

Genesis 2:4-25 Sermon Two

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Genesis 2 presents a portrait of a perfect, idyllic world, functioning as the world was meant to function, with God's people, in God's place, under God's rule. It was a beautiful world, a world where everything worked. To put it another way, Genesis 2 is the bright backdrop against which the darkness of Genesis 3 is revealed for what it truly is.

In our last study of Genesis 2, we focused on Genesis 2:4-17, and determined that the main idea of these verses is that from the very beginning, it was the Creator's desire, in his great generosity and kindness, to live in relationship with people who are in his image, and in the midst of a beautiful and abundant world created for his, and their, enjoyment.

In this study, we will address Genesis 2:18-25. These verses continue Moses' description of the perfect world as God's kingdom, where everything is as it should be, including human relationships, particularly male and female relationships in the context of marriage. We will concentrate on three main ideas: 1) marriage as a symbol of God's generous provision; 2) marriage as part of God's creational pattern; and 3) marriage as a picture of the future toward which God is taking his covenant people.

A Symbol of God's Generous Provision

Marriage, like so many other aspects of creation in the very beginning, clearly illustrates God's goodness and generosity. In Genesis 2:4-17, we saw a number of things that display the graciousness of our God. For example, we saw how his generosity appears in the simple fact that we exist at all. We saw his kindness in the fact that we share in God's image. We saw it in the fact that he so abundantly provided for the man in the garden; and in the fact that God made the world beautiful, not just functional; and in the fact that God provided meaningful work. And we even saw his goodness in the fact that God provided a boundary — something that was off-limits — for the good of his creatures, one that reminded them that there was a God and it was not them. All of these things illustrated God's great generosity and abundant kindness. And in Genesis 2:18-

25, we see a further illustration of how giving and kind God has been toward his creation: he provides a partner, a companion, a helper for the man he has created.

But let's step back for a moment, to think about Adam's situation before the creation of the woman. I mean, here is Adam, in a perfect world, in a perfect relationship with his Creator — just Adam and God. And guess what: it's not good enough. And we know it's not good enough because God says so himself. After a succession of pronouncements that the various things God has created are "good," we arrive at this passage where we are told, for the first time, that something was *not* good. How could Adam, as a sinless creature in an un-fallen world, have God and still be in a situation that was "not good"? Is God not enough for Adam?

Well, of course, God is enough. He's more than enough. And, I think, that is precisely the issue here. You see, God understands this creature he has made. He understands that there is a vast difference between himself and Adam who, although he bears God's image, is still more *unlike* God than he is *like* God. In other words: the differences far outnumber the resemblances. God has always existed in fellowship as a Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), and is himself a relational being. And in the same way, he created this man as a relational being, with a built-in need to connect with other creatures who were also finite, bounded by space and time. Things were "not good" simply because until the man has a partner, God isn't finished. His relational creature needs a relational partner who understands what it is like to be a creature, a child of God and not God himself.

And so, God's two-stage creation of the man and the woman highlights the importance of both the man and the woman together because it underscores the truth that the man on his own is not enough. This is one of the functions of the "parade of beasts." In addition to being the first act by which the man began fulfilling his God-given mandate to manage the creation, this act also underlined the reality that all of God's other creatures had companions — counterparts — that were both like them and yet different, not just sexually, but functionally. All of them except the man, that is. And so, as the man observed and named the various beasts, the unsuitability of having any of them as companions would have been driven home, and the need for a partner that was like him become painfully obvious.

With that point now established, God finally fashions a woman from Adam's own body — from his own side — thus making it clear that she is of the same "stuff" as him, therefore that she is not inferior to him in any way. Even further, the fact that something is taken *from him* in order to make her means that he now has a "deficit" within himself; something is missing. And this deficit will only be erased if and when Adam is reunited with this woman.

In the closing dialog of *Jerry Maguire*, the title character attempts to win back his estranged wife with these words: "You complete me." In becoming united to the woman, Adam's deficit is restored. She completes him, and he and she *together* are a whole. They are, truly "one flesh." And all of this is, again, one more sign of God's wise and good provision for his creatures, knowing their frame, understanding their need, desiring their joy, and then doing something about it.

And so God fashions this woman and brings her to the man, who immediately responds with, "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." Now, in your English translation, you may notice that the words are type set differently on the page. That is the translator's way of telling you that in Hebrew, these lines are poetry.

In other words (and to my wife's great delight no doubt), what we have here is something like the first "musical," with Adam waxing lyrical when the woman is first brought to him. Now, I'm not sure that this means that men are required to burst into song whenever their wives enter the room, but what surely is being conveyed here is that there is something very right about the man's delight and gratitude at God's gracious provision of a helper and companion.

Part of God's Creational Pattern

In previous studies, we saw how the fact that humankind bears God's image implies many things. But we also saw that in the context of the Genesis account, and in the light of Genesis 1:28, it means especially that both the man and the woman were to be fruitful and multiply, and to exercise dominion over God's creation. And, this task of filling the earth with God's images further illustrates why it was "not good" for the man to be alone, why it was so necessary for him to have a companion: it was part of the creational pattern and purpose. Without both a man and a woman, there could be no multiplication of God's image; there could be no "little images," if you will.

And so, it is certainly right to say that part of the creational pattern for human relationships included, and still includes procreation, bringing new life into the world. And yet, as important as that is, the context of Genesis 2:18-25 indicates that procreation is an aspect of *companionship and help*, and not a goal in and of itself.

And this is important to keep in mind, since in the history of the church, a misunderstanding of the priority of companionship and having a helpmeet has led, at times, to the development of a number of unhelpful perspectives on marriage. For example, there have been times in history where the relational aspect of marriage has been greatly ignored, reducing its significance to the provision of

offspring and the performance of thankless but necessary labor. At other times the procreative function has been elevated to unhelpful and illegitimate heights, leaving childless people to wonder if they stand in a diminished position, which they clearly do not. These and many other problems can arise when we forget Scripture's emphasis on *companionship* in marriage.

