

Introduction:

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (**Genesis 1:1**, ESV). God was in the beginning of everything, therefore we are striving to put God in the beginning of everything we are and do. We not only want to put God at the beginning of everything we are and do in the church, but also at home. After all, if what we do here among the church is not impacting us everywhere, then what we are doing here is useless. Therefore, in the month of May, we are focusing on the family. We are doing things a little different than usual. For this month, we are going to have two coinciding series. In the mornings, Andrew will be presenting a series throughout the entitled "Is There Hope for My Family?" During the Sunday evenings, I will be presenting a series entitled "Toward a Theology of Marriage." Tonight, I want to present a lesson for couples, "In the Beginning, Marriage."

I want to begin with this question. Why marriage? As God was wrapping up His creation week, He not only created male and female, He created marriage. Why? Likely, it isn't what you think. In fact, I regret to say that what I'm going to share with you is not the reason I got married. Frankly, this cuts to the heart of every problem and struggle Marita and I have had in marriage. To be honest, no one ever told me God's true reason for marriage. Sadly, I believe that's because our understanding of marriage has been more impacted by modern romantic comedies than by the Bible. In the beginning, God instituted marriage. Let's go back to that and see if we can figure out why. Some may remember we looked at this a couple of years ago. I believe it is time for a reminder. Marita knows I need it.

Be prepared, because when we are done, I am going to give you an opportunity to surrender to the gospel which we will learn marriage points to. I am going to give you an opportunity to seek spiritual help from the brethren here by coming forward and sharing your spiritual needs with them. But my main goal is to generate conversation. Not just any conversation, but to generate a conversation between you and your spouse. Or between you and your potential spouse. I've got some questions at the end of the interactive outline for you to discuss with your spouse. My goal tonight is to motivate you to have that conversation.

Discussion:

- I. "It is not good that the man should be alone" (**Genesis 2:18**, ESV).
 - A. **Genesis 2:18** explains why marriage. Throughout **Genesis 1**, God looked at what He had created and seven times declared it good. However, according to **Genesis 2:18**, He looked at one part of His creation and declared it not good. The fact that the man was alone was not good. God instituted marriage so man wouldn't be alone. But why was it a problem for man to be alone?
 - B. Sadly, for most of my life, I believe I've looked at this verse all wrong.
 1. Sadly, I have for too long read this sentence through the lens of the Romanticism of the last 300 years and the romantic comedies of the last 65 year. Therefore, I 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. First, how could man be lonely when he was in such a close fellowship with God? And before you protest, please remember that one of the most common pieces of advice shepherds and preachers give troubled married couples is that they need to quit looking to each other for what they can only get from God. Adam had that. He had what we can only get from God. He was "alone," but he was not lonely.
 3. If not dealing with loneliness, what was the big problem with being alone? According to blueletterbible.com, the word translated "alone" is used in the Old Testament 194 times in 176 verses and never once does it mean "lonely." God meant about Adam something similar to the statement about Moses in **Exodus 18:14, 18**. Jethro asked Moses, "Why do you sit alone, and all the people stand around you from morning till evening?" And then declared, "You and the people with you will certainly wear yourselves out, for the thing is too heavy for you. You are not able to do it alone" (ESV). Or again, as Moses cried out to God in **Numbers 11:14**, "I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me" (ESV). One of the very common usages of this word is actually to refer to Yahweh who alone is God, who does mighty things alone. Consider **Nehemiah 9:6**, when Nehemiah says, "You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it..." (ESV). Yahweh alone is

God, alone He made and preserves the heaven and the earth. Again in **Psalm 72:18**, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things” (ESV). And in **Psalm 86:10**, “For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God” (ESV).

4. What was God’s point about Adam? Not that he was lonely, but that he was alone. That mattered not because he needed friends and companions, he had God. That mattered because He had a job to do. And like Moses, the job was too big for him. It was too heavy for him to bear alone.

II. “I will make him a helper fit for him” (**Genesis 2:18**, ESV).

- A. God’s solutions to man’s problem was marriage. He gave Adam woman as wife. But God calls her “helper.” What a powerful term. Man was given a task he could not accomplish alone, so God gave a helper.
- B. What is fascinating about the word “helper” is that it is used 19 other times in the Old Testament. 16 of those times it refers to God Himself (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.
- C. Think of it like this. God can do all things alone, but man cannot do the job God gave him alone. Therefore, God gave the man help in the form of woman.
- D. And thus marriage began.

