

21st March 2021 10 am Christ's View of Marriage

Service led by Lindsey Attwood including interview by Andrew Attwood with Sue Pollard about an idea for Easter and with Jane Garsed about Listening to God.

Talk by Andrew Attwood.

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Welcome

[Andrew:] Morning all!

[Lindsey:] Welcome everybody. Just going to welcome Mary and Kal.

[Mary:] Hello! [Andrew:] Hi Mary. Hi, Kal.

[Lindsey:] Good to see you. How are you both?

[Kal:] We're both very well, thank you. [Mary:] Yeah.

[Andrew:] I hear, Kal that you had some time off this week. Are you feeling better for that?

[Kal:] Yes, I'm feeling really quite chilled, thank you Andrew, it's been a nice time of relaxation and taking it easy, yeah.

[Andrew:] And the cricket was good?

[Kal:] The cricket was good, yeah, it was good for India, the T20, Yes.

[Andrew:] Excellent. Good. Great, well I'm just going to leave you with Lindsey now, because she's going to introduce the service. Great, we'll see you guys later.

[Lindsey:] See you soon.

Notices

So just welcome, welcome everybody this morning. So welcome if you're joining us for the first time, or if you join us every week, it's great to see you. This evening as normal there'll be a 6pm service, and I think Andrew's leading evening prayer, so that'd be great if you can join them at 6pm. And as normal on Wednesday, you can see the madness of all of us who lead the Bible study at 12 noon and to see our love of actually enjoying Acts at the minute.

And just one thing to think about, I'm going to get a notice in a minute or it's going to be a video notice actually. Are you planning anything exciting this Easter? It's quite amazing how we're actually going to be our second time in lockdown at Easter. I mean if you just said this a year ago, I don't think I would have believed it, that we'd be doing Easter again online this year, so it's quite, quite amazing. However, maybe you might be thinking of something different to do on your street. So I'm going to share with you now a short video by Sue Pollard, about what she's planning on doing and maybe that could inspire you.

An Idea for Easter from Sue Pollard

[Andrew:] Hi Sue, good to see you!

[Sue:] Hi there, it's good to see you too.

[Andrew:] Sue, you wanted to talk about ideas for Easter and a particular idea that you want to encourage us with, but before we get to your idea, can you give me a bit of background about what you tend to do with your street? What's your experience in doing things on your street?

[Sue:] Okay. Our streets ended up with quite a history of doing community things. And we started off actually having a really useful conversation, and I'm sure that it was Heather Suffield at some point who said, "What about having a street party?" I remember thinking, "Street party? What on earth is she doing with one of those? I have no idea with that." And then the consensus was to go with the street party. And we started off doing something quite small prior to that: we had a bring-and-buy sale with Blue Peter, which was really easy, low key, we invited everyone. So there was no pressure, and loads of people came and they all said, "It'd be really good to meet people again, we don't know all the people on the street." So we said "Well, we're thinking of doing this street party." It was great fun organising it. I think of everybody I know, I would really not think that I would ever be a party person. But I ended up being involved in organising a street party, but everybody just chipped in, in all sorts of ways. So we had one in 2000, we had one in 2002, that would be for the Golden Jubilee, wouldn't it? I think we probably had one in 2012 for the sixtieth, we've had a number of street parties since then. But we've done other sorts of things, so at Christmas we've done carol singing. In fact the last couple of years people have done a great job, you know we've had mulled wine and mince pies, and everybody's done a countdown and switched on their lights at the same time, and we've done some choral singing together. We've done various things together.

[Andrew:] What really interested me was your idea for maybe helping Christians at this Easter time, who can't obviously meet together in the church building because of restrictions. What could we be doing as we head towards this Easter that might chime in with some of what you've been sharing?

[Sue:] Although the cross will be on Abbey Fields, we won't be able to have the Good Friday service and walk of witness. But it occurred to me that people could put a simple cross at the front of their property, just showing that actually it's not about rabbits and chicks, it's about the death of Christ and about the resurrection of Christ. And so, I was thinking about how to do it. I've been speaking to various people at it, you might have a cross in your house, I mean this is a really small one we've got. I went walking and just picked up two sticks and just bound them together with string, just to have a cross at the front of the property to say, this is really important to us. And I thought it would be good to put something there which would engage with people. And it occurred to me, put it in a sign which said we want to share the joy of Easter. We want to share the joy of Easter because a cross is not a sign of joy to people, it's a sign of death, but for us we know it's salvation, and we know the Cross is empty because Jesus has risen, and so it is good news for us and it is a point of joy for us.



So, I think so many people are walking around the streets at the moment, and hopefully over the Easter weekend there'll be more people walking around, wouldn't it be something to engage with people to say, "There is something significant here," and seeing a number of these around to make people think, "Well actually, for some of my neighbours, this is very important to them." And so that's the central thing.

