

In the Beginning, Part 6:

The First Wedding

Genesis 2:18-25

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Preface

We've been taking stock of how in Scripture first things contain within them last things, in seminal form. In theological terms, eschatology is found in protology, the end in the beginning. So, when God creates his world, including humanity, his image-bearers, it is not so that they might continue to qualitatively forever and ever live the same life. As good as it might be, there is something even better to be had, to be enjoyed. There is a promise, a reward, held out to the first man, conditioned upon perfect obedience. And I'd like to suggest that even here we find a hint of how God is orienting him further in that direction: "Hey Adam, there is something (beyond what you have already attained to) to look forward to!" This is what we encounter in what amounts to a first here, a first of many, countless weddings. There are many firsts in Genesis, and this is no exception.

Scripture Reading

[Genesis 2:18] 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.

Introduction

When Jennifer and I got married, our minister, as he began preaching during the wedding, opened by saying something like this: The most important person on hand, participating in a wedding ceremony is, arguably, the photographer. As it would turn out, our own photographer had been stuck in traffic and had missed the entire ceremony up until that point. I guess that's what can happen when you tab your former college roommate to be your wedding photographer, free of charge. And while I'm not sure we

were even aware of that, the real point being made was not lost on us—that, beginning with the wedding, any and every marriage is to depict something, to present an image, a picture, of something, to serve a higher purpose in God’s economy.

A Creation Ordinance

This is all underscored here, brothers and sisters. Marriage is God-given, divinely instituted, woven into the fabric of his creation—meaning that he determines its definition as a bindingly exclusive and permanent relationship between one man and one woman—meaning that he determines the ends that it is to serve, for his glory, to showcase something of himself and his love now known most fully in Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is not a malleable thing, neither in terms of what it is or what it is for. It is not a wax nose, no matter what our culture or any given culture may seek to say or do with regard to marriage. And, Lord willing, when we consider Satan and his work next time we’re in Genesis, we’ll spend some time considering his work as it lies behind the contemporary tampering going on with marriage, and so much that is related to it. . . . But, Covenant Presbyterian Church, it is a creation ordinance. So this at least must be said: Because *The First Wedding* demonstrates that it is established by him, we must honor the institution of human marriage and what God intends to achieve through it. So this morning, let’s just do this. Let’s take our seats, as it were, and pay close attention to God’s Word, to this special series of events culminating with this most original of all weddings. And let’s notice four things along the way.

I. First, Something Not Good

Brothers and sisters, check out Genesis 2:18: “Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone.’” He is alone, in terms of being without a human relationship. And, despite the fact that he enjoys the presence of the all-satisfying God who made him, who walks with him in the garden, God nevertheless insists that this situation, as it currently stands, is not good. If we could only pretend to be reading Genesis for the first time, then this would startle us, throwing us off balance. And it ought to. For all throughout the story of creation, repeatedly, the pronouncement of God’s Word has been “good,” and “very good.” This is good, and that is good. So God’s evaluation at this point of something not good, of something lacking, is meant to grab hold of our attention. It signals to us that at this point Genesis 2, which is just elaborating on the work of creation as revealed in Genesis 1, is letting us know that things are incomplete, unfinished—incomplete, unfinished, so long as the man is alone. So long as you and I are alone, I might add.

Let me say this for the sake of those here who are single, whether not yet married or maybe even formerly married but not anymore. Let me clarify that there’s nothing wrong with singleness. Jesus, after all, was single—and for good reason. The Apostle Paul, as far as we know, was single. However, even if you’re single—whether you’re meant to be single for just a little while longer or meant to be so lifelong or for the rest of your life—it is still not good to be alone. Even if not married, you still need and should be in community, in godly relationships with other people. In the context of not only

covenant families but the covenant community that is the church. Not in isolation or seclusion, where sin flourishes: in particular, certain secret sins and sinful habits. Not independent or self-sufficient. As if you don't need anyone. Not self-serving, as if no one needs you and your service of others. You're to throw yourself into relationships with God and with other people, especially God's people, through Christian community, like this Christian community, and deepen your friendships with brothers and sisters in Christ and work with them, working together, for the advance of God's kingdom.