III. “The LORD God...put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (**Genesis 2:15**, ESV).

- A. **Genesis 2:15** explains the job God gave man that was too heavy for him to accomplish alone: to work and keep the garden God had planted in the east of Eden.
 1. *Work*: The idea of work was more than to do a day’s farming. Rather, it conveys the idea of serving the garden. That is cultivating and caring for it so it will produce fruit. This is a picture of a mutually beneficial relationship between the garden and the first family.
 2. *Keep*: This is not just another way of saying they worked the garden. This same word is used to describe the job of the cherubim in **Genesis 3:24**. There, it is translated “guard.”
 3. Thus, Adam was the servant and guardian of the garden of God.
- B. To understand the importance of this job, we have to understand exactly what the Garden is. It is more than an orchard. It is the very first meeting place between God and man. Our usual term for the meeting place between God and man is the Sanctuary. Or Temple. In fact, in **Ezekiel 28:13, 14, 16**, we see God Himself connect Eden with Zion by speaking of Adam being thrown from the mountain of God when He was cast out of Eden. For the Jewish reading audience, this immediately connected Eden with Sinai where the tabernacle was constructed and Zion where the temple was. The Garden, then, was the first temple; more than that, it was the first city of God. Like the last city (**Revelation 21:22**), it has no separate temple because the Lord God Almighty was its temple. With this in mind, we see Adam as the very first High Priest of God, and Eve was the first Levite, if you will. They were to serve the city of the living God, the sanctuary of the living God.

IV. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it” (**Genesis 1:28**, ESV).

- A. But to what end were they to serve and guard God’s sanctuary, His temple, His city? **Genesis 1:28** explains that. Remember what **Genesis 2:8** tells us about the garden. It was planted in the east of Eden. That is, the garden did not fill all of Eden, let alone all of the earth. But in **Genesis 1:28**, God commissioned Adam to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” Not fill the garden. Not even fill Eden. Fill the earth and subdue it. Two aspects of this must be noted.
 1. *Subdue the earth*: The garden didn’t fill Eden, let alone the earth. But Adam and Eve were to subdue the entire earth, not just the garden. That is, they were to serve and protect the garden such that it overtook the entire earth. They were to fill the earth with the sanctuary of God. Earth was to be one big city of the living God, with the Lord God Almighty as its temple.
 2. *Fill the earth*: Adam and Eve didn’t fill the garden, let alone Eden, let alone the earth. But they were to be fruitful and multiply and fill the entire earth that they subdued through their service and guardianship. However, notice from **Genesis 1:27** what Adam and Eve were created to be: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (ESV). When these were fruitful and multiplied, what would they produce? Little image bearers of God.
 3. Adam and Eve were to serve and guard the garden in such a way that it subdued the earth as they filled God’s sanctuary with God’s image bearers who would in turn serve and guard God’s sanctuary with them.
- B. Sadly, they failed. Instead of filling the earth with the garden, the garden was essentially filled with 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**).

