

## **MATTHEW 19 - 22.05.11**

This chapter covers three incidents in the ministry of Jesus. We start with a debate with the Pharisees about divorce, then Jesus welcoming the children and blessing them and then his encounter with a rich young man who had a problem with his wealth.

Jesus' teaching during these encounters illustrates the radical nature of discipleship.

*"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* Luke 9:23

This often means we have to swim against the tide of general practice and public opinion which may lead to persecution.

On the subjects of divorce and wealth, so demanding was Jesus' teaching that the disciples couldn't believe that it could ever work. Vv 10 & 25

This chapter is bang up-to-date. Our western society is dominated by sex and casualness in relationships. The tabloid newspapers feed on it daily and the "soaps" glamorise it.

It is also dominated by the deceitfulness of wealth. We are bombarded with advertising that encourages covetousness and we are sold the lie that to win the lottery is a guaranteed road to happiness.

But most shameful of all, children are exploited around the world often to meet the demands of the wealthy in the west. It is estimated that annually, 1.2 million children trafficked for cheap labour or the sex trade.

**This morning we are only going to look at the first of these. Not so much divorce, but MARRIAGE.**

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### **SLIDE 1. THE ROYAL WEDDING**

It is estimated that 30m people watched the BBC coverage of the Royal wedding in the UK and world wide it was 2 billion in over 180 countries. People's reason for watching or being actually present in the crowd, will have differed. Whatever else you might say it was magnificent spectacle; British pageantry at its best. But perhaps the overwhelming reason why people watched it was because it is a love story. At heart most of us are suckers when it comes to love stories and there is something hugely attractive about following a budding romance, culminating in a wedding celebration. But when it is royalty, when it's a prince, then it has the potential to take on a fairy tale image. Surely every good story has its Prince Charming who wins his bride, made all the more magical if she comes from an obscure background into the spotlight of royalty.

So there we have it; our true life fairy tale and we are tempted to add, "... and they lived happily ever after."

On a more pragmatic note, when the commentators on the day were looking for possible wider consequences, a question that was frequently asked was something like, "Do you think this will have the effect preserving the British monarchy? This is with the understanding that some in the nation consider we should do away with it and convert to a republic. Most of those "experts" I saw interviewed thought that it was an excellent day for the monarchy, helping to underpin it for the foreseeable future.

But I would rather ask a different question, not one I heard coming from the commentators and it relates to what was clearly the focus of the whole occasion. Not the fairy-tale romance, not the splendid pageantry, not even the balcony kiss, but the marriage ceremony itself. So, my question is, what if anything, has the royal wedding done for the institution of marriage in a day and age when couples who

marry are now in the minority and there are a variety of alternative ways of expressing companionship and sexual fulfilment which are being legitimised and supported through parliament. And even many couples who eventually marry, first cohabit for a while as a trial relationship.

Not only was the marriage ceremony the very centre of the event, it was conducted as a solemn act which reiterated and celebrated the biblical understanding of the union. Of course also, it was conducted as a Christian act, which I think is not insignificant, in an age where we are under much pressure to accommodate the increasingly multicultural and multi religious nature of our society.

I sincerely hope that this act, viewed by billions, will have elevated this institution of marriage in the hearts and minds of many. Rejoice!

### **SLIDE OFF**

This morning I would like to take a few minutes to remind us of the biblical basis for marriage and that we are the custodians of the divine truth it represents and that we should defend it with all our hearts no matter how much our culture changes and no matter how many distortions of human sexuality are accepted in the name of human rights and, may I add, no matter how many failed or bad examples of marriage we may encounter.

The style in which the marriage ceremony is conducted and the celebrations which accompany it will vary according to the culture, so we do not champion marriage on the basis of culture, not even Christian culture, but primarily because it is a creation ordinance. God, having created man in His own image, He instituted His design for companionship between a man and a woman and from that companionship the human race would be perpetuated. Because it is a creation ordinance, God's gift to His creation, it is therefore, for the good of mankind. To abandon it, to distort it, or just undervalue it, must be to the detriment of all mankind.

Just a fairy tale? Maybe much of the romance of William and Kate will seem like a fairy tale to us. The feature of a fairy tale is that it is way outside the experience of ordinary people. But let me say that when William & Kate came to make their vows they were no different from any others who enter into marriage.

We will look firstly in Genesis, then in the gospels and finally in the writings of the apostles and we will see that both Jesus and the apostles when speaking of the basis for marriage refer to a statement in Genesis: *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."*

### **Gen. 2:18-25**

Good, but not good!

Before the fall we see that God's creation was perfect. At the end of the sixth day, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." 1:31

V18 Not good. A suitable helper is needed. (Not the only form of companionship. Friends/animals)  
God provides man with woman, not just to be a partner in procreation, but to be a complementary companion providing mutual support. She is to be:

**1. A helper**, which is one who supports both physically and emotionally. This is not a lesser, or demeaning task, indeed God is the one most referred to as a helper. Although men have abused this term, it is a high calling.

**2. A suitable one** – someone who is complementary, but different. She is his counterpart. (Better half) and Adam realises that although different she is part of his family. Together they will fulfil one another's need for companionship and this is through the institution of marriage as described in v24

*"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."*

Although this is described from the man's perspective the process is the same for both and both parties must:

**1. Leave.** Both are no longer dependant on, or responsible to their parents. There is a leaving emotionally and psychologically where their marriage is their primary relationship.