I'm hoping to put some Easter eggs out, because I'd love to share something with people. And so I had thought of just popping some Easter eggs out as well. Obviously I've got to be careful with that, that we keep them at a height away from dogs and making sure we're thinking about allergies, so that they're not accessible to children that are not supervised, and we'd make sure that people are careful in that way. But, you know, I'm thinking that I would be able to do that; other people might not feel so comfortable with that, but I'd love to be able to share that with them to say, "I want to share the joy of Easter with you." I've asked some of the neighbours on our street, who said, "Yes, I'll do that with you." And my plan is to just say to people on the street, "I'm going to be doing this over the Easter weekend - do help yourself to them, join in if you want to."



[Andrew:] I mean, I love the simplicity of it, because you know, like you're suggesting, maybe from the **Thursday in Holy Week through to maybe Easter Monday**, just a few days, where people will suddenly see crosses, it would be great if, you know, loads and loads of Christians in the town had a cross in a window or maybe on a gate or near a wall at the front of the property, like you say, simple - it's dead easy to do, and it's a kind of opportunity just to be a bit more visible. And it may even engage conversations with neighbours who hadn't known before where you're coming from, and it might be something that they would want to join in with or even talk about. So I think it's a great idea, really good idea.

[Sue:] Yes, that was just an idea to put forward, but it would be lovely to think people will engage with it, and think of doing that.

[Andrew:] Okay, well, I think we can leave it there. It's a great idea, I would love to endorse as many people in the church during that Easter Week to put a simple cross out, maybe a simple message inviting people into the joy of Easter, and, you know, sensibly putting some, maybe some Fair Trade chocolate or some normal chocolate, at a sensible height. That's a great idea. Thank you for talking to me, Sue, really good idea.

[Lindsey:] Thank you, Sue, for that. We met with some of our neighbours on Friday night on a Zoom, and we were chatting about what we're going to do in the street, maybe a street party when lockdown hopefully ends, and so we're trying to get to know our neighbours, and it's been really, really good. It's a great opportunity just to be known. So, I would really encourage people to do that.

Prayerful Introduction: Jesus, the Good Shepherd

So, today's service: we're still continuing with our theme of marriage, and what Jesus said about it. We're actually looking at some of the words of Jesus in Matthew, and Andrew will be sharing with us later, and actually after that, both of us, we're going to just talk a little bit about personal stuff and how this has affected us, because sometimes it's really good, not to sort of read stuff but how does it actually flesh out in reality and it's important to see that.

So as normal today we're going to have two worship songs, and a little video by Jane Garsed talking about what God is saying to her at the moment, and looking forward to Mary and Kal doing intercessions later.

So I just thought this Sunday morning, it's always good to get into God's presence and to be still before we even start and have to think. So I was praying, the other day and I just had this verse come to mind, and it's from Isaiah 40 verse 11. And I'm just wondering, what I would like you to do if you can, is to close your eyes when I say it because I want you to engage with this, and to allow God to draw near to you. So the verse is this:

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

So I just wanted you to imagine, just for a moment, that you are a sheep. I really love sheep actually, but sheep are quite simple. So just be a simple sheep for a moment, just imagine you're a sheep in your field. And I just wanted you to imagine that you can hear the call of the shepherd, and you're really used to his voice, or her voice, you're used to the voice of the shepherd, and that you follow it, you know that this is a safe voice, you know this is the voice that you can trust, and that you follow that voice. Notice that in the verse that he gently leads those that have young, so if any of you have children, for instance, and you're, you get anxious and it's just lots of work, how Jesus is so gentle with you, knowing what it's like to have young, to have young children, or to have responsibility, but He's good and He knows how to lead you. Just be still and imagine Jesus calling you by name, imagine Him calling your name. Let Him lead you and then allow Him to hold you. Just imagine that you love holding your children. If you have children, you will often hold them. And I just want you to imagine that you are being held by Jesus, that He holds you close to His heart. Sometimes, I don't know if you've ever seen sheep being held, they often wriggle, or even children, little children do as well, don't they, wriggle and want to get down. But just let Him hold you and relax in that hold if you can, don't struggle. Just let Him care for you right now. Don't be afraid of Him. Don't be afraid of anything you've done, just allow Him to hold you.

He tends his flock like a shepherd:
he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

I just want you to remember this week when you're stressed or things are difficult or you're struggling, just to imagine that: remember that He's the good shepherd. And if you can, just allow yourself to be still for a minute. And remember that He wants to hold you close to His heart, that He's close to you and that you can trust His voice, you don't need to run away, for He's gentle and loving.

Dear Father, we thank You for everyone gathered here now, and for those that may watch later. Thank You that You know each of us by name, and we are precious to You. We are dependent on You and are trusted in You completely. As we surrender ourselves in adoration, we ask that You would come by Your Holy Spirit, and inspire our hearts today. Come fill our lives with Your love, fill our conversations with Your grace and truth, and fill this time together with Your presence. We ask this for Your glory and praise. Amen.