You see, that's a big part of why it's not good to be alone. You can't accomplish very much for the glory of God all by your lonesome. Adam, all by his lonesome, will not be able to pull off the cultural mandate, that's for sure. He needs Eve, to biologically, physically reproduce and multiply, to fill and subdue the earth, ruling it under God as his vice-regents, his king and queen—as the first of his kings and queens. And yet, in the church of Jesus Christ, marriage—or let me put it this way, child-producing marriage—is not to be absolutized. The New Testament emphasizes the church and its work of international disciple-making and spiritual reproduction, the extending of the dominion of the new and second Adam, King Jesus, which every Christian is to be a part of, and that means singles and not just married couples—and that means married couples without children, and not just married couples with children. I think it's wise to keep such things in mind as a church body, and as we work our way through a text like this one....

II. Second, A Movement from Singleness to Marriage

Brothers, sisters, take a look at the rest of v. 18 with me, where the LORD God says, “I will make [the man] a helper fit for him.” And yet he first needs to have this deep desire stirred up in him. This is why the LORD God parades the animals by Adam, as he does according to vv. 19-20, that he might name them, and launch another institution, namely science, as he classifies the animals the way biologists or zoologists do. In past weeks, we have seen how humanity, as embodied in the first man, is to be a king and a priest. He is also to be a prophet, one who speaks God's Word after him and who interprets things—imparting understanding. And that would include self-understanding, that he might appreciate the gift God is about to give him, and not take her for granted. I mean, on one level it's hilarious. “How about the giraffe?” “Uh, no, Lord, giraffes aren't my type.” And yet it's no joke—as he exercises his authority over the animals, over the lower creation, not finding a counterpart, a soul-mate, among them. Adam is made to long for his Eve and then jump for joy when God brings her to him.

And that is still the natural course of things, and we experience it, under God's providential hand, when we are single and finding ourselves wishing to be married. It's true that it can become an occasion for anxiety, as you seek, as you wait—it can become a downright obsession. But if you're single, if that's you, be encouraged that if it is God's will, he will provide for you, just as he would provide for the man and the woman here. He will provide, and his provision will be perfect. Not that your spouse or spouse-to-be is or will be perfect in himself or herself, but that he or she will be just right for you. God will not give you what you want, necessarily, but he will give you what you need.

Well, what does Adam need? Two things are accentuated with regard to the woman: She is equal to him but different from him.

Let's take a look at the woman's equality, first of all. This is captured in the term "helper," which she is referred to as twice. The Hebrew noun is *chenegdo*, and its meaning is very rich, conveying many things. It is not a demeaning term, implying inferiority. God, after all, 16 times in the OT, is called our "Helper," our Ultimate Helper. He certainly isn't some inferior. The term implies a companion placed in front of you, opposite to you, face-to-face. Vv. 21-22 affirm her equality as well: "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. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man." Adam, we have already learned, has been formed from the dust. And the woman comes from the side of the man. They are both made of the same stuff in terms of origins, the raw materials from which God has made them to be his image-bearers—both of them, equally.

Listen to the commentary of the Puritan Matthew Henry, which also underscores the woman's shared dignity with the man:

The woman is "not made out of his head to top him, not out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

The scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures Umberto Cassuto adds this, in a similar vein:

"Just as the rib is found at the side of the man and is attached to him, even so the good wife, the *rib* of her husband, stands at his side to be his helper-counterpart, and her soul is bound up with his."

