

Once Upon A Time

Various Texts

Central Idea: Marriage in the Bible is an institution and image of God's relationship with His people!

Introduction

There has been so much controversy and attention given to marriage in our culture lately! From the political arena to TV shows and popularized versions of what marriage is like, characterizations and caricatures, marriage is attacked and brutalized so much that this year in the month of February, the month of love, I want to focus on the institution of marriage from the standpoint of the Bible. God's Word has so much to tell us about marriage and I want to share that with you this morning. It is my hope that this series will help you, if you are married, with your relationship, and if you're single, to have a positive and helpful view of marriage.

Many come to the idea of marriage with wide-eyed naivete based on the romanticized ideas of what marriage is going to be like that they are shellshocked when they finally arrive. Fairy tales have especially been the culprit, telling us about the joys of marriage, but not explaining the hard work and struggle to maintain a joyous marriage. They tell us all the good parts, but leave out all the hard times. The truth is that only those who work hard to have a strong relationship with their spouses will see those good times. Rather than romanticize marriage, I want us to biblicize marriage, to understand why God chose marriage for the purposes He chose it, and what is expected of each spouse, as well as how to win the battles that make your marriage strong, healthy and beneficial. So let us start on our road to Happily Ever After at the beginning, in Genesis, Once Upon A Time...

- I. God instituted marriage in the beginning of time.
 - A. Marriage is designed as a long-term covenant (Gen 2:18-25).
 - i. Several key notes in the story of the first humans and the first marriage show us what God expects marriage to be in our lives. The first thing we notice is that for the first time in the creation narrative, something is declared not good by God.
 - ii. God is the one who says, "It is not good for man to be alone." This shows us that humans are by nature not loners, but rather social creatures. We crave relationships, and Adam was apparently searching for that social interaction, and not finding it on earth so far.

- iii. It must be stated that God was not saying that a man must be married or must seek out marriage, but that a man will seek out social relationships, and that marriage is the deepest fulfillment of that desire.
- iv. Another key to marriage that we notice, besides social relationship building is the complimentary roles of husbands and wives in their relationship together.
- v. God seeks then to make a “helper” fit for the man. That word for helper is so very important to understanding the roles of husbands and wives in marriage.
- vi. The helper is not some slave that must do as she is told, or someone who is to be taken advantage of. She is just as human as the man, and her strengths are in different areas than the man’s. She is to be cherished.
- vii. It’s been said that the woman’s origin from the man’s rib or side is instructive for husbands, for their wives are not to follow behind them as obedient slaves, nor to lead in front of them as dominant masters. Rather the woman came out of man’s side because she is to walk beside him in life and share life with him. She is an equal, not subservient.
- viii. The man can go to his wife for wisdom, for strength in his areas of weakness, for comfort and emotional support, and for other areas of life that he cannot get from comrades.
- ix. She is perfectly suited by God for these reasons and many more. No woman is helpless, but every woman is designed to be equal in personhood with men.
- x. Notice that their roles are different. Adam is given leadership qualities, naming the animals and given responsibilities of work as well. But the woman is also given an important complimentary role, superior in what God designed her for in understanding social situations, relationships and several other areas.
- xi. A third thing we notice from this enlightening passage for God’s expectations of marriage is that there is to be great joy and happiness in marriage.
- xii. When the man sees the woman and is joined to her in holy matrimony, he reacts quite excitedly, singing verse 23’s stanza to her in great joy and bliss. The man is more than pleased with God’s provision for him!
- xiii. Couples are supposed to find great joy within their marriage relationship. They are to draw off of one another positively and be artistic, poetic, excited and overly satisfied, drawn to their spouses. That’s how God made them!

- xiv. Next, we notice another thing that God expected from marriage when He instituted it. God expected husband and wife to rely only on one another, not on others.
 - xv. This is why the man leaves his family and unites to His wife, cleaves to her, never lets go. He seeks her counsel primarily, not his friends' counsel or his parents' counsel. She longs to know what he thinks, what he feels, not everyone else. Their eyes focus on one another, not on possible other mates.
 - xvi. Finally, we notice just one more expectation of God for marriage in the beginning. The final verse of our text explains to us that they were naked and not ashamed. There was a level of intimacy with one another in marriage.
 - xvii. Intimacy is the cornerstone to the growth of each partner in marriage. Through intimacy, there is a security to be naked with one another, not just physically, but spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and socially. That nakedness, or vulnerability, is honored and cherished by the other, creating a safe place for weaknesses to grow into strengths and for true companionship.
 - xviii. This is how God designed and instituted marriage. He expected it to be awesome, helpful, wonderful, enjoyable, and an environment of safety and growth. And if that was how it stayed, we'd all not need this sermon today. But it didn't stay that way.
- B. Sin has caused marriage to be violated and abused (Gen 3:16-21).
- i. You see, shortly after Adam and Eve were experiencing this wonderful gift of marriage that God had instituted and given to them for their enjoyment, sin entered into their camp and things would never be the same.
 - ii. Because Adam and Eve longed to be more like God, to judge morality for themselves, rebellion affected not just their relationship with God, but their relationship with one another.
 - iii. In fact, sin affected all of creation on a cosmic and individual level. That selfishness and pride caused Adam and Eve everything, and their marriage would suffer just as much as all other things in creation.
 - iv. No longer would there be a closeness to one another, a compliance upon each other for strength, a melding of their bodies and souls as one, or that perfect union they knew for a short time.
 - v. Instead, sin would put a barrier between them in every area that God had designed in His way. The marriage would become a cage rather than a home, and the intimacy would become shared information. Their reliance upon one another's strengths would turn into envy and strife.

