, it has recreated what the family home was created in the first place to look like.

[11 : 44] And yet all these creation ordinances, the Sabbath, work, and marriage, they were instituted, defined, and ordained for our good and ultimately for God's glory.

And so marriage was instituted, defined, and ordained by God at creation. But the second thing I'd like us to say about biblical marriage is covenant. So creation, covenant.

Covenant. The Bible is a book of covenants. And there are many covenants mentioned in the Bible, but specifically, the Bible is made up of two covenants.

The Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The Latin word for covenant is testament, which is where we get the division in our Bibles between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible is divided into two covenants. But what's interesting is that both covenants, both testaments, they are actually one and the same covenant. They're one story.

[12 : 47] They're the same promise, but they're administered in different occasions. They're administered before Christ and after Christ. And covenant, it's the theme which ties the whole Bible together.

The Bible is all about God working in salvation towards sinful humanity because of his faithfulness. He works towards us because of his faithfulness towards his covenant.

And you know, this concept of covenant, it's relevant to marriage because that's what marriage is. Marriage is a covenant. In fact, that's how the Lord described his covenant relationship with the Israelites in the Old Testament.

He described it just like a marriage. In the book of Isaiah, the Israelites, they were rejoicing and they said, For the Israelites, it was like the celebration of a wedding, to know that the Lord would uphold his marriage covenant with his people, despite their waywardness and disobedience.

And you know, there's no doubt that the Israelites, they were wayward. They were disobedient many, many times. All you have to do is look at the book of Hosea. Hosea is all about the adultery of Israel, where the Lord says that the Israelites, they had prostituted themselves to idols by turning away from worshipping the living and through God.

[14 : 30] And the book of Hosea, it's all about showing Israel that they have been unfaithful to the Lord and they've been unfaithful to his marriage covenant with them and the Lord is calling them back in repentance.

And so the concept of covenant, it's relevant to marriage, but even more so because a covenant, it was a legally binding contract. And interestingly, there were other covenants made in the Bible that weren't between the Lord and his people.

We read that David made a covenant with Jonathan. Job made a covenant with his eyes. Armies, they often made covenants with one another as peace treaties. So there were many covenants mentioned in the Bible.

But as we said, the theme of the Bible, the story of the Bible, it's the story of covenant. And there's one covenant that runs through the whole Bible from Genesis through to Revelation.

And it's this covenant called the covenant of grace. And it's a covenant of grace because it was initiated by the Lord, not by us. It was initiated by the Lord towards sinful mankind.

[15 : 43] The Lord didn't have to enter into a covenant with us. He wasn't obligated in any way. And yet out of his love and out of his own good pleasure, the Lord chose to make a covenant.

He chose to make this binding promise. And what's unique about the covenant of grace is that when a covenant was usually made, it was usually this mutual agreement between two equal parties.

But what was remarkable about the covenant of grace is that holy God and sinful man, they're not on the same standing. The Lord knew that sinful man could never reach up to God's holiness.

They could never keep their side of the contract. We would fail. The covenant would then be null and void. That's what happened with Adam in the Garden of Eden. The covenant of works, it was made with Adam.

But Adam sinned. He fell into any state of sin and misery. And he destroyed the covenant of works. But the beauty of the covenant of grace is that the Lord sought to do something in order that there was nothing that could break this covenant of grace.

[16 : 54] The Lord sought to redeem a people to himself regardless of how wayward they could be. And the wonder of it all is that the Lord graciously bound himself to his people.

The Lord bound himself to this covenant promise. The Lord took the vows and the Lord promised that he would be faithful to his covenant people.

It's a covenant of grace because sinners can receive this covenant promise of salvation not by any merit of their own but solely by the Lord's initiative.

And in that covenant promise, the Lord assures his people. He assures us tonight, I will be your God. You will be my people. But you know what's so beautiful about this covenant promise and the theme of covenant throughout the Bible is that the covenant of grace, it was reaffirmed through, throughout many stages of history.

Whenever the covenant of grace was reaffirmed, there would always be this sign and then the seal. There would be a symbol of surety and a symbol and then there would be the surety.

[18 : 07] There would be a picture, then you could say, then there was a promise. Just to explain what I mean. When the covenant of grace, when it was affirmed to Abraham, it was affirmed to Abraham in Genesis 17.

And the Lord said, My covenant is with you. You shall be a father of a multitude of nations. This is my covenant which you shall keep between me and you and your offspring after you.

Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. And so the sign of the covenant was circumcision and the seal of the covenant was the promise that through the seed of Abraham there would be blessing for all nations.