So now we're going to have a time of worship, we're going to have two songs. And then we're going to see an interview with Jane.

1st Song: Great Is Thy Faithfulness

1. Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.

Chorus:

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

2. Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.

Chorus

3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

Chorus x 2

2nd Song: Holy and Anointed One

Jesus
Jesus
Holy and Anointed One
Jesus

Your name is like honey on my lips;
Your Spirit is like water to my soul;
Your Word is a lamp unto my feet;
Jesus I love You – I love You.

Jesus
Jesus
Risen and Exalted One
Jesus

Interview with Jane Garsed: Listening to God in Lockdown

[Andrew:] Hi Jane, good to see you.

[Jane:] Hi Andrew.

[Andrew:] Thank you very much for being open for a little interview. I just wanted to ask you some questions, and it's to do with what God's been saying and doing. And I just wondered, first of all, through lockdown in a general sense, what do you think are the key things that you've been learning as a Christian?

[Jane:] Okay, well I think, probably, I think there's been a personal growth, a personal deepening with God. And I think that really, some of it's been forced maybe, because there's been more time to be able to do it, but I think there's been a real calling by God for me to go deeper, and to... By that I mean to spend time with Him, to spend more quality time with Him. And I guess, you know, there was a big sort of turning point for me, in sort of rereading Hebrews 5:7, when we look at Jesus, petitioning God in prayer, in tears, and then it says that God heard Him because of His reverent submission. And those two words have really sort of stuck with me, and the challenge of trying to submit to God and be obedient, because that's also in that passage as well. And what does that mean? And so I was sort of, that's been stretching those muscles for me, just in ordinary, everyday situations, because by nature I'm perhaps quite a challenging person [laughs]. So it's challenged me but also, you know, that whole sense of just drawing closer in obedience to God.

[Andrew:] Okay, that's really helpful. Given that that's the context in which God's been leading you and guiding you, are there any particular things, do you think, that God has spoken or shown you in the last, say, few weeks or whatever?

[Jane:] Oh well, I guess this last lockdown I think has been incredibly hard for... well, it seems everybody, really, I think. Yeah, just really challenging. But you know what? What I sensed was that there was almost a sort of a severing of what was, of past stuff, of... And, you know, it reminded me really of the story around Lot's wife and actually that sort of warning not to look back and then what did she do and what happened to her. And, you know, that sense that this latest lockdown which has been so hard, has been a time for me when it's just stopped me from looking back to what was, actually, that sense of looking forward, but I don't know what I'm looking forward to, and only the Lord knows, you know, we just don't know. But it feels like a letting go of stuff: that's been quite big for me, I think really, yeah, to be more forward facing.

[Andrew:] Okay so in the light of that, then, what would you say you would be hoping for or encouraging other people in church to be thinking about as we gradually come out of lockdown?

[Jane:] Well, I think one of the things that has happened this last year, of course, is that, well certainly for me, and I know that's not the case for people working at home with kids and everything else, but - has been a sort of a rhythm that has meant that there's been some quiet times or lengthy quiet times, and so the pace perhaps for me has slowed down. And, you know, you just feel that when we come out, there's going to be a huge demand to do, a huge demand to... because there's going to be so much sort of need, but also perhaps the sense for some people that they've been wanting to pick back up the things that had stopped, which can often be really good and honourable things, but I guess the way God spoke to me really recently is that, you know, church in general, church as we know it, is it does good deeds, but I think whilst those good deeds are honourable, I think we mustn't do it to the detriment of our relationship with God and to seeking Him first and, you know, I was thinking that actually we can fall into things and we could be really capable and do those things really well, but do we have the mandate from God to do it? And I think it's about sort of, perhaps, that we need to be regularly checking, checking in with God, you know, is this what... it might seem good, but is it what you're calling us to do? Because, you know, the other thing I think is that we're going ahead, but we don't know what we're going into. It's a season that has been ordained by the Lord, and only He knows what He's been equipping us for in this last year. And therefore, there's that... you know, the most important thing for us is to actually share the Good News and to have that courage to talk about Jesus more and to, yeah, to find ways of doing that in a way that does what we're called to do.

[Andrew:] Okay, that's really helpful, Jane, thank you so much for answering my questions, and bye bye now.

[Jane:] Bye!

[Lindsey:] Thank you for that, Jane, that was really, really encouraging. That's great. So I'm going to bring our Bible reading now, which is from Matthew 19, verses 1 to 12.

Reading: Matthew 19:1-12 [NIVUK 1984]

1 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. **2** Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

3 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?"

4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'
5 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'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined
together, let man not separate."

7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce
and send her away?"

8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it
was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for
marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to
marry."

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.
12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and
others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this
should accept it."

This is the Word of the Lord.

