

Jesus on Sex, Marriage, and Singleness

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[0 : 0 0] When it comes to sex and marriage, our society makes two primary errors in how it views these things.

! On the one hand, it sees sex and marriage as not that important.! You'll see this come through in culture and online and movies and things.

That basically, sex is just a physical thing, it doesn't really matter who you have sex with as long as it's consensual and it's not hurting anyone. And marriage is really just a convenient legal arrangement if that's your thing.

And it's kind of, you can change it and it can be discarded if it's more convenient to do that. So on the one hand, it sees sex and marriage as not that important. But on the other hand, at the same time, simultaneously, the society we live in sees the sexual relationship as everything.

And that you'll never be fulfilled unless you have a sexual relationship. That's also what we see coming through in our movies and in the music of the world.

[1 : 1 2] And so at the same time, simultaneously, it sees sex as nothing but also as everything. And even as Christians, we often tend to take on these views without noticing it.

Because, I mean, to be honest, if you think about how much brain space we give to the messages of the world through movies and stuff we watch and stuff we listen to, versus how much brain space we give to God's Word, inevitably, we are going to have patterns of thought which are modeled on how the world thinks.

We're going to let society shape what we think about these things far more than the Bible, sadly. But that is exactly why we need to listen up this morning.

We need to listen very carefully to what Jesus says in a conversation about marriage. Because it's here that we find God's truths in these matters that Jesus brings into this conversation.

And in it, in this conversation that Jesus has about marriage, he shows how both of society's views that I just mentioned, that sex is nothing important but it's also everything, both of those are profoundly wrong.

[2 : 2 3] And in this conversation, Jesus calls those who follow him to actually take on a dramatically counter-cultural view of sex and marriage that will stand us apart from the world we live in.

That's the challenge that is laid down for Christians in the beginning of this chapter 19. And this dramatically counter-cultural view that we're to take on with regards to sex and marriage is summarized in two points that we're going to look at.

Firstly, we've got to embrace God's original intent for marriage. And secondly, we've got to embrace God's gift of singleness. That's how we're going to be different from the world around us if we do these things.

So let's look at each of them in turn. Firstly, to embrace God's original intent for marriage. So this conversation starts when Jesus is confronted by, we're told, some Pharisees.

Now the Pharisees were the religious legal experts and they come to him and we see what happens. So let's pick it up from verse 1. When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee, went into the region of Judea, to the other side of the Jordan.

[3 : 33] Let's pause there. Just why is it important to know where he's going? He's on his way to Jerusalem. He's on his way to the cross. But Judea was also, what do we know about Judea?

It's also the place where John the Baptist was executed because he criticized Herod's sexual relationship. So there's something going on here that's important to note.

But let's continue. Verse 2. Okay, let's pause there.

This was a hot topic of the day. It was kind of the talking point of the day. If they had talk shows back then, this would be the topic that they would have been debating and talking over.

So you basically had two sides to the debate. One side said that you should only be able to divorce if sexual immorality or if some other big adultery, some other big reason.

[4 : 42] But then the other school of thought, which was by far the most popular, was that men could divorce their wife for any reason. Sadly, in a patriarchal society like that, it wasn't the other way around.

For women, they didn't have rights in this matter. But men wanted to be able to divorce their wife for any reason, even if it was something small, even if they just got tired of her and wanted a newer model.

And so this was essentially the view that was popular. And it's not very different today, is it? This was the popular view that you could divorce for any reason.

It was essentially what it was in a religious culture like that. It was their version of sleeping around, but doing it legally without technically breaking God's law. Because people wanted sexual freedom.

Again, no different from today. People wanted to be able to choose what to do with their bodies and when. This idea of sexual liberation, it's nothing new.

[5 : 43] The sexual liberation movement isn't something that started in the 60s, right? It's always been around. Everybody from the beginning of time has wanted sexual freedom for themselves, for them to call the shots.

So that was the debate going on. That was the controversy. And so if you think about it, these Pharisees were really clever in what they were doing to ask Jesus this question. Because the verse before tells us that he was getting very popular.

Crowds were following him. The Pharisees were super jealous at this. So they raised a topic with him publicly that they know his view on is going to make him unpopular.

When he tells them what is right. It's going to make him unpopular. So it was very clever of them to ask him this question. It's kind of like asking a Christian today about gay marriage.