- V. "I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb'...and he showed me the holy city..." (**Revelation 21:9-10**, ESV).
- 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. It is no coincidence the Bible begins with the Garden city of God, watered by rivers, and built around the tree of life and it ends the same way. In **Revelation 21:9-22-5**, we hear of the Bride of Christ. But this bride isn't a woman, she is a city. She is the new Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem. In this heavenly city is the river of life (**Revelation 22:2**). Not only that, but the tree of life. It is an amazing city, the description of whose glory we simply do not have time to discuss in this lesson. But notice in **Revelation 21:24** that the kings of the earth walk by its light and bring their glory into it. It is a city that truly fills the earth.
 - C. The Bible is the story that goes from the first garden city of God to the ultimate garden city of God. But was that city? What is the new and heavenly Jerusalem? **Hebrews 12:22-24** explains, this city is Christ's church. We are the garden city of God, finding life in the tree of life (Christ on the cross), being watered by the river of life (the Holy Spirit). We, Christ's church are the new sanctuary, the temple, the city of the living God. Only we are not a sanctuary made of brick and mortar, but of living stones (cf. **I Peter 2:4-5**). **Ephesians 2:19-22** also explains that Christ's church is this sanctuary. We are being built to be His holy temple, His sanctuary, His city, a place for His Spirit to dwell. That is, His church is the place where God now meets with man. We are not surprised then to discover Christ's church is essentially called His bride in **Ephesians 5:22-33**.
 - D. This leads us right back to God's original intent for marriage. It is not accomplished by tending the ground and farming the earth. But the task God gave man for which he needed God's helper still exists. The purpose of your marriage is the same purpose as Adam and Eve's: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." Your marriage is to subdue the earth. Of course, we do not do this at the point of a sword or the end of a gun. We do not wage war according to the flesh with fleshly weapons. We spread the gospel, bringing down every argument, subduing lofty opinions and subduing thoughts to submission to Christ (cf. **II Corinthians 10:3-5**). Your marriage is to multiply and fill the earth. This would certainly include godly offspring (**Malachi 2:15**). However, we multiply God's image bearers not merely by biological reproduction but by taking the gospel message to others so that they can put off the old self in which the image of God has become marred and corrupted by sin and instead "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (**Colossians 3:10**, ESV).
 - E. Why marriage? God did not institute marriage to produce happiness, romance, fellowship, sexual fulfillment, or emotional and psychological fulfillment. I have no doubt in a marriage that is working as it should be, these things will all be there, but they are serendipitous by-products of pursuing God's real purpose behind marriage. The purpose of your marriage 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. Is that why you got married?
- VI. "The mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church" (**Ephesians 5:32**, ESV).
- A. Have you ever heard of a Passion Play? That is the name 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. The word "passion" did not originally refer to heated emotion as it does today, but referred to suffering. Thus, Mel Gibson's movie 13 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 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 purpose 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 so we could find emotional or physical fulfillment. God instituted marriage to reveal the secret, hidden wisdom of God, the mystery of the relationship between Christ and His church (**Ephesians 5:32**). Paul is not saying the relation between Christ and the church points to marriage. He is actually saying the purpose of our marriages is to point to Christ and the church. 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, why marriage? To display the gospel itself so that God's holy sanctuary, holy temple, holy city could be spread throughout the earth. Marriage 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. Marriage 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. Not because God established an arbitrary rule to see if you could measure up. Not because God is trying to limit your fun and pleasure. But 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 shows 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 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 why God instituted marriage: 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:

Are you married? Is this why you got married? It isn't why I got married. Of course, because I got married seeking from a spouse what I can only get from God, we have had multiple struggles through the years. How about you? If you are in the same boat, can we repent and let God redeem our marriages? Can we surrender our marriages to God's purpose? He instituted marriage to point to Christ on the cross for His bride the church, and to point to the church surrendering to Christ. He instituted marriage so His sanctuary can have dominion over the earth and to fill it with His image bearers. Will you allow the Lord to transform your marriage to accomplish His purpose? Certainly, if you need to surrender yourself to this gospel your marriage is supposed to point to, we want to help. If you need help from your brethren, let us know. But most of all, don't let this be a sermon that you forget. Spend some time discussing it with your spouse or potential spouse. Use the following questions to help facilitate that discussion.

If you are single and looking to be married:

- 1) Why are you seeking marriage?
- 2) Do you think the purpose for marriage presented in this lesson was supported by God's Word or did it miss the boat? Why?
- 3) If the purpose of marriage has been accurately represented in this lesson, what are some of the top characteristics you should be looking for in a potential spouse?
- 4) If you are in a relationship now, does the person you are dating fit that description?
- 5) When the person you are in a relationship with now answers the above questions, do you fit that description?
- 6) What are you doing now as a single person to spread the sanctuary of God's church throughout the world?

If you are married:

- 1) Why did you get married?
- 2) Do you think the purpose for marriage presented in this lesson was supported by God's Word or did it miss the boat? Why?
- 3) Does your marriage have as its number one goal the spread of the sanctuary of God's church throughout the world? Why or why not?
- 4) What changes do you need to make individually for your marriage to be more in line with God's purpose for it?
- 5) What plans can you and your spouse make to actively start subduing the earth with God's sanctuary and filling it with image bearers who shine forth God's glory?