

Have you wondered what was in God's mind when He created a rhinoceros? Or an anteater? Or mosquitos? Have you ever wondered what God was intending for life to be like way back in the Garden of Eden? I mean think about it. What did God intend to happen? **"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters."** **Genesis 1:1** So, the Spirit of God was hovering and the voice of God was about to speak into nothing and create something spectacular. Light from darkness, day from night, land from water, earth from sky, plants and vegetables, fruits and produce, stars and sun and moon to give order to chaos, fish and birds that could multiply themselves and populate the sky and seas, living creatures and animals and livestock. **Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness..."** **Genesis 1:26** God the Creator, God the Spirit who was hovering near by, and God the Son, who we later learn was present – they are in perfect submission to each other – perfect, unspoiled relationship, with total and complete trust in each other – and imagine the meeting of all 3 members of the Trinity when God say's let US make mankind in OUR likeness. As in mankind will look like US? Or be in perfect relationship like us? Interesting thought. Then, in true fashion we see throughout Scripture that God tells us what He's going to do, then He does it, and then He reminds us He did what He said He would do.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and

subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” Genesis 1:26-28

A blessing was pronounced, a mandate was given, work was established, and a job created. God looked over all He had created in the Garden and saw everything He had made and declared it was all very good. Adam got to work tending the Garden, but it quickly became apparent there was one thing that was not good. **The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Genesis 2:18** It would be impossible for man to be made in the image of a God, who exists in constant and eternal relationship with the Spirit and the Son, and the man be left alone. Mankind was made for relationship because we were made in the image of God. It was the only “not good” thing in the Garden.

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name...But for Adam no suitable helper was found. Genesis 2:19-20

This was a huge job Adam was given to subdue the earth, rule over the animals, and name them all. He’s in a literal zoo and is the only employee. There was no one to help him. The task he has been given is too large to manage on his own, a helper is needed. Plus, Adam has been told to fill the earth – to multiply mankind. We have a real problem here. There is no suitable helper for this mandate either. God had a plan and He made the woman. Now notice in Genesis that Adam and Eve were both formed and made by God, they were to help each other, and they were given the same instructions, same mandate, and the same blessing. Adam and Eve were to be helpmates to each other, to serve each other because

they were made in the image of the Godhead - total and complete submission to one another but without hierarchy. Certainly, Adam and Eve would have different strengths and weaknesses, different abilities and ways of thinking because men aren't women and women aren't men, they're different – God clearly states that. The fact that both male and female are needed to bear children stands as a powerful testimony to the roles God intended for men and women to play in covenant with one another. They are both needed. Indeed, they are both required and testify to the uniqueness of male and female. Both separately and together they serve a purpose in fulfilling the plan of God. There is no other union that is capable of producing life.

To be clear, God did not make Eve only for the purpose of bearing children, but it is a fact that the only way the earth could be filled was by the coming together of a man and a woman. God made both male and female and gave them a mandate to fill the earth and that would happen through marriage. **For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. Genesis 2:24**

Marriage was established before sin entered the Garden, before the founding of nations, before the birth of Israel, before the law of Moses was given, before the Pharisees formed to enforce those laws, before the church was born, before the western ideals of marriage took hold or the legality of marriage became a thing. Marriage was God's idea from the beginning. Because here's the thing – Adam and Eve don't have parents to leave. God isn't telling Adam and Eve what to do – He's telling us. He's setting a precedent, establishing a pattern that is to be followed. Genesis 2:24 becomes the foundation on which our understanding of marriage is still built.

The husband and wife will become united. It's covenant language that is used here. A covenant in Scripture was a binding agreement between God and His people or between two or more people. In marriage the man and woman agree to a permanent relationship with each other and they make that promise before God and to God. This is what makes Christian marriage different – you're promising each other that you'll love each other and remain committed to each other, certainly, but ultimately you're making a promise to God that you're going to remain committed to this person for a lifetime. **So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate. Matthew 19:6** By choosing to marry, you are choosing to make a covenant with God and your spouse so now you've been joined together by God. It's not your decision to separate.

Now, I don't know what God was thinking when He made giraffes with those crazy long necks or when He thought poison ivy was a good idea, but I do know what God had in mind from the very beginning when He created a man and a woman in the image of the Godhead who are forever covenanted together in a relationship that exists in perfect unity and joined the man and woman together to create life and multiply life which was also a way of bearing the image of their Creator who breathed life into them first. Because Scripture makes clear that marriage was in God's mind from the very beginning.