Their view on gay marriage or premarital sex. People aren't going to like the answer, right? They're not going to like what the Bible says about that. About things like that.

[6 : 46] A colleague of mine, another minister up in Johannesburg, was running an evening service aimed at younger people on what the Bible says about sex.

And he put it out on social media. And he thought this was going to be a great draw card. Because everybody's talking about sex. So, you know, if we do a talk series on sex, people are going to come.

And people didn't come. He actually went to the students in the university and invited them. And people didn't respond. More so, they didn't come to this series of talks than the other series of talks he did.

And he asked them why. He asked a group of students, why don't you want to come to this? And they said, because we know what you're going to say. You're going to say we mustn't have sex. And we don't want to hear that.

And so, the truth is that having rules about sex is not likely to draw a crowd. And the Pharisees knew that. They were counting on it.

[7 : 47] But Jesus knows that this is their tactic. And so, you know what he does? He doesn't respond with rules. But rather, with a simple idea.

Which is, well, what do you think God wants in this matter? And it turns out that they had never actually stopped to consider that.

For all of their rules, which they were super into keeping. These Pharisees were super into keeping the rules. But they had never considered what God actually wants.

And it shows us, you know, you can keep all the rules. You can have a lot of rules. You can live by a lot of religious rules. And still not be doing what God wants.

And that's exactly what Jesus was exposing to these Pharisees in the way he answered their question. That they are wanting rules. But they are not wanting to know what God's intent is. What God actually wants.

[8 : 48] And that is really the problem with so much religion today. Like I said earlier, it's about keeping the rules. But, and lots of religions have lots of different rules.

But you can keep all those rules and still be missing what God actually wants. And actually, you can have very religious people who don't even spare a thought to, does God really want me to do this?

They keep all these rules, but they never ask, is this really what God wants? They're not actually interested in that. They're just interested in making sure their conscience is cleansed and they feel good. And they feel like a good person.

But the question in their mind is not, what does God really want? That's what was the problem with these Pharisees. But that is one thing that's different about Jesus.

To all other religions. Is that, and we're seeing this through Matthew. Jesus has come to make a new society. He's come to make a new type of people.

[9 : 44] That's really one of the themes coming throughout this gospel. Right from the Sermon on the Mount. Where he's establishing the new way of living for this new person. This new type of person that he's come to make.

And essentially, Jesus has come to make. He came to earth to make a people who aren't interested in keeping the rules.

But are interested in doing what God really wants. That's what a real Christian is, by the way. You get fake Christians. How can you tell they're fake Christians? Because they're just interested in keeping the rules.

Real Christians. The type of person Jesus came to make and transform was the type of person who puts the rules aside and goes, and not just goes, what does God really want?

But also wants what God really wants. That's the type of person Jesus came to make. And he challenges these Pharisees and he shows them they're not that type of person.

[10 : 44] And so he tells them, when it comes to their question in marriage, he goes on to tell them what God really wants for marriage. What God's original intent is for marriage.

And this is something we need to hear in a culture that's lost its way with marriage and sex. And so he says, so from verse 4. Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female.

And said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife. And the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Okay, so he's going right back to creation. He's reminding these people, God created genders.

Male and female. That's, sadly, that's something that the world needs to be reminded of today. We don't get to decide our gender. God created genders. It was part of creation. But what's really interesting is that when he did that, when God created gender, he also created the appropriate relationship in which those genders are to come together sexually.

[12 : 03] So God didn't just design genders and say, have at it, do what you want. He designed genders and also designed the type of relationship which is the right and good way for them to come together, make children, propagate humanity.

And this relationship is to be an exclusive relationship and a permanent relationship. We see that in verse 5.

I'll read it again. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.

This is talking about a union, a deep spiritual and physical union, which creates a new unit out of the two, which is exclusive and which is permanent, and which is not meant to be separated after it comes together.

Often, I use, when I'm describing this pattern for marriage, the original word in Hebrew back in Genesis for united is to cleave or to be stuck fast together.

[13 : 22] So I use the illustration of two pieces of paper, which you stick together with glue. Right? I happened to do that this morning. I took two pieces of paper and I stuck them together with glue.

So here, this is two pieces of paper. And now, if they're stuck together, if they're stuck fast, cleaved, what happens when I try to separate them? Well, let's see.

Let's see what happens. So are they going to come neatly apart? Oof. No. No, this is really, this is not good. Okay? So you see what's happening?

