Gen. 2:24; Matthew 19:1-12; What Is Marriage? I. The Definition of Marriage II. The Purpose of Marriage III. The Limits of Marriage

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, choosing to get married is one of the most significant decision a person can make in their lives. After making a profession of faith, whom you marry is perhaps the most important vow you will ever make. But this solemn vow of holy matrimony is under attack today. Marriage has been redefined and applied to a whole host of situations that look little like the original institution. For example, remember when Dennis Rodman wore a wedding dress and married himself? Or in 2020, Scott Perry decided to marry his cat. This is ridiculous- but it just proves the fact that marriage and the family are under attack today. In our series we have now defined both man and woman as male and female. Today we continue by considering the union of this first man and woman. So we consider this theme: Jesus Christ unites man and woman in marriage as a sacred sign of His love.

**I. The Definition of Marriage**

In our first point, we will define marriage. Most of us know the Creation Mandate which is to fill the earth and subdue it. So there is a call to work and be industrious found in Scripture before the fall. But did you know that marriage also has a mandate given before the fall? In other words, the Marriage Mandate is also a creation ordinance- it was announced before the fall and it carries over after the fall. This means that God is the one who ordains and defines marriage- we are not free to tinker with it or make up our own definition of what marriage is and should be. So the context of Gen. 2 sets the stage- there is one man and one woman- male and female created by God and brought together again! What was separated was returned- man’s rib returned to him as a woman- and Adam receives his wife Eve who will become the mother of all living. Now we come to our text in Gen. 2:24- those well-known words of Moses defining marriage. Here we see three aspects- to marry is to leave, it is to hold fast, and it is to become one flesh. Although specifically applied to men in our text- this truth applies to both partners of this union. Marriage is to leave. To become married you have to first depart- to separate from all previous relationships. Someone who gets married is to set new parameters. A new household is created- other relationships are to be set aside and given a secondary status. In other words, married couples are to prioritize their spouse and their relationship. This does not mean that you cut everyone else out of your life, but it does mean that your first allegiance is to your spouse. Their desires and needs are your first priority! This means that couples have to learn to stand together- without depending and relying to much on their own parents. It also means that you refuse to enter into any relationship that will undermine your marriage. So you don’t flirt or get too comfortable with any member of the opposite sex for the sake of protecting your marriage. Now leaving does not necessarily mean distance. In the Hebrew culture, when a son got married, they simply added a room to the house or extended the tent. Families remained close in the sense that they all lived on the promised land allotted to them. But the fact remains, those who get married are to leave the nest if you will. They have to set up together and depend on each other first. Next, this couple is to hold fast. They are to join together and become one- united as a couple. They are to cling to each other- holding fast to one another in thick and thin. They have a new alliance formed- becoming one in the Lord. Marriage is a bond- a covenant where you promise to be faithful, loyal and dedicated! Your lives become integrated. What was once hers or his now becomes ours! Your needs become more pressing than my needs! You come first- over my family, over my friends, and even over the children! This might be a good reminder- but married couples are to prioritize their relationship with their spouse over the busy schedules of their own children! As an aside- I strongly encourage you husbands to continue to date your wives even after marriage! Take them out- go out for dinner or go for a walk just the two of you. Holding fast to each other is a daily thing- my possessions and time are yours. But more than that- my heart and my love are yours. They now share everything- including their own bodies. As Gen. 2:24 concludes, they become one flesh. Marital union culminates in, is illustrated and strengthened by marital union. The marriage bed is special- marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed it to be kept undefiled as Heb. 13 puts it. The intimacy of marriage is designed by God to strengthen the union. As two become one flesh- all the barriers and divisions come down. The husband and wife give their bodies to each other in this way- as v. 25 continues- they enjoyed marital union and were not ashamed. This is what marriage was designed to be – leaving, holding and becoming one. Marriage is then a covenantal union sanctioned by God.

In our parallel reading from Matthew 19 we find this addition- what God has joined together let no man separate. So marriage is work of the LORD- and act of our God. He brings them together and binds them- he weaves them together if you will. You cannot separate them without destroying the fabric of society! God glues them together- to rip them apart will cause great harm to all involved. To put all of this together then we see that God designed marriage to be a lifelong union between one man and one woman. It is an exclusive unit- no other can enter into it. No others are welcomed to join or partake of this pair’s relationship. It is to be life long- until death parts them they are to have and to hold each other. By this very definition, homosexual or gay relationships cannot be called marriage. This also excludes polygamy or any other perversion of this sacred union. In this way, marriage becomes the foundation of the family and society. God’s people are free to marry in the Lord- as I Cor. 7 puts it. No one is to be forced into marriage- but if two believers want to get married, they should not be forbidden. Paul would continue in I Cor. 7- you are free to marry or free to stay single. But if you want to get married, you must marry someone who is united to Christ in faith. Marriage then is a choice and a vow- it is something that we promise and commit ourselves to. Added to that, those who are united are brought into this union by God who joins them together- making them one flesh. But for what purpose? What is the goal of marriage?

