

“Here Comes the Bride” – Genesis 2:18-25

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take the Bible you brought or the one in the pew and meet me in Genesis 2...

[Weather...how can we help?]

We have come to the passage that established the paradigm for marriage. It is the first union of this sort, shared between the first man and first woman. To deny that this passage is critical for defining marriage is to accuse Jesus and Paul and other biblical authors of error, as they clearly saw it this way. And in a time when there is so much confusion on the topic of marriage, we desperately need to take seriously what God has revealed in this passage.

Concerning this passage, James Montgomery Boice writes in his commentary,

“When God brought the first woman to the first man, as we are told in the second chapter of Genesis he did, he did not merely provide Adam with a suitable helper and companion. He also established marriage as the first and most basic of all human institutions. Long before there were governments or churches or schools or any other social structures God established a home based on the mutual respect and love of a husband and wife, and all other human institutions came from it. From the authority of the father there developed the patriarchal and later tribal systems of human government. These gave rise to monarchical systems and then democracies. From the responsibility of parents to raise and educate their children came more formal systems of education: academies, institutes, colleges, and centers of higher learning. From the need to care for the family’s health came hospitals. From the obligation of parents to educate their children in the knowledge of God and the ways to worship came synagogues and then churches. One cannot think of a contemporary social or cultural organization that does not have a derivative relationship to the home and marriage.”¹

If he is right, then we have a huge problem on our hands. If marriage and the family serve as a foundation for all these societal features, then once you start chipping away at that foundation you risk the entire societal structure crumbling down. I think we have ample evidence in our time of this correlation. And, therefore, we have yet another reason to recognize the importance of these opening chapters in Genesis. Time and time again we have seen how relevant the patterns they establish, the designs they reveal, are for our time. And when it comes to things like marriage, the Bible speaks clearly. And what it says is built off of the text we have come to this morning.

Hopefully you have found your way to Genesis 2 by now. I’ll begin reading in verse 18. Let me invite you to follow along as I do. Focus your minds that you might hear God’s Word in this text...

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ ¹⁹ Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. ²¹ So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²² And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and

brought her to the man. ²³ Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' ²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:18-25)

This is God's Word...

The opening of this passage is striking. Repeatedly in the previous verses we have heard the assessment "*it was good...it was good...it was very good.*" Now we come to a verse that tells us that something was "*not good,*" namely, "*It is not good that the man should be alone*" (2:18). Man created in God's image is a relational being. But God, unlike man, is a tri-unity. He exists (and always has) as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So God didn't create us because He was lonely. He was never lonely. He is, in Himself, perfect relationship.

But humans are different. We are made in God's image and so are relational beings. But do not share this divine nature and plurality, and so we were created with a longing to relate to others. We do that first and foremost with God. But in God's design, humans need other humans. It's not good for the man to be alone. So what does God do? The same verse tells us that God "*will make him [Adam] a helper fit for him*" (Gen 2:18).

Of course, this "*helper fit for him*" is none other than the woman that God makes in the next verses. She was to be Adam's suitable helper, his compliment. Yet I am fully aware how that sounds to modern ears. Woman as the helper to man sounds a bit antiquated to our ears, if not outright chauvinistic. But that misunderstands what is being said.

In describing her as "helper," the Lord is in no way diminishing her value, but adorning her with language that the Lord elsewhere will use of Himself. You might remember that Moses, the very author of this section of Genesis, named one of his sons Eliezer, which means "my God is a helper." God is a "helper" (Exod 18:4). The psalmist will later praise God as the "*helper of the fatherless*" (Ps 10:14), and David will also address God as his "*helper*" in song (27:9; 40:17), as would the nation of Israel (e.g., 118:7). Indeed, in the Old Testament, the term nearly always applies to the Lord (e.g., Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Ps 33:20; 121:1). I believe it's sixteen of the eighteen Old Testament occurrences that refer to God, therefore the language here in Genesis 2 "signifies the woman's essential contribution, not inadequacy."²

So in describing the woman as "*helper*" in Genesis 2, there is not any sense of inferiority implied. Both the man and the woman were created in the image of God. That is the basis for human dignity, a dignity that is equally shared by both sexes. But each sex is unique. Each brings something different to the table. They will need to complement each other if God's purposes in the world are to be brought to fruition. The creation mandate makes that clear, for how could the earth be "filled" with other image-bearers if Adam were left to his lonesome. It could not. As one writer put it,

"By God's good design, the mission of the garden required not just one, but two; not just man, but woman. Adam needed a compatible co-regent, a queen to assist in his reign, a helper of the highest honor. Together, in complementary glory, they would garden the world."³

So God makes for him a suitable helper to enable them to move forward together.