It's ruining both of them. And if I try, if I force them apart, look what they end up as. This is not good.

This is not what paper was made for. Right? So, when you glue them together, they're not meant to be separated. This is the kind of imagery that Jesus is using to describe the sexual union between a man and a woman.

[14 : 23] It is powerful. This sexual union is not just something physical and small and unimportant. It is a powerful bonding thing that cannot be separated without damage on both sides.

You know, many people are surprised when I tell them that there is a book about sex in the Bible. It's the Song of Solomon. It's all about the erotic relationship between a husband and a wife.

And one of the things that it teaches us is how powerful sex is and how powerful the sexual union is. And that's why it needs to be a permanent and exclusive relationship.

A committed relationship. A permanent relationship is the only right context for sex according to the creator of sex. Okay?

That's what Jesus is saying here. But the Pharisees don't like that, of course. So they counter it in verse 7. And they bring up, admittedly, a good point.

[15 : 29] Why then, they asked, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away? Gotcha, Jesus. They think.

Now they're quoting from Deuteronomy where there's a law that if a husband divorces his wife, he's got to write an official certificate of divorce.

And so they say, well, you see, we can divorce our wives. So they see this law in Deuteronomy as an excuse to change partners whenever they want.

But Jesus corrects them in verse 8. He says, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. So he says, notice the verb.

They say, Moses commanded us to divorce our wives. And Jesus says, no, he permitted you because you were being idiots. All right? And the thing is, what was happening was that men were just casting off their wives, divorcing them for any reason.

[16 : 35] And what that meant in a patriarchal society where a woman doesn't have a lot of rights is that they would be out on the street with no prospects if they were divorced.

And no prospects of getting remarried and actually making a life for themselves. And so God actually was permitting this to protect women, to give women rights in society.

Women's rights was something that God gave and it was way ahead of its time. But God permitted this because if men were going to do this, the women had to be protected.

And that's why this law existed. But it was never God's intent for them to divorce in the first place. And that's the point Jesus is trying to make.

And by saying that, again, he's showing the Pharisees, he's saying to the Pharisees, you are not interested in what God wants, are you? By quoting this and not actually going back to Genesis, all you're doing is that you're just thinking of how you can get what you want but stay, you know, within the bounds of the law.

[17 : 49] You're not interested in what God wants. You're just interested in what you want. And so this is an indictment on how far their view of marriage was from God's intent.

And not just the Pharisees, but the people they were representing, which was the majority of society in that day, how far their view on marriage was from God's intent for marriage.

It wasn't just, it's not just today that society's view of marriage is messed up. It was back then as well. But you know what? Thinking about this, this is actually an indictment not just on them, but on all of us.

And not just on the non-Christian world, but on the Christian world as well. Jesus is talking to God's people here, the Jews. And this is something that we've got to take on board.

It's an indictment to us as well whenever we ask what's allowed when it comes to sex and marriage and divorce.

[18 : 49] Whenever we ask questions about what am I allowed to do, what am I not allowed to do, what are the rules? When we're more interested in the rules, then there's something wrong.

How far can I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend? You know, I've been asked that question as a pastor. What is allowed? If I'm a Christian, am I allowed to do this or that?

And the moment we're asking those kind of questions, what's allowed, we're missing the point. And we're showing that all we're actually interested in is how can I get what I want?

Where we should be asking, what does God really want from my marriage? not when am I allowed to divorce, under what circumstances am I allowed, but what does God want from my marriage?

Not what I want, but what does God intend my marriage to be? Or, not how far can I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend, but we should be asking, how does God want me to use sex?

[19 : 55] How does God want me to use my body? What was His intent? But you see, we don't naturally think that way, do we? We naturally think, what's allowed? What am I allowed to do?

We don't think, what does God really want? But that is what Jesus came for. That is why Jesus came to this world, to make a new type of people who stop asking what is allowed and start asking, what does God really want?

And start wanting what God really wants. And if we are going to be part of that new people that Jesus came to make, then we all first need to repent of how we've been more interested in getting what we want from marriage and sex to satisfy ourselves than what God designed those things for.

And we are all guilty of that. Whether we're married or not, we are all guilty of being more interested in what we want than what God wants.

But this is the first shift that Jesus wants people to have in His mind with regards to sex and marriage. It's the first counter-cultural attitude that Jesus calls His people to is to embrace God's original intent for marriage and sex.