It's reflected as well in Adam's response upon the woman being brought to him, walked down the aisle in effect by God himself as her Father, according to v. 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.'" "At long last!" he is exclaiming, breaking out into poetry, into song. "She is one of me!" There's nothing here to suggest that he hails her as someone to master, to dominate, to tyrannize. The God-given roles of men and woman in marriage, including this marriage, would degenerate, but as a result of the fall, which we'll be getting into later. But in this ideal state Adam hails his wife as an equal, as a partner. With her, and not without her, he can fulfill his God-given mission as his representative king in this world. In the words of Meredith Kline, he views her not as his slave-girl but as his wonderful queen! Indeed, this is another departure the biblical text makes from all the ancient Near Eastern comparative literature, in which the creation of women is pretty much excluded from all the creation narratives. In Genesis, it is cause for celebration! In fact, while the creation of the man is given one verse in Genesis 2:7, the creation of the woman is given six verses in Genesis 2:18-23.

Let's now take a look at the woman and how she is different from the man, as well as equal. She is different, and called to take on different roles—something which has

implications for the role of women in both marriage and the church. *Chenegdo*, that term translated “helper,” is that nuanced. It refers to one who is simultaneously like you and not like you. You see, this is what Adam needs, someone who will complement him, who can offer something that he doesn’t yet have. And it goes beyond just the ability to bear his children. She can offer her opinion. She can offer her wisdom. You see, we husbands need that.

Ladies, being helpers means being helpful. Being submissive doesn’t mean just being a quiet little mouse. Yes, you need to follow your husband’s headship and lead, but by all means speak up if you see him doing something you think is idiotic. My wife does that for me all the time—she has plenty of opportunity. I need her to help me see things I don’t see on my own. And, again, not just help with cooking and housekeeping and raising our children. I’m always better off when I embrace life in partnership with her. Husbands, you are to lead and provide for and protect your wives, which means loving them, serving them, valuing them—letting them, among other things, help you. Letting them help you raise a family and all together, with the church, be a God-glorifying, Christ-exalting witness to the world. You see, like the equality of the man and woman, the differences between the man and woman are a good thing too. We shouldn’t deny them, or resist them. God, after all, knew what he was doing in the act of creation. Just as he knows what he’s doing when he leads you to the spouse of his choice.

As sinners, living now by God’s grace in Christ, it may feel like friction at times, but God is using it all to smoothen out the rough edges of our selfishness, to sanctify us. And there again you have a word to take to heart yourselves, in case you are not among the married here today. God is using all our relationships to thus sanctify us if we are his children.

III. Third, Union, Including Sexual Union

Dear brothers and sisters, Adam recognizes that his wife is bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. They are bound together. They are one. They are no longer just individuals, for they belong to each other now. As a matter of fact, in marriage, spousal union takes precedence over obligations to parents. Like it says in v. 24, singling out men, it seems: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” If you are married, or when you get married, make sure, especially if you’re a man, that your priority is your spouse or spouse-to-be, over and above your allegiance to your parents and whatever they want. Otherwise, you compromise your union with your spouse. You undermine your marriage. You’re to “hold fast” to one another become “one flesh,” after all, like the text says.

This is the language of covenant commitment. That means not just sexual oneness, but oneness in everything. One reason marriages break down and fall apart today is because of a lack of oneness. You need to be one spiritually. You need to be heading in the same direction together, with the same priorities. You can’t compartmentalize your lives. I dwell on this because people do this when they get married. They get married but try to stay single at the same time. They have separate checkbooks, and separate lives

with their own separate hobbies and their own separate set of friends. Be careful. Make sure you're building together on a common foundation, upon Christ. I mean, to name just one example, how in the world are you going to raise children together if you're not on the same page when it comes to being committed to Jesus? This is something, by the way, I recommend you make sure as best you can before the wedding, and not after. Afterwards, it can be very complicated to say the least. I'm not talking about marriages between non-Christians, which God in his common grace will bless. But I'm referring to unequally yoked marriages, to use Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 6. How dare any Christian enter into the covenant of marriage when there's no unity in Christ, no shared commitment to him, the one who has covenanted with us, who in unconditional love is committed to us?