Talk: Christ's View of Marriage

[Lindsey:]

So just before Andrew talks to us, I'm just going to pray for him because this
is quite a challenging subject for lots of people, so let us pray.

Father God, I ask your Holy Spirit to anoint Andrew when he's talking this
morning. I pray for Your wisdom, and for Your Word. And I also pray, Jesus,
that Your love will shine through. But just be with him now and anoint him.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Andrew:] Amen. Thank you, Lindsey.

So, good morning again,
good to see you all. I
just thought it might be
worth mentioning, today is
the anniversary of our
first online service, last
March. Isn't it bizarre to
think that we've been
doing this for a whole
year, the whole year?
Amazing.



John Dunnett
(CPAS/EGGS)



Ian Paul
(Psephizo)



Andrew Goddard
(Fulcrum/CEEC)



Andrea Williams
(Christian Concern)

Inspiring people

Well, let me begin: I'm
going to talk on marriage.
We'll have our first slide
up. I just wanted to, in
some respects, give a kind

of a commendation to the different kinds of people who've been a particular help
to me during the last, say, five years. Some of you will know that I'm part of
something called Evangelical Group General Synod, EGGS for short. John Dunnett
has been a huge help in leading that while I've been involved in General Synod
for the last five years, likewise Ian Paul, who has a particular blog that deals
with subjects around marriage, sex and sexuality, he's been amazing. I would
really encourage you to Google Ian Paul and read some of the various articles

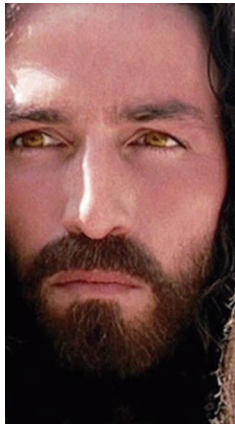
that he covers, and it's wide-range, as well as stuff to do with marriage and sexuality. Andrew Goddard has done some extraordinarily good in-depth theology, and some of you may have heard of an organisation called Christian Concern that Andrea Williams set up, about 5 or 6 or 7 years ago, and that was to do with being able to protect and defend Christians in the workplace, who were probably going to be struggling as society was changing its views on issues around sex, and sexuality in marriage. That's been really helpful to to have those folks kind of in the background while I've been doing the learning.

Today I wanted to focus in on Jesus Christ as our focus when we think about the subject of marriage in a kind of a no-brainer way: for Christians, what Jesus says is basically what we should believe: He is our Lord. That's why we call Him Lord Jesus Christ, so whatever Jesus' perspective was is the clearest indicator as to what kind of things we should understand about the subject of marriage.

And I would begin with this general point: even though we have a picture in our head of Jesus being gracious and welcoming and accepting, forgiving, on the subject of marriage, Jesus was stricter on marriage, sex and sexual thought, than every single group of His day, every single existing group, be it Sadducees, the Pharisees or the Essenes. The Essenes were a group that were kind-of out in the wilderness, possibly it's where John the Baptist is linked to. All of those groups had different perspectives on issues around marriage, and beyond all of them, Jesus graded up the requirements for people who were married. It's entertaining when you read that section in Matthew 19 as to the disciples' response when they realise they can't get out of marriage, and they were saying, "Well, it's better that we should be single," because Jesus raised the bar on the subject. He frequently talked about marriage. And what He was doing, He was addressing an issue of His day. One of the problems that had emerged in Israel at the time of Christ was the idea or the practice, rather, of easy divorce, where people had taken a line or two from the Old Testament, and the men were using it in an abusive way to get out of marriage whenever they felt like it. And depending on the different kind of rabbinic emphasis, some people would say, if your wife does this or this or this, you can get divorced. Some people were saying things like, "Well, you know, even if she burns the toast you can kind-of divorce," which was crazy. This was abusing, abusing women. And so the teachers of the day gathered around Jesus to challenge Him and see where He stood on the matter. And that is where He made this case for marriage being a lifelong commitment, except for very specific clauses. He really raised the bar and said marriage is so important: this was how it was done from the beginning.

Now some people may say, "Well that's all very well and good. How does that relate to our current conversation with regards to marriage that is different now, where we're talking about same-sex marriage. Jesus doesn't seem to say anything about that." Well, I think that's a misunderstanding of Jesus and what He was teaching. I think if Jesus in His day had stood up to a crowd and said, "Let me talk to you about homosexual marriage," every single person, every single Jew around Him would have scratched their heads and thought, "Why? Why do you want to talk about that?" Every single Jew, every single Israelite for centuries was already very clear on what the Old Testament Scriptures taught about that. And so His absence of saying anything about that, is because there was no need for Him to be raising the subject explicitly: that's a misunderstanding. In the same way, I mean, Jesus didn't say anything, for example, about incest. Now presumably, that doesn't mean we can infer that He was pro-incest simply because He doesn't mention it. Jesus focused on the matters of the day, and didn't need to make reference to things that were already a given at His time.