[21 : 19] But then there's a second counter-cultural attitude that we need to cultivate as God's people and that is to embrace God's gift of singleness.

So let's continue and see what happens. Having heard God's high standards for marriage, this is what happens next. The disciples said to Jesus, well if this is the situation between a husband and a wife, it is better not to marry.

Okay, now this is kind of what you'd expect from typical men who fear commitment. What?

We've got to commit? We can't, there's no exit rule? Well then, we shouldn't get married. Now what's really interesting about Jesus' reply here to them saying, well we shouldn't actually get married, He effectively replies by saying, yeah, you're probably right.

He effectively agrees with them but then He says, but not everyone is able not to marry. Have a look, verse 11. Jesus replied, not everyone can accept this word but only those to whom it has been given.

[22 : 33] What word is He talking about that not everyone can accept? He's talking about the word the disciples just said to Him about you shouldn't, you know, we may as well not get married.

That's the word He's saying not everyone can accept the disciples' word about it's better not to marry. And so Jesus is saying, yeah, you're probably right.

It might be better not to marry. In fact, interesting, that's exactly what the New Testament goes on to say. 1 Corinthians chapter 7, let me read to you.

What Paul, this is a very, 1 Corinthians chapter 7 by the way, is a very important chapter on sex and marriage. And Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 8.

He says, now to the unmarried and to the widows I say it is good for them to stay unmarried as I do. Paul, he was single, he never got married. He starts the chapter by saying, you know, it's better for a man not to get married, not to be in a sexual relationship.

[23 : 42] And he goes on to explain why. In 1 Corinthians 7, he says, because there's so many benefits to not having to worry about a wife and a family. You can focus much more fully on God's work.

That's his argument. You can commit yourself much more fully. But Jesus here in Matthew 19 says, not everyone is able to do that.

but only those to whom it has been given to not get married. That's what he's saying here. And the reason for that is based on what he just said about marriage.

The reason is that if marriage is the only right context for sex, which he's just reminded us it is, then most people won't be able to stay sexually pure without being in a marriage where sex can rightly happen.

And where sex should happen. Again, 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says this. It's not just a choice.

- [24 : 55] 1 Corinthians 7, verse 5. He's talking about sexual relationship and he says, verse 5, do not deprive each other, husbands and wives, do not deprive each other, except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, but then come together again sexually so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

This is what the Bible says. It says not just that sex can happen in marriage, but that it should. the idea of conjugal rights you've heard of, it's from the Bible.

It's from 1 Corinthians 7. It's biblical. And so if you are married and sex is not happening, then you shouldn't just say, well, that's not what we do.

You must realize actually there's something wrong. There's an underlying problem and you need to seek marriage counseling, which exists and which pastors are here to help you to do because that is not what God wants.

Most people have sexual needs. We are sexual creatures and marriage is the relationship, the way God has designed for those needs to be fulfilled.

- [26 : 14] Unless you're a eunuch, which Jesus goes on to use as an example in Matthew 19, very unexpected, he starts talking about eunuchs now.

And I know many of you are going, what is a eunuch? Okay. A eunuch, technically, back then, is someone who had their sex organs surgically removed.

And the reason for this would be many in the ancient world, but mostly it was the people like the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts who were in charge of a royal harem or who served a queen and they mustn't be tempted to get involved sexually in that situation.

So they would have this drastic surgery. And also, interestingly, doctors tell us today that it would reduce testosterone levels and sexual desire as well. But also, eunuch, when eunuch was spoken of in the ancient world, it wasn't just referring to the physical eunuchs.

It was also used figuratively for those who had no strong desire for sex and marriage. It's what Jesus says in verse 12, for there are eunuchs who were born that way.

- [27 : 32] He's not talking about born disfigured, he's talking about people who don't need to marry, people who don't have a strong sexual desire. Today's society would probably call those types of people asexual and part of the LGBTQ community, but actually they are just people who have different hormonal levels and don't have the same sexual desire and urges as normal.

So there are eunuchs who were born that way. But also, there are people who have committed to celibacy for various reasons, and we've seen this throughout history as well.

Jesus talks about them at the end of verse 12. He says, and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. But now, whatever reason it was, in Jesus' day, in this society, eunuchs, whether literal or figurative, were looked down upon.

