



2024 Weekly Devotions

Week of: Jan 29th - Feb 4th

Sermon: January 28th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◊ equipping believers ◊ serving Jesus

January 29

1 Kings 11:1-5

You can consider this week's devotion material as my attempt at answering the frequently asked questions pertaining to Genesis 4. The fourth chapter of Genesis raises many interesting, if sometimes unimportant, issues. Many of those quandaries are not central to the redemptive storyline that Genesis is beginning to unfold, which is why they are not dealt with in the Scriptures. While I will not attempt to address it here, the most common question I receive about Genesis 4 is where Cain found a wife! If you are interested in that question, I would refer to the resource of the week which deals with that dilemma. If you didn't pick up the resource, you can find it by googling "Ligonier, Cain's wife".

Other problems or questions do raise their proverbial heads again in the text and this means that they are most certainly worth our time here. The first issue is the issue of plural marriage. We read in Genesis 4 that one of Cain's descendants, Lamech, married multiple wives and the natural question arises, is this good, or right? The answer, in a nutshell, is no! However, that simplistic answer does little to help us understand why and so I want to spend a few days seeing, in more detail, the biblical teaching on the topic of marriage.

The first thing we need to recognize is that plural marriage does show up in many places in the Scripture and some of those who are married to numerous wives are the "good guys". For instance, King David was married to many women, Jacob had multiple wives and the like. What we will see is that the Bible does not hide the warts of its heroes, and this means that everything we read about a person isn't synonymous with God's commendation of the specific action. In fact, the Bible describes many behaviors that it does not condone. Noah got drunk, David committed adultery, Moses got angry to the point of disobedience and Peter denied Christ. While all these things are freely revealed to us, the Bible is not saying that we should emulate these behaviors! In fact, we should do the opposite. Why? Because the Bible teaches that these actions are sinful AND it shows us that these men were guilty of misdeeds in these specific instances. In the same way, the Bible clearly teaches that marriage is to be between one man and one woman and it always shows us that plural marriage leads to severe consequences.

Today's text is one instance of God's demonstration of the effect of unfaithfulness in marriage. Solomon is known as a wise man; indeed, he was exceedingly wise, nevertheless, he had a weakness and that weakness was women! Solomon's desire to be with multiple women is demonstrated in the hundreds (you read that right, HUNDREDS) of women that he married. While this man understood quite a bit about quite a bit, he was foolish as it relates to his ability, or inability, to overcome his lustful desires. What was the result of this? The answer is that Solomon's multiple wives led him away from God. The Bible draws the connection quite clearly in our text, it was the influence of Solomon's wives that drove him from the Lord's good graces.

This detail is not minor, the Bible records the general number of Solomon's companions and then points the finger at their influence as the reason that he was "seduced away from God". Now, some might quibble here and say that the real problem wasn't the number of Solomon's wives but their religious convictions. That certainly didn't help! However, it is important to note that if Solomon had one, believing, wife the level of pull on his soul would be far less. Nevertheless, this is just one passage of many that shows us the wreckage of numerous wives.

January 30

Genesis 29:30

Today's text centers on another hero of the faith who found himself in a dysfunctional, unbiblical situation. To be fair, Jacob did not set out to marry multiple wives, his relationship with Leah was the product of the deception of Leah (and Rachel's) father. Nevertheless, the result of the circumstances was pain and difficulty.

We don't have to read into the dynamics of Jacob's relationship with his two wives as the Bible tells us quite clearly that he loved Rachel more than Leah. While this would be incredibly painful for Leah, it also inevitably spilled into their corporate lives as an abhorrent family unit. There are two things that we must note about this relationship if we are to see that the Bible both describes what happened and demonstrates some of the calamity that follows this sinful setup.

First, we must note the insecurity that is rampant in this dynamic. It is obvious from various portions of the narrative surrounding Jacob and Leah that Leah was incredibly insecure. We see this in chapter 30 when Leah says to Rachel, "Is it not enough that you have taken away my husband?" The point is fairly straightforward, Leah knew that she was second fiddle and she also dealt with insecurity that arose from a circumstance that was unbiblical. Folks, there is simply no biblical defense for this kind of pain. All of us who are happily married can try to imagine the pain that would be felt if another partner came into our lives, specifically a partner that was obviously more loved and treasured by our spouse! Why is this reaction so commonplace? Precisely because God did not ordain for us to share our spouses!