Yet before the text describes this, it tells us of the work God set out for the man to do in isolation, particularly naming the animals. In the ancient Near East, as in most cultures today, naming something implies authority.⁴ In naming the animals, the reader would have recognized that this signified Adam's authority over the animal world, which we've already been prepared for through the image of God discussion. He is God's vice-regent, His representative, on the earth, so of course we would expect him to exercise a delegated authority over that which God has made. God bringing the animals before Adam confirms that man's authority over creation accords with God's design.

But the exercise of naming the animals also serves the purpose of allowing the man to come to see what God already knows—that there is no true complement to Adam in creation. Not yet at least. Only when this realization sets in for Adam does God get to work on remedying that “*not good*” state of affairs. It’s as though God wanted Adam to learn from the outset that whenever He encounters a need, he should not despair, but look instead to God to meet the need.

Interestingly, to meet the need, God does not do what we might expect—simply create another human from the dust of the ground (2:7). He instead does surgery. We’re told, “*the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman*” (2:21-22). Why do it this way? I suppose only God knows. But it would seem that this “procedure certifies the fact of oneness” between the man and woman. There is a fitness to their pairing that human beings can have with no other creation.

Additionally, perhaps the old Hebrew adage is right when it states that “God chose to make Eve from the rib of a man. He did not take her from Adam’s head that she should rule over him. He did not take her from his foot that he should trample upon her; but from the rib that she might protect his heart.”⁵ Matthew Henry famously wrote something similar: “[She is] not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled on by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”⁶ Sounds like a Hallmark card. But maybe there is something to it. Adam is about to break out in poetry so...

And what occasions this reaction? God making the introduction. Verse 22 tells us that God “*brought her to the man.*” This is the same language that is used of the animals that God brought before Eve. But here it is not to impress upon Adam his isolation, but to remedy it. God plays the role of a Father who brings his daughter to her future husband.⁷ He has prepared her for this day. Now He walks her down the aisle, so to speak, and puts her hand in Adam’s. And Adam, recently raised from his slumber, responds with poetic elation. Look at verse 23...

“Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’” (Genesis 2:23)

I read an article published this weekend on this very verse, in which the author, Scott Hubbard, writes,

*“Lest we imagine marriage as a union of mere usefulness, a practical arrangement for the doing of tasks, God shows us the first husband *singing* the wonder of his wife. Here, standing before him, is *woman* — his own humanity refracted through the prism of triune diversity. She answers the longing of his heart, and he hers.”*⁸

She’s nothing like the animals. To Adam, she’s “*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh*” (2:23). She’s his complement. The best thing that will ever come of him. Another image-bearer. The “*helper*” he only recently realized he needed, and now cannot imagine life without. It was a match made in Eden.

In calling her “*woman*” there is a play on words in the original, which happens to also work in English. In Hebrew the term for “man” in the poem is *‘iš* and the term for “woman” is *‘iššâ*. The words are clearly related, built with the same alphabet, which is also true in English when we speak of “man” and “woman.” From the man’s perspective the woman was not just some animal. They are related, *‘iš* and *‘iššâ*. The man expresses this reality in memorable verse, “a forceful way of demonstrating that the man recognized the woman as designed especially for him, something that did not apply to any of the animals he had previously seen.”⁹ She was different. He would never be the same.

Some argue that this calling her “*woman*” should not be equated with the naming of the animals in the previous verses and, therefore, need not imply his authority over her. It’s often pointed out that Adam doesn’t name her

“Eve” until after the Fall (3:20). Any sense of authority or headship then, it is argued, is a consequence of sin and need not be seen as part of God’s design for a household.