**II. The Purpose of Marriage**

As we continue, in our second point we look briefly at the purpose of marriage. For what purpose do people get married? What is the goal or consequence of a good marriage? We will be seeing 4 purposes of marriage. Each one is unique- but not all will be enjoyed by all who enter into marriage. To put this another way- every marriage will not always have all four of these aspects. But normally, we would find these aspects a part of a Christian marriage. So then, the first purpose of marriage is that of mutual help and aid. Marriage is designed for the good of those who enter into it. As we saw a few weeks ago, it was not good for man to be alone! He needed a helper fit to his needs. So in marriage we find a ready made helper that is fit to the need of the other! Marriage is for the mutual help and aid of those who enter into it. Companionship, support, encouragement and fellowship are the fruits of a good marriage. The second goal of marriage is to increase in number. As the creation mandate reads- be fruitful and increase in number. So it is, God has given us marriage to so that the human race might grow and increase. Bringing forth children is only properly found in the context of marriage. The third purpose of marriage is the increase and establishment of the church. Not just the continuation of the human race- but the continuation of the church on earth. As Malachi 2:15 puts it, God is seeking godly offspring from your marriages. Stated another way, it is the desire of God to see His people raising children in the fear and knowledge of His name! He uses Christian marriages to bring forth children who are both holy and will be future disciples! And the forth reason for marriage and purpose of marriage is that of intimacy. Only within marriage can the sexual desire that God gives to His people find a proper expression. Marriage not only prevents uncleanness- marriage not only protects against adultery and fornication- positively marriage is the place of joyful union and even the celebration of these God given desires. As I said before, these 4 aspects are not necessarily found in every marriage. For example, a couple that cannot have children will still enjoy the blessings of fellowship and marital union. Or if for some medical reason no physical intimacy can take place- like when one of the members of the marriage is in a coma- this fact does not diminish the beauty and purpose of marriage. Marriage gives us a place to use our gifts to serve others on a daily basis. For better or worse- in sickness and in health- those who are married have promised to protect, provide, nourish and support their own spouse.

**III. The Limits of Marriage**

But marriage also has limits- marriage remains a creational ordinance. To state this point in another way, marriage is not for everyone and marriage is not eternal! There are clear limits that God has placed on marriage. The first limit is simply this- not everyone will get married. Although it is true that most people will get married, many do not. Not everyone desires to get married- and not everyone has the opportunity to marry. Jesus says as much in Matthew 19:11- after the disciples said that they would be better off not getting married, Jesus said that this can only be received by those to whom it had been given. In other words, some people do receive the spirit of singleness. To those who are not married- some have never been, and others become widows and widowers; Jesus continues to call these to sacred service. You do not need to get married to serve the LORD and His people faithfully! In whatever context you find yourself as Paul would say in I Cor. 7. Whether single or married- engaged or not looking to get married- serve the Lord as you are! In whatever capacity and calling you have. You can bless God and His be a blessing to His people! So the first limit on marriage is simply not everyone is or will get married. You don’t need to be wed to another person in order to be united to Christ in faith and serve Him obediently. The second limit that God places on marriage is simply this, human marriage is by its very nature temporary. As we say in our vows, until death do you part. The fact is, death parts those who are married! Marriage is a limited and temporary institution. As Jesus teaches us in Matthew 22- in heaven we will not be married but rather we will be like the angels. Our marriage is momentary. This helps us to view our spouse in the proper light. Your spouse is yours while you both live. Death breaks this bond. This reminder keeps us grounded. Some things are more important than marriage- like obedience to the LORD! Your faith in Him- your union with Christ is more pressing and lasting than your earthly marriage! This fact also keeps us from idolizing our spouses. Marriage and the blessings of it are not to be the object of worship or the primary purpose of your life! You are called to love, honor and obey God above and before all- including your spouse. So marriage remains a temporary blessing that will fade on day. And yet- sadly- the is one more way in which marriage is broken. Marriage is not only broken in death- it can be broken while both members are still living. Earlier we read in Matthew 19 of a certificate of divorce. Although this certificate of divorce was being overused in Jesus day- the fact is that Jesus identifies a valid or biblical reason for someone to seek a divorce. Matthew 19:9- on the grounds of sexual immorality. If one member of this marriage commits adultery, that act is so serious and severe that it does in fact give the other partner an excuse for divorce. Because marital intimacy is fundamentally linked to its identity- when one party breaks this bond it is possible that this union is irrevocably broken. Adultery violates and pollutes to such a degree that the marriage may not be saved. So adultery is given by Jesus as biblical grounds for divorce. Added to this, Paul stays in I Cor. 7 that if your spouse deserts you, you are also free. You cannot stay married to someone who refuses to stay with you. So these two reason- adultery and desertion- are recognized as biblical grounds for divorce.

But let’s not end on this sour or sad note! Marriage is given as a gift from God- and as such it is also a sign of something greater! Earthly marriage is a picture and foretaste of the marriage that is to come! Eph. 5 reveals Christ is the head and husband of His bride, the church. Added to this, Rev. 19 talks about the marriage supper of the Lamb. So the marriage blessings that we enjoy in this life are designed to point to and prepare us for the blessings of the marriage that is to come! As we now come to the Lord’s Supper, we partake in part of the meal we shall enjoy for all eternity! Feasting with Christ our husband and head who calls us now to come, take and eat- to remember and believe! Jesus Christ unites man and woman in marriage as a sacred sign of His love. So let us come to the table to feast with our loving husband and lord Jesus!