Jesus is the only one who makes verse 25 possible. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." All these things do include sexual union, you see. There are so many prohibitions in the Bible against sex outside of marriage between one man and one woman, aren't there? And yet it's all because sex is such a precious gift from God. It's meant to be protected. So, if you're married, flee from temptation to sexual sin, to sex outside of your marriage, and give yourself to the act of loving your spouse. Singles, this applies to you too, even very young singles. If you're not married, or not yet married, God is calling upon you too, to pursue purity and save yourself for your spouse. Otherwise you will already be undercutting your love for your future wife, or husband. Sex is meant to be preserved for marriage, as something that gives expression to this union, as something that gives expression to the intimacy involved between husband and wife—as well as being the means of producing children. Where you can be so secure with your spouse that you can get naked with him, or her. Where you can be yourself. Where you don't have to perform. Where you don't have to hide things. Where you are loved, period, no strings attached. Where you are naked and not ashamed....

IV. Fourth, A Shadow

Beloved, v. 25, as lovely as it is, carries with it an eerie, haunting sense as well—because we know that the innocence is lost. We are no longer unashamed. There is hidden sin, hidden skeletons in our closets. This original marriage, and all marriages ever since, even the best of them, even the ones that last, have been tainted by sin, strained by sin. We are now dealing in every human marriage with a marriage between two sinners, with so much baggage, and so much brokenness. Marriage will expose you, as it has exposed me. I entered it, thinking I was going to be such a loving husband—I mean, how could anyone ever love a wife the way I loved my wife-to-be? But it's humble pie, thrown in your face. You don't just find out that your spouse cannot live up to the impossible standard of the person you've imagined him or her to be. But you find out that you yourself fall miserably short, that you yourself can be so difficult to live with. Where can hope be found in the midst of it all?

Well, thank God that human marriage is just a shadow. You know what a shadow indicates? It indicates the presence of something greater, something more real, something with actual substance. When your shadow appears, it means you are there, walking

nearby. And if human marriage is just a shadow, the real thing is the preexistent and prior love, of God for his people, which begets in them their love for him. Of Christ for the church, who loves him in return. It's born of the initiating, redeeming love of God, planned before the creation of the world. *The First Wedding*, humanly speaking, is recorded here, in Genesis 2. But *The First Wedding*, in the heart and mind of God, took place in eternity past, when God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) conspired to bind to himself a bride, a wife—though she would be sinful, having played the harlot, having gone to bed with other gods, having dressed herself in filthy garments. He would send Christ to become sin for her, upon the cross. That in him she might become the righteousness of God and be found dressed in blood-bought wedding garments, pure and spotless. That in him she might be turned into a radiant bride, as Paul expounds upon this mystery, now revealed, in Ephesians 5, which human marriage is meant to explain, to tell us something about. With the wedding of all weddings to look forward to, a coming marriage consummation, in the new heavens and the new earth, as told in the last book of the Bible, in Revelation 21. Human marriage, as dim as it may be at times, exists for it, for the glory of a greater love.

And yet it means that this becomes the question of primary importance, for everyone here, whether humanly married or not? Are you espoused to be married to Christ? Have you been made a part of his bride? Do you know this love which gives sinners like you and me hope, to face a holy God—and strength to love one another with his love, in the context of the church, and even in the context of marriage, and the home that marriage leads to, where so much forgiveness is needed, so much longsuffering—where the gospel must be active and applied, the gospel that says no condemnation in Christ Jesus, so that you can at least, for example, begin again to know and be known by your spouse, unafraid that he or she will condemn you?

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, I've thought a lot about our pastor's suggestion regarding the importance of the wedding photographer. But the most important picture of all is not taken the day of the wedding. It's not the wedding album that counts the most. In fact, the reason weddings are so significant lies in something other than the wedding—it lies in how they are to commence with solemn joy a whole, entire life of holy wedlock. So I say this. The most important picture of a marriage is the one that is taken over a lifetime. In our marriage commitments, as in all the love relationships that we are called to, as the rest of our lives unfold, one day at a time, will we mirror and manifest something of the gospel, the love of Christ, displaying something of him, fleshing out something of him? That is our responsibility. That is our glad privilege, all that God our Creator and Redeemer might be blessed, might be praised.

Amen!

Prayer