But I don’t think that reading does justice to the details in this text, nor to those we find elsewhere in Scripture. You’ll notice in this passage that God “*brought*” before Adam the animals for the purpose of his naming them (2:19). The same language is used with Eve. God “*brought*” her before Adam (2:22; cf. 2:19) and he “*called*” her “*Woman*” (2:23; cf. 2:19). I cannot imagine the first readers would have seen this repetition and not thought that it implied that Adam was delegated certain authority in his relationship to his wife. The New Testament confirms this at various points when it ties the leadership a husband is called to in a marriage to the order of creation (e.g., 1 Tim 2:13; 1 Cor 11:8-12)¹⁰ and speaks of a husband as the “*head*” of his wife (e.g., Eph 5:23). Therefore, I think that Adam’s naming her “*woman*” probably does suggest that “*Adam has an authoritative position in the family structure.*”¹¹

Again, I don’t think this should be heard as demeaning to women at all. God created men and women to embody different, but complementary roles. A difference in roles does not imply a difference in value. Within the Godhead—the holy Trinity—each person (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) possesses different roles. But these roles in no way diminish the value of any person. They each share the divine nature. In an analogous way, a husband and wife are assigned different roles in a marriage, but they each share the image of God. They each possess the same value and equality. One is no more important than the other. They complement each other. They each bring to the table different attributes and capacities important to God’s purposes for humanity. As Paul told the Corinthians,

“...in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.” (1 Corinthians 11:11-12)

In short they are equal. But in a marriage, they are tailormade for different, but complementary roles. A husband is called to lead his wife. He’s been entrusted with a kind of spiritual authority. And he will be held accountable for its abuse or neglect, for this authority is not given for the sake of the man himself but for the sake of his service to his bride and their household. You get a clear sense of this when you read the New Testament’s instructions for how a husband and wife are to relate to one another in marriage. The most famous example is found in Ephesians 5, where we read the following instruction:

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.” (Ephesians 5:22-24)

If Paul wrote that today, he would be canceled in a millisecond, and blasted all over social media. That sounds oppressive to people today. Why? Well, because everything sounds oppressive to the ears of people in our day and setting. But for some it sounds this way because, quite frankly, many have misused these verses to justify abuse that should be abhorrent to all, and certainly is to God. But you can only misuse these verses in such evil ways when you don’t read them in context.

You see Paul doesn’t stop there (and he didn’t start there either). First, listen to what Paul says to husbands immediately after these words to wives.

“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.” (Ephesians 5:25-30)

So has God given a husband authority to exercise in a marriage? Yes. He is the head of his wife. That's what the text says. I don't apologize for God's Word. And you shouldn't either. But does the husband exercise that authority in oppressive ways? Absolutely not. He is called to exercise that authority as Jesus does for His bride, the church. Husbands, your instruction manual is the Gospel. Your model is Christ. Christ gave Himself up for her wellbeing. Husband, Paul says, go and do likewise. Love your wives like you love your own body. There is no price you can pay, no cross you can bear, for her sake that will match what Christ has modeled. You lead her. You give for her. You lay down your life that she might be carried in the sanctifying waters that Christ has provided for his people. That's what a Christlike exercise of authority in marriage looks like. It's not pulling rank and insisting on getting your way in all things. It's sacrificial. It's cruciform. It's sanctifying. It loves like Christ loved His Bride. It adorns and adores her as Christ does His Church. As Hubbard writes,

“In the pattern of Genesis 2, then, a husband loves his wife as *woman*, and he leads his wife as *helper*. He waxes poetic about her beauty, and he labors with her beside him. He rises up to praise her (Proverbs 31:28-29), and he empowers her dominion (Proverbs 31:11-27). He embraces her as lover, and they stride forth as fellow rulers. Their inward romance, like the trunk of a great tree, branches up and out, bearing fruit for outward mission.”¹²

This is the first marriage. This is where the institution is founded. Jesus clearly viewed it that way, appealing to this scene when questioned about the nature of marriage (e.g., Matt 19:3-5)...