So let me have the next slide. This particular phrase we find in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount gives a really good window into where Jesus was coming from, in terms of His attitude to the existing Law of God. Matthew 5:17-18 says this: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until Heaven and Earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."



Matt.5:17-18

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."

Jesus the Jew, remember we need to see Him in His context, Jesus the Jew endorsed the whole content of the moral law, because He regarded that as being from His Father. The only laws that Jesus replaced or fulfilled, if you like, were the sacrificial and cultural laws. We know through His death and His resurrection, sacrifices no longer need to be performed and the cultural laws that had separated the Jewish from the other nations were overturned by Jesus, because He made the Gospel available to all nations. When we think of what He was endorsing long-term are the obvious things that all Jews of His day would look back to. If you were to read through the Levitical commands from Moses, there's a whole set of prohibitions that Jesus would have had in His mind when He's thinking about what you mustn't do to protect marriage. In Leviticus 18, it talks about parents and children shouldn't have sex, and this is all kind-of obvious, that siblings and half-siblings shouldn't or a grandparent and a grandchild or an uncle or a niece or a brother-in-law and a sister-in-law. All of these common understandings of those you should not have sexual relationships through, and including in those lists in Leviticus 18, it would include bestiality, which is sex with an animal, or homosexual sex. This is where Jesus would have drawn His understanding of what are prohibited because marriage is, as He said, from the beginning, male and female, and a marriage that should last until the end of your days.

Jesus in effect closed loopholes. He closed the loopholes beyond every single group in His day, beyond the Pharisees, beyond the Essenes. You may remember in the Sermon on the Mount, He goes even further. Matthew 5:27-28 says this:

27 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'

So no longer is Jesus simply saying you should stick with the woman that you're married to, He's saying you should not even be thinking about anybody else, you shouldn't be imagining lustful thoughts about somebody else. So the bar with Jesus goes higher than anyone else, He is stricter on issues around marriage than any other person.

Now why would He think like this? Why would Jesus have such a firm, clear idea of this? He always refers back. Every single time He refers, or is challenged, over the question of marriage, He refers back to the Genesis account. You will see in this why we've emphasised this in these previous talks: every single reference is back to the primary word of God, that defined and designed human beings in the beginning. Again let me read it to you. These are the words of Jesus. He says¹,

4 'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," 5 and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his

1 in Matthew 19:4-5

wife, and the two will become one flesh”? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’

His source material was Genesis. Jesus regarded these words as the proof text for any dispute around marriage. Why would this be so personally important to Jesus? Well, you will have heard from Phil last week, that Jesus knew Himself to be *the* bridegroom. He understood that the picture of marriage, the icon if you like of marriage, portrayed His own divine relationship with believers. That's what Paul says in Ephesians, that Christ and the church is the picture of true marriage: Jesus as the bridegroom. And so this would be hugely, hugely important to Jesus, He would see every single marriage as pointing to what He was going to do with those who would become His followers. So the only two arrangements that He endorsed were marriage, male and female, that's what He designates; and singleness, in this passage in Matthew 19, and He placed actually a strong emphasis on singleness. He talks about marriage, but He emphasises singleness.

You'll know later in Paul's letters that he too emphasises singleness. Why might that be important? I think, even in a series focusing on marriage, we need to emphasise the significance of single life. The two most obvious examples of holy and vibrant and radical single life are Jesus Himself and the apostle Paul. Jesus Himself embraced the life where he wasn't married, and He chose to do that not only primarily because He was Messiah but He was saying something about the importance of being devoted to God in a way where there is no other distraction, there is no other priority. That was Paul's argument in his lectures, he says, "You know, obviously it's better to marry than to burn with passion, but I would rather that you are like me," says Paul², "so that you can be devoted to the Kingdom." That's exactly the language that Jesus uses here at the end of this section. Let me read it to you again. Jesus says this³:

11 ... "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

So Jesus really rates people who choose a single life instead of a married life. And He says, "For the sake of the Kingdom." There's very little evidence to describe exactly what particular categories He was talking about. But people have argued that this could well include, for example, people who seem to be same-sex-attracted, but who nevertheless choose a single life, a celibate life for the sake of the Kingdom of God. I will give some examples later of this, but Jesus gives us two examples for living: for marriage, male and female; or for singleness, with an emphasis on singleness.

Let me have my next slide. We sometimes wonder how frequently Jesus would speak about questions around sex and marriage. Is this a peripheral matter or is this a really important matter to Him? There's a particular Greek word that occurs in the New Testament. 25 times it occurs and it's the word *porneia* [πορνεία]. Jesus refers to it four times in different gospels, but like I said, 25 times throughout the whole of the rest of the New Testament, across 11 separate books, the reference to *porneia* is made. And this word *porneia* means in English translation 'sexual immorality', and it's

Jesus refers to 'porneia' 4 times (and there are 25 references in the NT across 11 separate books) prohibiting ANY sex outside monogamous male/female marriage. This would have to include same-sex behaviour.

"Neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin." John 8:11



2 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verses 1 to 16

3 [NIVUK 1984]

basically a kind of a catch-all term to describe any sex which is outside of monogamous marriage. And inevitably that would have included any same-sex behaviour, but it included that whole list that I referred to earlier from Leviticus. Sexual immorality is any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage that is male and female.

Jesus emphasised this, but His practice really reveals a great deal of care. You will remember the story in John's gospel, John 8, where a woman caught in adultery is dragged in front of Jesus by a hostile crowd, to see if they could challenge Him over what should be done with this woman who was caught in adultery. It's always worth noting, they only brought the woman. What happened to the man? Why wasn't he there? Obviously there was a bit of a slant going on in terms of their emphasis in this crowd but they drag her in front of Jesus. And Jesus protects her. The first thing I would want to emphasise is this: even though Jesus was expressly clear on sexual immorality being serious and wrong, His intention from the outset is to protect people who are sexually immoral from hostility or any kind of violence. He guards her, He puts Himself in between her and this crowd, and creates a way so that she can be set free. And He doesn't condemn her. He creates that beautiful conversation with the crowd, "If anyone else has not sinned, you can cast the first stone," and they all gradually walk away, and He speaks to her. He speaks tenderly to her. And He says, "Has anyone condemned you?" and she says, "No." And He says this: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." There's two things we can learn from Jesus' attitude to people who are living a sexually immoral life. He doesn't condemn, but He does encourage them, or even command them, "Go and sin no more." So He protects. He prevents hostility to them. He doesn't condemn, but He does call them towards repentance. Why? Because He wants to be in right relationship with God. He doesn't endorse wrong behaviour, He protects the life so that it can be turned around.

So what could we confidently conclude that Jesus would say about same-sex marriage? Inevitably, if we've done this series, people will be thinking in their heads, "Well, what can we say? Did He say anything explicit? Does that mean it's an open question?" I think it is much clearer than that. We know for a fact that the Old Testament Scriptures spoke in prohibitive terms about same-sex behaviour. We also know that the people of Jesus' day, the Jews around Him, believed exactly the same. That was the same position as the Old Testament. We know that Jesus Himself was stricter on sex and marriage than any other group of His day, so He was moving towards strictness, rather than towards liberty. And finally, you would think the people who become the chief witnesses of Jesus and the people who give His teaching later on, the apostles, would reflect Christ's own position. What did they say? Every single reference to same-sex behaviour in the New Testament is regarded as wrong. They all described *porneia*, sexual immorality and explicitly same-sex relationships, as not the will of God. This is what you would call a univocal message from the Bible. It says one thing all the way through, from the old to the time of Jesus, and after Jesus, clear, plain teaching. What are the odds of Jesus being out of sync with the Old Testament, out of sync with the teaching of His day, out of sync with even His followers and having this kind of unique space where, even though He didn't mention it to anybody, He was actually pro same-sex marriage? That is beyond absurd and is ridiculous, especially when Jesus Himself had a stricter view than everybody else. So I can happily conclude, I can happily conclude that the position of Jesus on marriage is the traditional one, that God made us male and female, and put us in a marriage covenant to live our lives to the end of our lives, committed.

Now for those of you who do need to spend more time studying this and examining this, once again Denise has kindly issued the marriage documents that I put together for the church. Can I really encourage you, read them and study them. There's a particular focus in on those three passages in the New Testament, Romans 1:18-32, or 1 Corinthians 6:9, or 1 Timothy 1:9-10. It really goes into

some depth. I would also recommend to you one of the Grove booklets that covers this subject. Ian Paul, who I mentioned at the beginning of the talk, has got a really brilliant Grove booklet looking at same-sex unions. It's a booklet⁴ that you can order from grovebooks.co.uk. It's only £3.95, and it gives a really clear understanding of what the New Testament teaches about same-sex unions.

I need to say this: these texts mean what they say. They do say that homosexual or gay sex is contrary to the will of God. I do need to say this: this does not mean that a person who is orientated towards their own sex is more wicked than I, because we all have desires and actions that are wrong. My inclination to be greedy or angry, and a multitude of other things, are equally wrong. This has nothing to do with condemning; this is simply describing what Jesus and the New Testament would have believed, and what they teach.