- vi. And sadly, it is this way today. Marriage counselors make good money because of sin and its dramatic destruction of what God had created perfect.
- vii. Because of sin in the hearts of humans and the blight of sin upon the creation, God had to act by cursing all that sin had touched. He started with the creatures, but then moved to woman and then man.
- viii. Woman's curse greatly affects her marriage roles and her person. Now bearing children would become a great pain in the process to her, and she would grow to despise the pain, which would only be remotely mitigated by the joy of having a child successfully.
- ix. There was now a danger that children could become a problem in birth, and even become injured or die through the process, robbing the woman of her desire to nurture and care for them and her family.
- x. Not only this, but she would no longer be satisfied with being the trusted, personal confidant of her husband's mind and heart, his wisdom and helper, but would chafe against his leadership. She would long to do better than him for herself and desire his God-given role as leader, wanting the power of decision without the responsibility and consequences.
- xi. And man would fare no better than woman, for God's curse would greatly affect the joy of working so that it became unbearable, a drain and a pain at every turn.
- xii. Beyond the pain of working harder for the same goal, the product of the man's labor would be greatly reduced. He would no longer see a good product with his long day's work. The toiling would become almost in vain for him.
- xiii. His ability to provide and lead would be compromised by such hard labor and the two would grow farther apart in their relationships to one another. Most of all, the man would now not only have to provide more, but would have to protect and preserve, for death would constantly be a struggle at his door.
- xiv. Beyond these immediate concerns that sin brought, they would stem into other issues throughout the Old and New Testaments. For instance, Moses would have to issue the possibility of divorce because of hard hearts in marriage.
- xv. Men would seek multiple wives rather than share life with one woman, as God intended in the beginning. The hearts of both men and women would become pluralistic in nature, and they would seek more than one mate. The Bible never condones these practices, no matter who practiced them.
- xvi. There are a host of other maladies in marriage that sin brought with it, and we will talk about these in our series. It is important for us to see how far

we have fallen in the Fall in the area of marriage. Sin has caused God's good gift to be ridiculed and used, rather than enjoyed and fruitful. But don't worry, for all is not lost! God will find ways for marriage to be positive again!

II. God uses marriage as an image of His relationship with Israel.

A. God saw Himself as married to His chosen people (Ezek 16:6-16).

- i. As we move throughout the Bible, we see that marriage continues to be one of the key elements of stories, as families are made and husbands and wives struggle through history together.
- ii. Children are born and people continue to move through history. I focus now on how God has begun to redeem the marriage institution He began in the garden.
- iii. There is a story among stories, and we must understand that many of the prophets used marriage in such ways, to tell the story of God and His people.
- iv. Though marriage had become so destructive, God still used it as His institution for intimately sharing life together between a man and a woman. Marriage was to be an adventure together in life, even though it was so abused by both husbands and wives.
- v. In Ezekiel 16, we find an amazing story about God and His chosen nation, Israel. You see, God wanted to show Israel that He is faithful and trustworthy, that He will stick with her no matter what.
- vi. So what could God use to show Israel that He was faithful? He used marriage as an image of His faithfulness to Israel, of His plan to make Israel its very best. Through marriage to God, Israel would become everything she was supposed to become. She could reach her destiny!
- vii. From the moment of Israel's abandonment, God began to woo her and to show her that she was beautiful and precious, that she was worth fighting for and having a relationship with.
- viii. He used marriage to show that He would be faithful to her, that He would always be her Provider, Protector and Husband. He would always be there for her, no matter what.
- ix. In our day and age, marriage has become a choice that people can make and then decide later to change it. But God has always intended for marriage to be a life-long commitment, a faithful act that starts with every sunrise's choice to stay and live through the trials and pains of life, as well as the joys and accomplishments of life, together. Marriage is about being faithful and committed, not about chilling for a couple of years.