There was a sign and a seal. Then that covenant, years later it was reaffirmed to Moses. We're told in Deuteronomy chapter 4 that the Lord spoke to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai and the Lord declared to Moses his covenant of grace.

And the Lord commanded the people to keep the covenant according to the Ten Commandments. Therefore the sign of the covenant with Moses was the law.

[19 : 21] And the seal of the covenant was obedience to the law. The call to be obedient to the law. So the sign and then the seal. And then years later the Lord reaffirms his covenant of grace again and he does it with David.

The Lord said to David in 2 Samuel 7 and these are key moments in the Bible. The Lord said to David in 2 Samuel 7 that he would establish a royal dynasty through him.

The Lord said, I will raise up your offspring after you who shall come from your body and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

I will be to him a father. He shall be to me a son. So the sign of the covenant was this royal dynasty, this royal descendant.

And the seal of the covenant was I will be to him a father. He shall be to me a son. There's a sign and a seal. But you know, when you consider this theme of covenant that's running through the whole of the Old Testament, it's beautiful.

[20 : 27] Because this covenant, which is, as we said, is one and the same covenant between the New Testament and the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's one and the same covenant and it reaches its climax and culmination with the death of Jesus Christ.

Because it's at the cross that we see the promised seed of Abraham being slain. That's the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham. It's at the cross that Jesus fulfills the law, which was the covenant with Moses.

It's at the cross that this royal descendant of King David is establishing his kingdom and throne forever. That was the covenant with David. And you know, the wonder of the cross is that Jesus fulfills the covenant promise of grace and he establishes its importance for us by his own blood.

And of course, the blood of Jesus Christ was the sign of the new covenant. And the seal of the new covenant was whosoever shall believe in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And you know, it's amazing that the whole of the Bible, it's tied together by this theme of covenant. And it was Jesus who said when he instituted the Lord's Supper, he took that goblet of wine and he said, this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

[21 : 55] And so what we have to see is that marriage is not only a picture of salvation. Marriage is also a binding covenant promise. Marriage is a covenant and that's what a man and a woman do when that's what they enter into on their wedding day.

They enter into a covenant before God and in the presence of witnesses. And although a wedding is one of the happiest days of someone's life, it's actually one of the most solemn.

Because when a couple make vows to one another, the congregation are asked to stand because they're standing in the presence of God and all the witnesses, they're witnessing the covenant vows which are sealing the marriage.

And the Bible warns us that it's better that we should not vow than to make a vow and to break it. And as you know, in a marriage service, the couples, they take one another by the right hand and they seal their marriage with vows.

So for example, on my wedding day, I, Murdo, take you, Alison, to be my lawfully wedded wife and I promise in the presence of God and of these witnesses that I will be to you a loving, faithful, and dutiful husband for richer, for poorer, for better, for worse, in sickness and in health until God shall separate us by death.

[23 : 22] And after the covenant has been formulated, the covenant is then symbolized by exchanging rings. So like the covenants the Lord made with his people throughout the generations, there was a sign and a seal.

So there's a sign of the marriage covenant with a ring. And there's the seal of a marriage covenant with the vows that are affirmed. And you know, what I always find solemn, so solemn at a marriage service is that a covenant of marriage, it's a binding promise until God shall separate us by death.

And you know, this is important because when God instituted marriage at creation, man and woman, they were to be bound to one another by God as one flesh.

Jesus explained that in the New Testament. He said, what God has joined together, let no one separate. So Jesus made absolutely clear that the only one who's allowed to sever covenant ties in a marriage is the one who bound them in the first place.

And that is God. And that's what the solemn vows of marriage throw attention to, that marriage is to be until God shall separate us by death.

[24 : 41] Now, we will highlight the issues of divorce and separation in a couple of weeks' time. but this evening we're considering biblical marriage as God set it out in the Bible.

And as we've seen, biblical marriage is part of creation. Biblical marriage is also a covenant. But there's one person that the creation of marriage and the covenant of marriage points to and that is Christ.

That's our last heading. Creation, covenant, and lastly and briefly, Christ. Christ. Christ. When Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians, as we read, he exhorted the Christian men and women in the church to imitate Jesus Christ in their marriage.

He said, Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its saviour.

Now, as the church submits to Christ, says Paul, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. But then Paul says, Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

[25 : 57] Paul says that the example for Christian marriage is Christ's marriage to his bride, the church. That's the example. And as we've said, the covenant of grace which reached its climax and its culmination with the new covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ, Paul says that it's that covenant we should emulate and imitate in our marriage covenant.