The second detail that bears mentioning is the way that this favoritism, which was ingrained in the family structure, was passed on to the next generation. Jacob did not only have a favorite wife, he had a favorite son as well! The Bible tells us that Jacob loved Joseph more than any of his other children. Now, to be clear, the Bible says that Jacob's love for Joseph was because Joseph had been born to him in his old age, however we must also note that Joseph had a younger brother (Benjamin) so the idea that Joseph was the baby and, therefore, the favorite, cannot be totally the case.

What was it that caused Jacob to love Joseph more? One obvious reason was his mother! Rachel, not Leah, was the mother of Joseph and it stands to reason that this was at least part of the cause of Jacob's favoritism.

Now, these truths coalesce around a truly tragic event in Joseph's life. The Bible says that Joseph's brothers grew to despise Joseph so much that they eventually sold him into slavery! Why? Because Joseph had the audacity to tell them about a (true) dream he had regarding their submission to him. To be clear, this would be offensive to many of us regardless! However, we must recognize that part of the reason behind their angst was undoubtedly the same insecurity that is born in the mind of a son who is not as beloved. Jacob was used to playing favorites, this is because he had two wives to choose from, and this bled into his entire family.

January 31

Genesis 16:3-4

The literalists among us might not love me using this text to attempt to prove the point that the Bible ALWAYS demonstrates the truth that those who take multiple wives deal with consequences which proceed from sin. Stated differently, we know that plural marriage is sinful, in part, because the result of plural marriages is always dysfunction.

Now, how does Abraham qualify? The answer, on the surface, is that he doesn't! Hagar was never the wife of Abraham, but this might not hold as much water as people think. You see, the act that Sarah prescribed for Abraham is an act that is limited, biblically speaking, to marriage. This means that while Sarah and Abraham didn't call his lying with Hagar marriage, the very fact that Abraham did so for the express purpose of offspring is an act that is only consistent with marriage from a biblical perspective. In other words, attempting to add to the family through sexual relationships that are not isolated to one man and one woman requires the motivation of bringing another person into the marriage and this, by definition, adds to the unique relationship with another party.

Today's text describes the action, the rest of the Bible and history itself is replete with the consequence. We could, rightly, say that the result of Abraham's sin in going outside of monogamy is the root of one of the most bloody and painful conflicts in man's history. God prophesies that this would be true as He tells Abraham that Ishmael, the offspring of Hagar from Abraham, would constantly be at war with God's righteous descendant through Sarah, Isaac. Indeed, over the centuries and millenniums, this prophecy has proven to be exactly true! Isaac and Ishmael's descendants are still at war in the middle east and their issue can be traced back, in part, to who has the rightful ownership of disputed land that Abraham was on the road to inheriting. The chronological "firstborn" was Ishmael, the seed of Abraham that would produce the nation of Israel was realized in Isaac.

The point for today's devotion is quite simple... do you see the destruction that comes from a non-monogamous marriage relationship? When we just read what the Bible says and heed its warnings as it recounts for us the dysfunction that comes from a plural marriage, there is simply no way we could honestly look upon the biblical narrative and conclude that plural marriage is an acceptable practice before God. Now, this doesn't mean that the Bible doesn't give us explicit instructions, in fact we will see in the next few days that God is quite clear that marriage is to be between one man and one woman, but we must also recognize that this instruction has immensely practical fallouts and those include the problems we have seen in Scripture along with countless others that were left unaddressed.

February 1

Genesis 2:24

So, we have attempted to survey some of the relevant passages that demonstrate the consequences that befall those who choose to operate outside of God's will in plural marriage. Today and tomorrow, I want to briefly look at the explicit instruction God provides on the topic of marriage in order to establish the fact that plural marriage cannot be reconciled to the biblical teaching on the topic.

Today's text is repeated 3 times in the New Testament (Matthew 19:5, Mark 10:8, Ephesians 5:31). While we most certainly believe that all Scripture is inspired and important, there is a principle of biblical interpretation called the "perspicuity" or clarity of Scripture. One of the precepts contained within that doctrine is that God has been most clear about those things that He is most concerned about. So, we see the Gospel throughout Scripture, we read in many places about the attributes of God, and we have some of the most central commands of Scripture given to us repeatedly. This passage falls into the repetition category and that means that we should certainly lean in when reading and studying this exhortation.