They were seen as freaks. They were seen as something wrong with them. Lesser humans. There must be something wrong with you if you're not married, if you're not having sex. But here, Jesus is saying, no.

it's a good thing. It's a good thing. Actually, it's a gift if you don't need to. It's a gift if you don't need to be in a sexual relationship.

- [28 : 58] It is something that God gives to people. The gift of celibacy, the gift of singleness. Now, this is something we urgently need to embrace as Christians in today's world, in a culture that idolizes sex so much, and preaches that you can't live a fulfilled life without it.

But you know what? There's a Christian version of that as well. There's a Christian version of that message, where Christians see marriage as the ideal that everyone should be aiming towards, with language like, well, when you get married, not if you get married, but when you get married, like it's an expectation.

You know what that is? That's just the Christian version of society's idolization of sexual relationships. But here, Jesus is wanting us to see that sex and marriage is not the ultimate goal, because it's not where we find our ultimate fulfillment.

fulfillment. The kingdom of God is the ultimate goal in this life. And being in a relationship with the Creator, God, is the way we as created beings find ultimate fulfillment.

And if we don't get that, we will inevitably put far too much pressure on our human relationships to fulfill our deepest desires when they were never designed to do that.

[30 : 31] And that is the cause of a lot of marriage problems, by the way. As Christians, we need to realize that our human relationships are not what we were designed to find our ultimate fulfillment in, but our relationship with God is.

And you know what? All Christian marriages, at their best, only ever are meant to point us towards that ultimate relationship with God. And so, it's a good thing, if God enables you not to marry so that you can be more committed to His work on earth, if that's His will, rejoice in that.

Now, I know, if you're single, you might not feel like that. You might not feel like rejoicing in your singleness. You might have strong sexual desires that need to be fulfilled, and if so, pray for a partner to marry.

There's nothing wrong with that. But, more so, pray, rather than for a partner as the thing that will fulfill your deepest desires, pray for the Holy Spirit's power to give you self-control, if it's not God's will for you to marry, and realize the Holy Spirit that God gives us, that Jesus sent down to us when He ascended, gives us great power to overcome our natural inclinations and our natural desires, to overcome.

If you're struggling with sexual desire, if you're struggling maybe with porn addiction, and it can present itself in various ways, if you're frustrated and you're struggling with that, realize the Holy Spirit that Jesus has sent us gives us great power if we let Him to overcome sexual temptation, to overcome sexual desire, so that we don't get enslaved to our physical desires, and to give us higher desires, because there are actually far better things than marriage that God wants to give you.

[32 : 35] And that is also why it's the right thing to turn down an opportunity to get married, if that is with a non-Christian, which will take you away from devotion to Christ.

It is the right thing to choose Christ over marriage in that situation, and it's a good thing to commit yourself to not marry, especially if you have, for example, homosexual attraction.

You don't have to gratify it like the world says you do. God can grant you the gift of celibacy, and through His Holy Spirit, the power to overcome your temptations, and put you in a position where you don't need to gratify those things.

That's the power of the Spirit that God gives us, because, and He's given that to us, because in Christ, God has called us to greater things than what the world says is necessary to live a fulfilled life.

In Christ, God is forming a new type of person with different values, different priorities, different desires, and that's why we're not meant to think of sex and marriage the same way the world does.

[33 : 47] we shouldn't see it as nothing, to use whenever or however we want, but neither should we see it as everything, something we have to have to be fulfilled.

But we are to be people who seek instead what God really wants rather than what we want, and who seek to live the lives that God intends for us, whether we're married or single, because that is actually the only way any of us can be truly happy and fulfilled.

Let's pray that we will be those people. Will you bow with me? Lord Jesus, we thank you for speaking about these things.

When challenged by these Pharisees, you took the opportunity to tell us what God really wants and to speak into the confusion that we're surrounded by in this world about sex and marriage.

Help us, Lord, to understand these things properly. Help us to take them on board. We pray, Lord, that you would help us not to listen to the voices of society around us to shape what we think and how we think.

[35 : 18] Lord, help us to let your word be the thing that shapes our thinking and our minds and our attitudes. Lord, we thank you for designing us and creating us in the way you did and we pray that you would help us to now live out your intent for us.

We pray, Lord, that you would help us to be people who are sexually pure, who have marriages the way that you designed and who seek for higher things.

Help us to be people, Lord, who realize that our deepest needs are actually only met in you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.