And by the way [commercial:] the way Jesus and the New Testament authors engage with this story has implications for other theological conversations in our day. For example, was there a historical Adam and Eve? I think we have to answer yes because Jesus refers to them as historical individuals. To say otherwise would create conflict with the teaching of Jesus (and the various biblical authors). The doctrine of inerrancy could be at stake.

Similarly, the way Jesus spoke draws on Genesis 2 and has implications for our understanding of the doctrine of inspiration. Who is speaking in Genesis 2:24? The narrator. Jesus believed this narrator to be Moses (Luke 24:44), and yet in Matthew 19, Jesus says (when questioned about marriage and divorce),

“Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” (Matthew 19:4-6)

So Jesus knows that Moses wrote these words quoted from Genesis 2, and yet Jesus says that God said them. What does that tell us? It tells us that when Scripture speaks—regardless of the human author—God speaks. We are hearing God's Word, not merely the words of men. So Jesus had a high view of Scripture and the doctrine of inspiration. We should too. [End of commercial].

Taking our lead from the rest of Scripture (and from Jesus Himself), we are right to understand this text in Genesis 2 as establishing and defining for us the institution of marriage. So if we are looking for a paradigm to inform modern definitions of marriage, it should be found here. It's found in this one-flesh union between one man and one woman for life. It is monogamous. It is exclusive. It is permanent. It is God-initiated, designed, and sealed. It is heterosexual. It is not open to redefinition from God's perspective. “Genesis, therefore, holds that marriage is not merely a humanly devised convention to be changed or adapted to new circumstances or conceptions of human sexuality.”¹³ It's God's idea. It's His creation. It's His to define.

Similarly, back in Ephesians 5, where we looked at the roles assigned to men and women in marriage, Paul likewise demonstrates that Genesis 2 has everything to do with the institution by quoting this same verse that Jesus does. More than this, Paul helps us to see that marriage is not only God's idea, but “it is designed by God

to display his glory in a way that no other event or institution is.”¹⁴ Immediately after giving those instructions to husbands that I read earlier, Paul writes,

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” (Ephesians 5:31-32)

This is fundamentally the ultimate purpose of marriage—to be a picture, an object lesson, of the Gospel in the world. What a high calling! It’s not about convenience. It’s not a worn-out and meaningless institution. It’s about the Gospel. And that’s why it matters. God has established it and designed it in such a way to help us make sense out of the Gospel. It illustrates—albeit imperfectly—the beauty of the Gospel. John Piper once said in a sermon titled, “Staying Married Is Not About Staying in Love,”

“The most ultimate thing we can say about marriage is that it exists for God’s glory. That is, it exists to display God. Now we see how: marriage is patterned after Christ’s covenant relationship to the church. And therefore the highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display. That is why marriage exists. If you are married, that is why you are married.”¹⁵

Do you see why marriage matters? You can’t just transform it into something that deviates from God’s design without obscuring the Gospel that it was intended to display. This is why same-sex “marriage” is such an issue. It’s not simply that it violates God’s design for human beings and sexuality. It’s that it corrupts the very message that God intends marriage to communicate—the Gospel message. It distorts it. It defiles it. It destroys it. It takes a relationship that by its nature was designed to communicate truth—saving truth—and it uses it instead to blaspheme. That’s ultimately why it’s a problem.

And the same goes for divorce. Divorce is a reality in a fallen world, where people sin against one another and refuse to repent. But if marriage is foremost about the glory of God and the object lesson of the Gospel, then divorce is more serious than society realizes. This is why our marriages are worth fighting for, why reconciliation is worth pursuing—because the marriage is not about you first and foremost, but about God and His Gospel. When we enter into a covenant—and this covenant in particular—and say those words, “Till death do us part” and “As long as we both shall live,” we have to mean them. We have to mean them, “in good times and bad,” “in pain and in sorrow,” “in sickness and in health,” and so on. We take those vows for the hard days. And what makes the breaking of the covenant so devastating is not first of all the pain that it inflicts on the parties involved (though that is tragic enough), but the misrepresentation it makes of the Gospel that marriage is a picture of. Christ is faithful to His bride, even though we have at times been unfaithful to him. He keeps His covenant. Marriage is a picture of that.