Now, the point of the text is quite simple, the covenant of marriage unites two parties into one, distinct entity. While it is absurd to state that a person physically becomes "one flesh" with his partner, it is equally absurd to think that God's uniting two parties into one can somehow be added to or multiplied. The point that God is making in Genesis 2 is that Adam and Eve, as the first married couple, are a united, and finished, team. They are one in the eyes of the Lord as it relates to their union and they are to operate, with their complimentary gifts, in tandem to accomplish the mission that God had given them as a couple. While they would multiply, through the conception and nurture of children, the marriage relationship was meant to be guarded, and therefore not altered, by any addition.

The addition of a new wife would necessarily take the husband, at least partially, away from the existing wife and/or add a third person to the united couple. Neither of these possibilities truly exists. An addition to the couple would create a three headed monster which would not be able to function in any meaningful, profitable sense (remember Jacob, Rachel and Leah and their dysfunctional marriage) and the taking of the husband, at least partially, away from the existing wife would diminish the unity and purity of their marriage together.

The point for today's devotion is quite clear, it is simply impossible to believe that God had a plural arrangement in mind when He made the statement recorded in Genesis. Instead, it is obvious that God designed marriage to be between one man and one woman. One obvious question is why? We have provided one portion of the answer, the more temporal aspect, today. Tomorrow we will see that there is a greater "mystery" that is demonstrated and proclaimed to the watching world through our union as husband and wife. Tomorrow's devotion will constitute the culmination of our study but it also should be the pinnacle, and most convincing, reason for monogamy.

February 2

Ephesians 5:31-32

We get to the heart of the matter today in Ephesians 5. As you have noticed, verse 31 is a reprisal of the statement made in Genesis 2. Paul reminds the reader that marriage is a relationship whereby a man and woman unite into “one flesh”. However, the Apostle doesn’t end with this repetition, instead in Ephesians 5, Paul goes further to help us understand the purpose and ultimate point in the design of marriage between two parties (one man, one woman).

First, we need to say a word here about the term “mystery”. Paul says that the mystery of marriage is profound, what does he mean? R.C. Sproul helps us immensely here saying, “Instead of a secret truth that only the “truly spiritual” can understand, mystery in the Bible refers to something that was once unclear under the old covenant but is now seen plainly under the new covenant.” Essentially, a mystery is something that was once not fully known that has been revealed to God’s people in due time.

In this case, the “mystery” that marriage has always foreshadowed and demonstrated is the new covenant relationship between Christ and the church. Jesus is the bridegroom, the loving, sacrificial head of the church and the church is His bride. We are living in the ultimate, eschatological, purpose of marriage when we submit to the head even as He loves and leads us as His church. The reason why the term “mystery” is appropriate here is because this relationship could not have been fully understood or grasped when marriage was instituted. While God gave Adam and Eve some insight into His plan of salvation in the protoevangelium, the manifestation and details of that plan would take several thousand years to fully materialize!

Now, the question is what does this have to do with plural marriage? The answer is that plural marriage destroys this picture. There are not two brides and there are not two husbands! There is one, universal, church. Christ did not come to redeem multiple brides; He came to build His church (singular) and He will ultimately be united to His church for all eternity. Additionally, there are not two grooms. We are to be loyal and faithful to one bridegroom, He is the reason for our worship, and it is in our relationship to Him alone that we experience all the joyful bliss of salvation that comes through faith.

The point then is quite clear, the picture of marriage and the ultimate design of demonstrating the relationship between Christ and His church totally precludes plural marriage. There cannot be an accurate picture in bigamy. Instead, marriage can only be accurately pictured in a faithful, loving and committed relationship between two distinct and unique parties. This explains why things fall apart every time a third party enters the picture in Scripture. It helps us grasp why dysfunction is so rampant when plurality of partners is introduced and it gives us a good rubric to evaluate all relationships by as we see past the temporal to the eternal relationship that each of our marriages is meant to genuinely, if imperfectly, mirror.

February 3

Genesis 6:5

We are skipping ahead in Genesis a bit but, I pray that this past week's passage helps illuminate the statement that is made in Genesis 6. The context of Genesis 6 helps us understand why this description is so key. We know that the fall of man happened in chapter 3, and we further know that Noah's ark is getting ready to come into the account in the following verses and chapters. So, from chapter 3 to chapter 6 we have the human race moving from one sin by two people to a multitude of sins by ALL the people (save the repentant Noah and his immediate family). The sin was so rampant and so perverse that God saw fit to destroy the inhabitants of the earth, save one remnant family, and start over!