It makes sense then that when God chose to send His own Son to earth He chose to do so by placing Him in a family with a mother and a father. One day, years later, Jesus and His disciples are ministering in the region of Judea when Some Pharisees came to him to test him. **They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"**

Matthew 19:3

The Pharisees are intent on trapping Jesus and catching Him out through this well known debate among the scholars of Jesus day. The Pharisees wanted to engage Him in an argument they felt confident He could not win. Why were they confident? Because there was no definitive answer. The debate centered around this verse - **“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce...” Deuteronomy 24:1** What they wanted was for Jesus to debate the Law – to get into the weeds with them on the minutiae of the “any and every reason” why men could divorce their wives. Does any mean any? But Jesus took it as yet another opportunity to do a segment He should have called – Adventures in Missing the Point.

Jesus doesn't engage the argument from Deuteronomy 24, No, He goes back even further – He goes back to the beginning – because He was there and He knows what God had in mind about marriage. So Jesus answered them, **“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.” Matthew 19:4-6**

Jesus connects the creation of man and woman with the principle of marriage and then says – so as you can see this was a big deal, established by God and made in covenant to God. And, God is greater than the Law. You can debate the law and the legality of marriage and divorce all day long but it doesn't negate the fact that God's ways are the ultimate authority and His ways exceed man's ways forever.

That's when the Pharisees interject. Wait a minute! But, Moses said we can! Their rebuttal to what Jesus just said is basically – if God says we can't separate **Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?**

Matthew 19:7 Huh? Answer us that.

The Pharisees aren't used to anyone challenging them. They know the Law so they don't need anyone telling them about original intent. We talk about the Law all day long and we're pretty good at deciphering it's meaning. Jesus upsets the conversation though when He says yes but what about what God says? You see, this is still a tactic of the enemy to get us to talk about the Bible without reading the Bible – to live by principles that came from the Bible without actually living by the Word of God and to use the Word of God as a sword to attack others without first allowing it to penetrate down deep into our own hearts dividing out soul and spirit, joints and marrow and allowing God's word to judge the thoughts and attitudes of our own hearts first.

Jesus says – guys Moses doesn't command you get a divorce if you don't like your wife he just permitted it because your hearts had been hardened against the things God had established early on. If your hearts weren't hard then this wouldn't be an issue. The truth is, if our hearts weren't hard – even the exception Jesus gives wouldn't be an issue. **Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."**

Matthew 19:8-9

If we truly lived in relationship with our spouse like the relationship of the Godhead in whose image we were made then there wouldn't be abuse – physical or emotional or verbal

or sexual – because we would care for each other above ourselves. We would prefer one another in love. Submission wouldn't be a bad word because it wouldn't be defined by power dynamics but by humility and love. If we truly lived in the kind of relationship like the Trinity then we would be selfless, and patient, and kind with those closest to us. If we truly remained committed to each other like the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit then sin wouldn't ruin marriages through adultery or other sinful behaviors. But, sin does have its way right now and Jesus understands that and so He finishes His response to the Pharisees by saying – It wasn't this way in the beginning – it wasn't this way in the Garden when marriage was conceived in the heart and mind of God, it wasn't this way before sin entered the picture and broke the beautiful relationships God had created, but the law permits divorce because hearts are hardened by sin and marital unfaithfulness occurs – people can be unfaithful to their vows by abuse, infidelity, and indiscretions. And, if that has been your experience I have to pause here to let you know that Jesus sees your pain, sees the hurt you have known, washes away your shame, and is holding on to you with a heart bursting with love and compassion. And, if you were the one who was the abuser or the one who was unfaithful there is forgiveness and healing for you as well.

But, so that no one else experiences this in the future – don't look backwards on what God has already forgiven but in looking forward Jesus makes clear that anyone who leaves their spouse for any other reason than marital unfaithfulness has broken the covenant and committed sin.

Let me sum up Jesus main points here in Matthew 19:

Jesus affirmed marriage was established by God from the very beginning to be between a man and a woman for the purpose of uniting together for a lifetime.

Jesus recognized sin has hardened hearts and therefore God allowed through the law specific reasons for divorce.

Jesus has no problem calling out sin and He sees adultery as sin.

You can understand much better now why the disciples asked the question we talked about last week. Because after Jesus has called out everyone – the Pharisees for looking for loopholes and missing the covenant import of marriage, and people who had allowed sin to enter their hearts and turn them against their spouse, and even in Jesus day no one likes hearing a sermon that lists specific sins, His hearers were squirming as much as you guys are. So the disciples say – **If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry. Matthew 19:10**

And, again this week, I still think Jesus is shaking His head going – no, guys, no. I won't re-preach last week's sermon but this is where Jesus offers a strange response. Jesus doesn't say, no, you're wrong, it is better to marry than stay single and He doesn't say, yeah, you're right, it's better to stay single than to marry. But, what He does do is unequivocally state that some will choose to singleness over marriage for the sake of the Gospel and the building of the kingdom of God.