Because what the covenant of grace reminds us of is the Lord's long-term faithfulness, commitment, and love towards his people. And as the climax and culmination of the covenant of grace, Paul says that Christ's covenant love for the church, that is the primary example which should be expressed in the marriage covenant of a Christian couple.

Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. It's a huge ask. Because the love of Christ, it's sacrificial love.

But the basis of Christ's marriage covenant with his bride, the church, his love is covenant love. And Paul explains what this unconditional, sacrificial, covenant love of Christ looks like.

And he did that in that, you could say, poetic form in the well-known passage of 1 Corinthians 13. Paul said, love is patient and kind.

[27 : 30] Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. And what Paul says is that the love of Christ for his church, it must be emulated and imitated in the life of the believer and in the marriage covenant of a Christian couple.

And I say that should be part of the marriage covenant of a Christian couple because in some way we cannot expect an unconverted couple to love like Christ loved the church.

We can't expect them to do that without first knowing who Jesus is and what Jesus Christ has done. And we'll look more closely at that in the coming weeks.

We'll go into it in more depth. But what we must see is that biblical marriage, it was formulated at creation. It's based upon God's covenant of grace and it's exemplified to us in Christ's love for the church.

[28 : 41] So creation, covenant, and Christ. And you know, just in conclusion, you know, there's not what John, about this creation, covenant, and Christ, and marriage.

it's what John draws our attention to in the book of Revelation as our Bible comes to its close. John says, he talks about the promise of what Jesus will do for his bride as he presents her faultless before his glory with exceeding joy.

John writes in Revelation 21, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

[29 : 54] And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

And so what is biblical marriage? It was formulated at creation. It's based upon God's covenant, and it's exemplified to us in Christ's love for his bride, the church.

So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word.

It is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify and enjoy thee forever. We thank thee, Lord, for the reminder this evening that we were created in thine own image and in thy likeness.

We were created to love one another as Christ hath loved us. And Lord, we pray that even for our marriages, Lord, that thou wouldest keep us. We realise that we faint and fail, but yet we look to a God of covenant, a God who is faithful, faithful to his every promise, one who never fails us.

[31 : 09] And help us, Lord, we pray thee then, to love as Christ loved the church and gave himself for us. Bless us, Lord, we ask thee. Keep the evil one from us.

Protect our homes and our families. Protect our marriages, Lord. Help us, we pray, to be used for thine own glory, for the extension of thy kingdom, to lift up the name of Jesus.

Remember, Lord, those who are in marriages where maybe a spouse is still outside of Christ. Lord, we plead that they too would come, that they would know what it is to have Christ in them, the hope of glory.

Bless them, Lord, we plead. Remember those, Lord, who have lost their spouse, those who walked with them for many years in life, and yet they're reminded of the vows they made long ago, that these vows would be until God shall separate them by death.

But, Lord, we bless thee for the great hope that we have, the hope of what marriage points to, that one day that the Lord will make all things new, and he will prepare his bride.

[32 : 16] She will be adorned for her own husband, and in that place there will be neither mourning nor crying, nor tears, for the former things will have passed away. O Lord, help us then, we pray, to keep looking to the Saviour, the Saviour who loved us and gave himself for us.

Keep us, Lord, we ask, and go before us, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We shall sing in conclusion the words of Psalm 45.

Psalm 45, we're singing, it's in page 268, and we're singing from verse 13. Psalm 45 in the Scottish Psalter, the first version of the psalm, and this psalm, the title of it is A Song of Loves, it's a love song, it's actually the father's love song about his son, Jesus Christ, and their marriage, his marriage, to his bride, the church, and that's what's been described in these verses.

The daughter of the king and how she's been brought into the father's house to abide there forever. That's the church, how she's brought home to be with the Lord.

And it's the fulfilment of the covenant promise. That's what it mentions in verse 17. Behold the daughter of the king, all glorious is within, and with embroideries of gold, her garments wrought have been.

[33 : 54] She shall be brought unto the king in robes with needle wrought. Her fellow virgins following shall unto thee be brought. We'll sing down to the end of the psalm, of psalm 45, to God's praise.

Amen. The daughter of the king of glorious is within, and with them the bride and his of both their garments brought and be.

She shall be brought unto the king in robes with needle wrought.

and their fellow virgins following shall unto thee be brought.

They shall be brought with gladness great and earth and earth on every side into the palace of the king and there they shall abide instead of those thy father's dear thy children thou mayst take and in all places of the earth than noble princess may.

[36 : 13] thy name thy name remembered I will be through riches all to thee the people that forever more shall praise thou praise is yet to thee the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever.
Amen.