What does this have to do with Genesis 4? The answer is that we already see the grotesque and exhaustive nature of sin developing in our chapter for the week. In Genesis 4 we have: jealousy, pride, deceit, bigamy, murder and the like and this is not just revolving around Cain! In fact, we read that one of Cain's descendants, Lamech, bragged about his vengeful side and was himself married to multiple women.

The point is that man's sin was pervasive already and God saw it, as He always does. Unfortunately, man's sin has not subsided after the flood. We still live in a crooked generation, and we still deal with many of the consequences of our collective and individual sins. In many ways, Genesis 4 is not the pinnacle of sin, nor is it an unusual moment in time, it is simply a horrifying harbinger of what would befall the world without Christ.

For thousands of years, man has tried to fix himself. Some of those solutions are attempts to ascend to the heavens (see Babel), others are attempts to deny that anything above us exists, giving us free reign to determine what is good and evil. Sometimes hedonism is the rule of the day which simply says that the goal of this life is to have as much fun and experience as much pleasure as possible. However, history shows us that none of those worldviews holds water. Man can't ascend to the heavens, there are objective rights and wrongs as determined by our Creator and no amount of worldly pleasure can bring joy and fulfillment.

The good news, of course, is that Christ did come. He came to redeem us from our sins, and He also came to transform us by replacing our cold, dead, sinful hearts with a heart that is alive and desirous of walking in accordance with His will. When we understand that the true problem in society is with the sinfulness of man, we will only then look to Jesus as the solution for our problems.

The world does not need political reform, at least not in the way that people seem to think, it doesn't ultimately need better counselors or a jolt of self-esteem, what it needs is Someone who would overwhelm the sin that holds mankind in captivity. It needs a radical transformation through salvation that is, in its essence, regeneration bringing man from death to life. Only this will "fix" society and the good news is that you and I know the solution!

February 4

Romans 5:6-11

As we close this week's devotions, I want to return to a passage that has been mentioned quite often over the past few weeks. The latter portion of Romans 5 tells us that Adam's sin impacted the rest of his descendants which, by my count, is all of us! it was through the sin of Adam that death entered into creation and death continues to reign in the human race by virtue of the fact that we are all conceived in iniquity and brought forth as sinners.

However, the portion of the chapter just prior gives us some really good news. Adam's sin made him an opponent of God and righteousness. We see this through the separation that took place between Adam and God and the way in which Adam's offspring largely behaved towards God. Sin is a rebellion, an act of cosmic treason, against the Sovereign Lord of the universe and this means that those who are guilty of sin, particularly those who are guilty of unrepentant sin, are rebels who oppose the rightful rule and reign of the One True God.

Now, this is bad news. There is no way around it! We are opponents, enemies of God. What can be done about this? The answer is that mankind can do nothing. There is no hope for us in our own abilities or efforts. We are simply guilty and the judgment that will befall us is sure... unless. The good news of the Gospel is that God sent Christ to die for us. Christ didn't die for those who naturally loved Him, Jesus died for those who were still His enemies. This is what we read in Romans 5 and this truth makes the Gospel of Christ truly remarkable.

What kind of God would die to atone for those who despise Him? The answer is a loving, merciful and gracious God. Sometimes people wonder why God doesn't save more but this is really the wrong question. The real burning question should be, why does God save any of us? When we begin to comprehend the depth of our sin and the wickedness that dwells in our hearts, the fact that God would have anything to do with us at all is amazing.

Jesus died for sinners and He died so that we could become not just forgiven but part of God's family. Christ's death didn't secure a pass from on high. The pinnacle of the Gospel is not that God isn't upset with you anymore (although that it is certainly true that His wrath is gone for us in Christ), the pinnacle of the Gospel is that Jesus died so that you could be reconciled to the family of God! Jesus died so that those who were enemies of God could become His children. He died so that you and I could become sons and daughters of the King and this means that even in spite of our wickedness and rebellion, we have a pathway to peace and adoption through Christ.

This God deserves your worship this morning. He deserves praise and adoration as we consider and reflect upon His goodness to us. May we pause on this Lord's Day and remember, yet again, the beauty and depth of love that we see on the cross and may it inspire and inform our songs of praise and our eager listening as we sing to God and hear the Word of the loving King of Kings.