But, how does that fit with what God said in the very beginning? If marriage was created by God at the same time He was creating clouds and strawberries and daffodils then how can singleness be considered good? Is singleness a lesser plan or lesser ideal than marriage because certainly at times since Adam and Eve single people have been made to feel this way. Well, look again at verse 9.

In this passage Jesus asserts His own authority into the matter. John Stott notes Jesus "loved to use a formula no ancient prophet or modern scribe ever used. He would...[speak]

in his own name and with his own authority.” He had done this before – most notably in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had told the crowd that day **Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.**

Matthew 5:17 and then 6 times He would say – you have heard that it was said – and then reference an Old Testament law and then say But I tell you. Jesus wasn’t getting rid of the law or saying it didn’t matter. He was actually challenging His listeners to go further than even the law required. Michael Green said, **“The law is not the limit of obedience; it is to be seen rather as the springboard for a life of devotion to Jesus and his Father.”** –

Michael Green

Jesus was looking for those who would honor the Giver of the Law with their obedience not those who were simply trying to legalistically follow all the rules. So, in Matthew 19:9, Jesus does this again – the law permits you to divorce but I tell you on my own authority that it’s bigger than that. It’s not about what you can do and still follow God, it’s about what God desires – obedience and faithfulness to the covenant you’ve made.

The authority that Jesus has is important because it means He has the authority to then announce to His disciples that a life of singleness was also a good and obedient choice. It was the choice He himself had made. Jesus is the single witness to the good of both marriage and singleness. He came to fulfill all that had been said in the Scripture – in the law and by the prophets – and He came calling our attention to go beyond what even the law required. Jesus kingdom was bigger than the nation of Israel, required more than rule following, and reimagined what the people of God would look like, act like, and live like.

In Genesis God blessed man and woman and gave them a mandate to be fruitful and increase in number. He was building a people and a physical nation. But Jesus gives a

similar mandate too. He stands before His disciples after He has risen from the grave and says, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...” Matthew 28:18-19** Be fruitful, multiply yourselves, increase the number of disciples because God is now building a spiritual kingdom.

In Genesis blessing is connected to the man and woman bearing children. God pronounced that blessing on the man and the woman. That blessing continued to the generation after that and the one after that. Time moved forward and God called Abraham to be the father of the nation He was building and promised that through his children all nations would be blessed. Blessing was tied to children until Jesus arrived and announced in Him was the fulfillment of all that had been said to Abraham. Jesus was both a descendant of Abraham and the blessing and gift to all the nations of the earth. So after the resurrection Jesus took His disciples out to Bethany, **He lifted up his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. Luke 24:50-51**

In Genesis God states it was not good for man to be alone. In the Garden marriage was the solution, and Jesus does not contradict this statement in Matthew 19 even as He recognizes that His followers may be asked to give up children or family. Yet, the lack of family doesn't equal being alone. Jesus, who was single, lived in constant community. He was born into a family and raised by a family, was surrounded by male and female disciples who followed Him, He had close friends like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus, who let Him stay at their home often. We were made for relationship and Jesus knew this. Marriage, friendship, and relationship with God are all ways of being “not alone.” Jesus announces as part of His own blessing over His disciples **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**

Matthew 28:20

In Genesis the task at hand, taking care of the earth and the animals, was too big for one man, Adam, to accomplish on His own. So a helper was given to Him. Just like in the Garden, the task at hand, taking the good news to all the world, won't be accomplished by a singular man or woman. It won't be done by only single people or only married people. The whole community Jesus built while on earth would be sent out.

Marriage is a good thing – established by God. God desires healthy, strong marriages that reflect the image of the Godhead. But, God also desires us to be obedient to Him in all things – which includes our marriage vows. Jesus came not to do away with any of this but to fulfill it and establish a new kingdom. In this kingdom both married and single people participate in its expansion. Both married and single play a role in telling the story of the Scripture – but that's for next week! Both married and single are needed to make disciples and replicate themselves.

Genesis 2:24 describes covenant marriage but doesn't require it. Deuteronomy 24:1 permitted divorce but didn't commend it. Matthew 19 proposes singleness but doesn't demand it. In the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 the creation mandate is restated as Jesus sends out His disciples to be fruitful and increase in number through the making of many more disciples. They would do it by "teaching them to obey everything" Jesus had commanded them.

I don't know what God was thinking when He created thistles or pinecones, but I know what He was thinking when He made us – men and women will bear my image to a world in need. They'll show the world how to live in relationship and community with others. And they'll go forth and produce life – multiplying themselves with both biological children and spiritual children. You have heard it said be fruitful and increase in number but Jesus says

to us today – yes, and also go make disciples. There is a purpose for both married and singles in the work of the kingdom.