**2. Unite.** The old word was **cleave**. This speaks of passion and commitment, not casual convenience. Like being glued together.

**3. Become one flesh.** It does not just mean sexual intercourse. This is illustrated by the fact that Paul reminds us happens when a man unites himself with a prostitute he becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor. 6:15-20). Marriage involves the whole person and that the two now make one new person, not just a new family unit. Jesus tells us that God is involved in the joining of the two and Paul tell us that it is a mystery, akin the union between Christ and the Church. They do bring different things to the marriage, they do have their own life, but there is no separateness because an exclusive joining has taken place that no other relationship can provide. This has profound implications and explains some of the pain of divorce.

Before we look at some NT scriptures I would like to make a comment about **co-habitation** in the light of what we have just considered.

When I was young, co-habitation was not socially acceptable. Whether or not people had a real understanding of sin, this is the label that was applied to it. They were living in sin. Look how far we have moved. Both socially and legally, it is now largely an acceptable alternative to marriage. Some would say that "you don't need a religious service and a piece of paper to be married, it's about commitment." Some Christians are being persuaded along these lines.

There are at least four aspects of marriage that are missing from co-habitation: (my primary aim here is not to condemn co-habitation, but rather to emphasise the uniqueness of marriage). Marriage is:

**1. A Life-long Commitment.** All too often co-habiting is seen as a trial period before marriage. Statistics are quite clear that such relationships are like more likely to fail than those who commit to marriage. It is the commitment that underpins the marriage, not the trial run.

**2. A Public Declaration.** Co-habitation is a private arrangement. Marriage is a public one – it is an arrangement with profound social and legal consequences. Usually the families are involved and in many wedding services the father of the bride "gives her away" signifying that he is no longer her primary relationship.

**3. A New Standing in the Community.** Marriage acknowledges that the new relationship has an impact on the wider community that must be recognised and honoured, co-habitation does not.

**4 Public Commitment before Sexual Union.** The statement *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh."* There is a clear order here. It is hugely unpopular today to say it, but we must say it, **all sexual intimacy outside of marriage is immorality.**

### **Let's look at what Jesus had to say about marriage.**

Matt 19: 1-12 (Matt 5, Mark 10) These passages are most often quoted in regard to divorce and remarriage.

1-3. Different schools of thought and Jesus is being tested. Jesus brushes this aside and refers to the creation ordinance. I don't care what the rabbis say.

4-6. He takes the statement further "what God has joined". If God has blessed or endorsed something we tamper with it at our peril.

8-9. The Pharisees are not satisfied. Let's get back to what God intended for the benefit of mankind. This is precious, it involves the deepest of human relationships and if you are careless with it you may not only cause much pain as people are wrenched apart, but you may stray into immorality.

10-12. Following God faithfully, being a true disciple of Jesus, may at times seem very hard. Later in the chapter we have the Rich Young Man. 23- 26

And regarding the subject of marriage we may find ourselves increasingly going against public opinion and even what may seem fair and reasonable to us.

**Adultery in your heart.** Matt 5:27-30 This is another way of saying "Fight to protect marriage at all costs."

### **Marriage elevated to the highest level.** Eph 5:22-33

Two way metaphor: How can we understand the relationship between Christ and the Church? Paul takes the example of marriage. How can we understand the quality of the relationship God intends for husband and wife? Paul takes the example of Christ and the Church. For the man in particular, this is a very high calling.

Throughout the Bible, when God wants to express His relationship with His people, He uses the metaphor of marriage. What higher honour is there for the institution of marriage?

### **The Wedding of the Lamb.** Rev 19:6-9, 21:1-5

This is a picture of the groom returning for his bride. We are betrothed to Him.

Referring to Steve Dunn's sermon last June.

Jewish marriage had two separate parts, betrothal and marriage (not like our engagement) Betrothal was declaring the couple married, but they did not live together as man and wife. So strong was the betrothal that unfaithfulness was considered adultery.

### **SLIDE 2. JEWISH BETROTHAL**

At the betrothal the bridegroom would offer the woman a cup of wine. If she agreed to be betrothed to him, she would drink from the cup and the bridegroom would say, "I will not drink of this cup until we are reunited. Then he goes away and prepares a place for them to live.

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The Lord's Supper. Matt 26:26-29

### **CONCLUSION**

This may seem academic to those who have fully accepted this truth and experienced faithfulness in marriage, but over and above our personal experience, as the Church, we are custodians of this truth and must uphold it with all our might. Tragically, there are churches that are prepared to accommodate alternatives for couples and bless what I don't believe, from scripture, God blesses

We must pray for marriages in our church and families and give every support to any that are under stress. We must teach our children and young people that this is God's way for the good of mankind.

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**QUESTIONS**

1. In the light that people may become involved with us who have all sorts of relational and marital history, quite contrary to that expressed above, how should we maintain our commitment to God's truth, yet be non-judgemental and accessible to those currently outside the kingdom?
  2. Accepting that some things in the past cannot be undone, for unmarried couples, should we make marriage a condition of (a) baptism, (b) membership, or (c) neither?
  3. Singleness may be a calling and accepted as God's will, or it may be unwelcome and a cause of much disappointment. In either case, how do we, in our church community, make sure, that with the rightful promoting of marriage, those who are single do not feel sidelined. (If you have single people in your group, get them to give their personal perspective on this.)
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