And I know we live in a fallen world, and bad things happen, and relationships can crumble, and sometimes that happens in marriage even when we don’t want it to. Some of us have felt that firsthand as a marriage has come to an end because of sin. Some of us are perhaps contemplating throwing in the towel on our marriage now. And if we listen to the world, it will say that marriage doesn’t matter. It’s not worth it when it gets tough. Do what you want. Make of it what you want. But that is not what God’s Word says. To God it matters. Why? Because the clarity of the Gospel is at stake. So as far as it depends on you, fight for a healthy marriage. Fight for reconciliation. Fight for faithfulness. Fight for God’s glory in marriage. Take it seriously because God does. And we—your pastors and your faith family at Southern Oaks—are here for you along the way. We serve a miracle working God, a God who changes hearts and minds. A God who has saved many of our marriages in this room. He can do that for you. I’m not saying your marriage is guaranteed to heal. I’m saying that it’s worth pursuing because God’s glory is worth pursuing. Seek first His glory. We seek first His glory by pursuing His design, including His design for our marriages.

Of course, never has this design of marriage been more perfectly expressed than right here in Genesis 2. We end on a beautiful note. Verse 25 tells us “*the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.*” Here we read of “perfect ease between them”, the blessed “fruit of perfect love, which has no alloy of greed, distrust or dishonour.” O the heights from which we have fallen! This state will soon be squandered, the “immediate casualty of the Fall,” as we shall see. But at least for the moment the verse allows us to enjoy the beauty of the state of this first couple. Yet the more we marvel at the beauty and simplicity of what is said in this verse, the more we are left “with a pointed reminder of our vanished concord.”¹⁶ More on that later. To be continued...

Let’s pray...

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 136–137.

² Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

³ Scott Hubbard, “Every Marriage Needs a Mission: Three Steps for Husbands,” published on February 3, 2023, and accessed on the same day at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/every-marriage-needs-a-mission>.

⁴ John Goldingay, *Genesis*, BCOTP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 63.

⁵ John D. Currid, *Genesis, Volume 1*, EPSC (Leyland, England: Evangelical Press, 2003, 2015), 109-110.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (London: Marshall Brother, n. d.), 1:12.

⁷ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 66.

⁸ Hubbard, “Every Marriage Needs a Mission.”

⁹ Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis*, TOTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 67.

¹⁰ Anticipating objections, John Piper writes, “Some teachers have said that the order of creation means nothing because in Genesis 1, for example, the animals were created first and then man. So if order implies responsibility for leadership, then the animals should lead man. There are two answers to that objection. One is this: when the Hebrew people gave a special responsibility to the ‘firstborn’ in the family, it never entered their minds that this responsibility would be nullified if the father happened to own cattle before he had sons. In other words, when Moses wrote this, he knew that the first readers would not lump animals and humans together as equal candidates for the responsibilities of the ‘firstborn.’ And we shouldn’t either. The other answer to this objection is that the apostle Paul, who was inspired by the Holy Spirit in his handling of the Scripture did see significance in the man being created first (1 Timothy 2:13)... We do well not to say there is no meaning in something where an inspired apostle finds significant meaning. So the first observation is very significant: man was created first, then the woman. And this points to a leadership responsibility for the man, especially in view of the other observations that follow.” John Piper, “Manhood and Womanhood Before Sin,” accessed online on February 4, 2023, at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/manhood-and-womanhood-before-sin>.

¹¹ Currid, 111. Similarly, Waltke, 89.

¹² Hubbard, “Every Marriage Needs a Mission.”

¹³ Steinmann, 67-68.

¹⁴ John Piper, “Staying Married Is Not About Staying in Love,” accessed online on February 4, 2023, at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/staying-married-is-not-about-staying-in-love>.

¹⁵ Piper, “Staying Married Is Not About Staying in Love.”

¹⁶ Kidner, 66