Is there any hope for those people who may struggle with such a message, so people who may hear this and feel like, "Well, what can I do?" Can I have my next slide. One of the things that has been inspirational for me over the last five years is discovering a group of people who were connected to a particular website called Living Out: livingout.org And these guys are people who I would regard as some of my most significant



Sam Allberry
(Pastor/Speaker)



Ed Shaw
Emmanuel, Bristol
(Pastor)



Sean Doherty
Trinity College
(Principal)
- now married to
his wife

LivingOut.org

heroes of the day, I think of people like Sam Allberry, Ed Shaw, Sean Doherty, who are people who are leaders in the Church. These are people of significant influence, and they are self-confessed same-sex-attracted celibate Christians [Andrew corrected afterwards: "In fact Sean Doherty WAS same sex attracted and is now married (to his wife)"]. These are people who have made the decision that because of their orientation, they know that they can't enter into marriage, and they believe what the Bible says, that they need to remain single. I've listened to Ed Shaw over a number of years: I've had conversations with him at General Synod. Just the last week or two, Sean Doherty was doing a Zoom seminar for some local clergy in the area and he's brilliant, he's the principal of my own theological college. So people who are same-sex-attracted are possibly some of the most inspirational and great examples to me of people being devout. They are examples that show single celibate life is actually a tremendous way of honouring God with the whole of your life, perhaps in a way that we who are married, can't. So I would say to you that there is no closed door here, to people who are same-sex-attracted. The message of the Kingdom is to call everybody into a life of clear devotion to Jesus Christ and, like Him, a single life which can be a full life, and in the context of a good church community, an included place of belonging, a place of love and welcome. Marriage is not the only place where intimacy can happen.

So I wanted to kind-of finish there and say, everything I have studied, everything I have learned, shows me that Jesus Christ would hold the same view of the Old Testament, the New Testament writers, and the things He said raised the bar, rather than made things more lax and more open.

Lindsey's thoughts on the subject

I'm just going to ask Lindsey to join us now. And I just wanted to finish this talk really by explaining that we have had to kind of like battle with this, over the years. One of the things that many people won't really understand is, you don't do this in a kind-of an empty kind of academic stance, you do this in the real world. And it has been costly, it has been costly for Lindsey and I to

4 Several booklets found at <https://grovebooks.co.uk/search?q=same+sex>

wrestle with this. For example, it's been difficult to wrestle with this, when your children don't necessarily agree with your position on this. I don't know how you would say this has been for you, Lindsey?

[Lindsey:]

I think this has been going on for a few years, and, you know, it's very, very hard as a mother, I'm by nature a very pastoral person. I've found part of the time I've wanted to run away from this, it's an issue, because it's really difficult and it's contentious, and not wanting to come across as some sort of bigoted person; and you know, people, sometimes the children say, "Well that's like racism if you don't agree with that, and it's being unkind," and I've really struggled with that, and I know a lot of Christians struggle with this, because we're not nasty people. Most of us, you know, especially at St John's, we're extremely kind, we're compassionate, we're caring, and I've had to really work with God on this through the years. It's painful when your children have really struggled and just thought, you know, this is terrible. And I've had to... And it's made me either do two things: one, walk away from God, if I'm honest, or actually walk with God. And I think He's taken me through this process with Him, and to trust Him through it. And God isn't a bad God, and He doesn't hate. Can I just say He does not hate people who are gay, He does not. The two verses that came to mind when I was thinking about this from God was Isaiah 42 verse 3 where it says,

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out.

And the other one was Matthew 11 verse 28:

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'

So God doesn't break people who are struggling. If you're someone who's struggling at home or you found these feelings of same-sex attraction, not to hide them, not to bury them, that's not God's intention, He doesn't want anyone to hide. He loves everybody and wants them to come to Him. And I would even say as a married person, I want to make it really clear: being married is not always easy. It can look like, "Oh, it's not fair, you're married," but there are times that marriage is really tough. And for any of you are married, it's really tough and there are times you think "Gosh, it'd be easier not to be married," or there may be times you fancy other people, you know, monogamy, you're not able to be with anybody else. It's tough. And the only thing I can say is what I found is, none of this: you cannot live God's way in your own strength, and actually all of us should say like the disciples, "How the heck do we do this? This is impossible!" And that's the right response: it's impossible, because it's only possible with God, the Holy Spirit, we can't live this life.

And my other thought is this: if people are not Christians, then, you know, then we have love and respect for people outside of the Christian faith and we share Jesus, and that my trust is that Jesus's way is the best way for all of us, so that's just my thought.

Prayerful Reflection

[Andrew:] That's really helpful. I just wonder if perhaps we can conclude this talk and sharing with some prayers, and then we'll hand over to Mary and Kal in a moment. So let's pray first.

Father God, we thank You for revealing the will of Jesus to us in Scripture. We thank You, Holy Spirit, for revealing His clear, unequivocal view of what marriage is. And we thank You, Lord, for the New Testament texts that give us even more details of what marriage isn't.

But we come to You, Lord, and we ask for Your grace to be strong and clear on what your Bible teaches, but also to be pastoral and compassionate to those who struggle and don't see a way forward because of orientation. We pray, Lord, that we can do both of these things well, that we can be

faithful to the Word of God, and compassionate to people who need help with sex and sexuality.