B. God expected Israel to remain faithful to Him (Hos 2:14-20).

- i. In another prophetic book, we find that God would even use a human marriage as an image of His expectations for his wife, Israel. God wanted to show that He is always faithful, even when Israel is not faithful.
- ii. For this, he had a prophet who spoke His words and did His ministry for Israel marry a prostitute, a woman who by nature was taught that she would not be faithful.
- iii. She in fact violated every statute and expectation of marriage. Her name was Gomer and she constantly became a problem for her husband, Hosea. He had to even plead with his own children to get their mother to remain in his house.
- iv. One of the most valid reasons for not keeping marriage a life-long commitment is allowed for even by Jesus, that divorce is possible for those who have been cheated on, who have committed adultery and broken their fidelity to their spouse.
- v. If anyone had a right to exercise this allowance in the Law of Moses for a certificate of divorce, it was Hosea, a man who was nightly going to someone else's house to get his wife back into his own.
- vi. Can you imagine the depths of the pain this man endured? And yet, Hosea had a command from the Lord to stick with Gomer, despite her life of adultery and prostitution.
- vii. God would then use this to show two principles of His love for Israel. First, Israel was a harlot, a prostitute, breaking her relationship with God through idolatry to idols and false gods. Every time that Israel worshipped another god, they were violating their marriage covenant with God.
- viii. And yet, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God would be faithful to her, like Hosea was to Gomer. And this brings another principle besides Israel's faithlessness, that God was strong enough to endure her adultery and remain faithful to her.
- ix. You see, while divorce is permitted in the case of adultery, God, and also Hosea, were able to endure and be healed in the area of their wound by their love. They were both able to demonstrate that marriage is stronger even than the pain of adultery.
- x. While adultery is permissible under certain criteria in the Bible, we have quite a tradition of marriage being stronger even than that destructive effect of sin and fallenness. Marriage can even redeem that lost trust between a husband and wife, that breach of intimacy and faithfulness in marriage. But it takes strength and unconditional love and a will to heal and forgive!

III. God uses marriage as an image of His relationship with the Church.

- A. The Church is the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:25-27, 32).

- i. Finally as we continue to track marriage throughout the Bible, and especially its ability as one of God's institutions to be redemptive and once again blissful, we see that not only God the Father used it as an image in the Old Testament, but that Jesus used it in the New Testament.
 - ii. Along with the new covenant, Jesus brought the marriage imagery into His relationship with the Church. Christ died for the church, creating a responsibility for husbands to be sacrificial in their love of their wives.
 - iii. Now marriage becomes an image of the perfect relationship between Christ and the Church. Like husband and wife, Christ and the Church have roles in their relationship, much like Adam and Eve had before sin came into the world.
 - iv. Christ serves the Church by preparing her for her glorification, providing her needs, most of all to be purified and made holy, beautiful without blemish.
 - v. His goal is to see her fulfill her destiny, to be presented to Himself as His perfected bride, ready to be by His side and fulfill her place in Him. Jesus is preparing her for life with Him, even now.
 - vi. And yet this profound mystery for Paul is not about marriage between a husband and wife, but between Christ and the Church. This mystery is interesting, but marriage serves as an image of that relationship.
 - vii. We will be discussing in much more detail this passage, which is key to redeeming the destruction that sin and the Fall has brought upon the marriage relationship, breaking all of God's expectations for it.
- B. Jesus will be united with His Bride (Rev 21:2; 22:17).
- i. It is not just in places like Ephesians where we see Christ and His Bride the Church mentioned, but just like God had an original plan and destiny for marriage in the beginning, so in the end these two will finally be together!
 - ii. The destiny of marriage for Christ and the Church is to be united in heaven together, enjoying their relationship without hindrances such as sin and death and hell.
 - iii. One day, this will be the case. In fact, there's a giant marriage supper that will take place in heaven with great rejoicing, pomp and circumstance. It will be a joyous time as Christ the ruler of the universe celebrates His Bride's homecoming!
 - iv. And this image is borne out through Revelation's mention of these two after all of the tribulation and trial of the book. Not only will they celebrate their wedding, but there is also a wonderful image of them together inviting others to join in Revelation 22:17.

- v. The joy and intimacy lost at the Fall from the original marriage is now restored in Christ and the Church. This culminates God's redemptive plan, using marriage throughout as one of His great tools.
- vi. The Bride is described in just such a way to see her as precious and beautiful, adorned with jewels and just like what Christ had been working for when she was on earth in Ephesians 5.
- vii. This imagery of the New Jerusalem is also directly correlated with the Bride, and so we see that Christ through His sacrificial love has indeed fulfilled His goal from Ephesians. There she is, in all of her splendor, to be joined to the splendid Christ.
- viii. Marriage has a goal, a destiny. It is not just a coupling of two people, but God's way of making us better as we live closely and love intimately. He has designed marriage as a way of growing into godliness.
- ix. Your spouse is part of God's formula for your spiritual, emotional, relational and physical formation. There is a goal for you and your spouse, a destiny to be achieved, and an adventure to take together. We will talk about how to see this destiny in your marriage throughout our series!

Conclusion

Marriage throughout the Bible has been a wonderful vehicle for God to teach us so many things about His expectations and what He can do through marriage. He wants to redeem your marriage, to make it strong and beneficial. Unlike most people, if you are obedient and selfless in your marriage, and your spouse is also the same way, you will see God do great things in you and in your spouse. God wants to use your marriage to bless you and help you develop into the destiny He has for you. But you have to be willing to work hard at it!

Action Points

- As you have heard about God's expectations for marriage, what is one area in which your own marriage falls short of God's expectations? What steps can you take to improve that area?
- Do you think you could be faithful even if your spouse was not faithful to you? Why do you think you would or would not be faithful? What is at the root of your answer?
- What is your goal in your marriage? What are you working toward for your spouse and for your marriage? Take some time to define and describe the destiny you have envisioned.