We pray, Lord, that You'd give us wisdom as a church to know how to do both of these things well, so that we can care, whilst holding the truth before people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[Lindsey:]

I just want to pray, Lord, just one thing that I was thinking. I pray that we would be a church community where we feel safe to express the difficulties that we're going through, that we don't hide from each other, or from You. Because actually, that's the worst thing we can do, that nobody feels condemned by saying they're struggling, and that it's in those spaces that we can come and be, I don't know, that intimacy with each other in the body of Christ, that we can share with each other, and we can be with each other. I just pray it's a safe space for people to be open with each other. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Andrew:] So on that final note, thank you for that, Lindsey, on that final note if anyone does want to talk further about these issues, around marriage, orientation, sex, sexuality; as a PCC we are already working on this subject, we've been working on some possible statements and some wording, and then we'll work on some implications to do with how we express this as a local church. But in the meantime, if anybody wants to talk, please do regard this as a safe space, there is no condemnation. There's only a desire to help.

Intercessions

So I'm now going to hand over to Mary and Kal, and they can lead us in some intercessions. Thank you guys.

[Kal:] That's an awful lot to take in from what Andrew and Lindsey have said. Let's spend just a few seconds reflecting on what we've heard.

Heavenly Father, thank You that You always welcome us when we come with sincerity and honesty. We acknowledge the subject of marriage is difficult for us in many ways. The views of society have changed tremendously in recent times, and the church has gained reputation as being homophobic, particularly by the younger generation. This makes us feel uncomfortable. As we carefully and prayerfully consider what Your Word says, give us the courage to come to our conclusions with integrity, but also an attitude of love for all people, as You have created them. Give us the grace to live in love with those we may not fully agree with. We ask this in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, who died for the sins of the world.
Amen.

[Mary:] Father God, we lift to You all those who are widowed, divorced, single, unhappily married. We pray that You would strengthen and comfort each one. We pray for the encouragement of good friendships, and the healing of hurts, the emotional wounds and of rejection. We pray for Your Holy Spirit's abiding presence, and for Your restorative touch. In Jesus' name.
Amen.

And the Mothers' Union prayer for marriage: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who gave marriage to be a source of blessing to humanity, we thank You for the joys of family life. Pour upon us Your Holy Spirit, that we may truly love and serve You. Bless all who are married and every parent and child. May we know Your presence and peace in our homes. Fill them with Your love and use them for Your glory. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Following the killing of Sarah Everett, as she was walking home, and the eight people shot in three spas in Atlanta, Georgia, we pray a prayer for

justice and mercy, against hatred and violence. We pray for a change in our society, for fairness and equality to grow. We repent of violence and hate, misogyny and racism.

Lord incarnate, fountain of mercy and justice, in a world of inequality and iniquity and pain, may our actions be our prayer. We cry out for shalom, fullness of life for all. Let the Spirit of truth guide us, let the Spirit of love free us. Give us the compassion, courage and resolve to become the light we seek, that many may see life and their dignity restored. Inspire us to embody a world without injustice and prejudice, form us into channels of Your love and peace.

Let the river of justice and mercy flood our imperfect world, quenching the thirst of parched souls and lands.

Abide in us, O Liberator, that we become the Word that so that the world may have life, life in all its abundance. Amen.

[Kal:] We thank God for the vaccine rollout and the fact that 50% of the population have been vaccinated with the first jab. And yet the pandemic still affects us. And so we pray. Let us pray to God, who alone makes us dwell in safety, for all who are affected by coronavirus through illness or isolation or anxiety, that they may find relief and recovery.

Lord, hear us, **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For those who are guiding our nation at this time, and shaping national policies, that they may make wise decisions.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers, that through their skill and insights, many will be restored to health.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the vulnerable and the fearful, for the gravely ill and the dying, that they may know Your comfort and peace.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray, to the mercy and protection of God. Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Conclusion and Blessing

[Lindsey:] Thank you, Mary and Kal. They were lovely prayers. We're going to just end with the blessing now, and I've taken this blessing from an Australian Anglican church. And then we're going to have our final song, but, like Andrew said before, if there's anything that you feel you want to talk about, do get in touch, and talk to somebody. Okay.

Lord God, we rejoice in Your greatness and power,
Your gentleness and love, Your mercy and justice.
Enable us by Your Spirit to honour You in our thoughts and words and actions,
and to serve You in every aspect of our lives.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

3rd Song: Light of the World (Here I am to Worship)

1. Light of the world,
You stepped down into darkness,
Opened my eyes, let me see;
Beauty that made this heart adore You,
Hope of a life spent with You.

Chorus:
Here I am to worship,
Here I am to bow down,
Here I am to say that You're my God.
You're altogether lovely,
All together worthy,
All together wonderful to me.

2. King of all days,
Oh so highly exalted,
Glorious in heaven above.
Humbly You came to the earth You created,
All for love's sake became poor.

Chorus

Bridge:

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.

Repeat Bridge

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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