Nevertheless, it is still true that we see in these verses the necessity of woman's creation so that, together with the man, they can fulfill the important procreative function with regard to marriage. That is certainly part of the creational pattern.

Another part of that pattern, seen in these verses, involves the introduction of roles and distinctions between men and women. On the one hand, the equality of the man and the woman is made very clear in this passage in a number of ways. The woman is made out of the man, not from some other substance but from his flesh. She is of the same "stuff" that he is. Further, in the scheme of things, it will be the woman who, by God's design, is the vehicle for bringing new human life into the world — out of her body, out of her womb. And, further, there may be some significance to the fact that the woman is taken from the man's *side*, and not from some other part of him such as his head or feet.

And there are other things that also point to her co-equal standing before God. In Hebrew, the word for man is *'ish* and the word for the woman is *'ishshah*, which sounds the same but comes from a different root word, one that means "soft." Again, you see: similar, and yet different. I think that this is no accident. Likewise, there is the declaration of the man in Genesis 2:23 that the woman is flesh of his flesh and bone of his bones, the implication that she completes him. Finally, there is the clear statement in Genesis 1:27 that *both* the man *and* the woman were created in the image of God. So, again, the man and woman are equal in substance and worth and significance before their Creator.

And yet, there are differences between them. For starters, besides the obvious physical differences — which really ought to be the first clue — there is the fact that the man was made first and the woman was made second. Now, if it were not for Scripture's own treatment of this fact, we might not be inclined on our own to attribute any great significance to this. However, the reality is that Adam's being created first meant that certain roles and responsibilities fell to him as the "firstborn," and that other roles and responsibilities fell to the woman who came afterward. We know this is the case because the Bible's own infallible commentary on Genesis 2 (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13) shows that the *order* of their creation was significant.

There is also the reality that, after the woman's creation, she is brought to the man, who proceeds to name her. Now, to be sure, the woman is not just another creature being brought to him. That is clear in the passage. Still, just as the man expressed his authority through the naming of the creatures, there is an

element of authority expressed in the fact that he also names his wife (as he does again after the Fall).

We may also see an implication of role differences in the fact that, as John Piper points out, the instructions about the forbidden tree were given to Adam before the woman was created. And yet, in Genesis 3, the woman clearly is aware of these instructions. We have no record of her being given the instructions. So, how has she come to know them? The most reasonable conclusion is that her husband has taken responsibility for letting her know the rules for life in the garden.

In addition to this, the man's unique role and responsibility are further demonstrated by two facts: Firstly, after the man and woman sin, God comes looking for the man, not the woman, even though she ate first and was tempted first. Why? Arguably because Adam is the head of their relationship and, although both are guilty, it falls to Adam to be confronted first.

Secondly, the serpent — whose desire was to overthrow God's pattern and purpose — initially approached the woman. This violated God's design because instead of ruling over the creatures, the woman (and later the man) was submitting to one of them. But the serpent also seems to have challenged God's design by approaching the couple through the woman, not through the man, for the purpose of introducing confusion into their relationship.

Finally, as we have already seen, other parts of the Bible conclude that there are role differences between men and women, and that these differences are grounded in the creation pattern of Genesis 2 (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:8; 1 Tim. 2:13; and esp. Eph. 5:22-33). But once again, having said all these things, it is important to remember that we have to see them all within the larger context of what God is doing.

From the very beginning of Genesis, what have we seen? We have seen a God who is all-powerful and all-wise and loving and kind and generous and giving. And the creation of male and female relationships, with their similarities and differences, simply must be seen within that context as a further expression of God's goodness and kindness. Therefore, no matter how counter-cultural it may seem, we need to see the distinctions between men and women as a good thing, as a right thing, as a helpful thing. To be sure, the sinfulness of our own flesh and the fallenness of our world sometimes make this hard to see and to value. And the patterns of relating between men and women can become quite twisted and disfigured and ugly and hateful in our world. But the problem is not God's pattern; it is sin and its effects which are the problem. And we only make things worse when we reject or doubt God's pattern and God's wisdom. We only invite further hurt and pain and hardship.

Well, in addition to seeing the procreative purpose, and the male and female role/relational pattern, we also see a creational pattern here in terms of human sexuality, that is, what constitutes true union and legitimate oneness. Simply put, when you look at the movement and momentum of the creation up to this point, when you see what God has been doing, why he has been doing it, and where he is taking this whole thing, it is painfully obvious that the only pattern of human sexuality that fits with God's plans and purposes for humanity is heterosexuality. Woman was taken out of man, so that woman completes man; men do not complete men, and women do not complete women. Similarly, men cannot multiply with men, and women cannot multiply with women. You simply cannot look at this account and this developing plot line and conclude that male-male or female-female relationships fit into this picture. They clearly do not. They are out of step with what God is doing.

Saying these things is not about homophobia. There is no irrational fear or paranoia behind what I am saying, no loss of love or lack of compassion or understanding. Nor can this be characterized as some sort of "hate crime," as if these things are said to incite violence and the unjust persecution of people who believe differently on these matters. Nor is this even about the hypothetical question of whether two men or two women could really love each other or be faithful to each other.

Very often these sorts of ideas are batted about as if they were the main issue. But they are not the main issue; they are *emphatically* not the point. The issue is not whether two men or two women could be as faithful to each other as a man and a woman. The issue is whether two men or two women could form some sort of union and still be faithful to the designs and purposes for which God created this world and the human race. Again, the issue is not faithfulness to each other; it is faithfulness to the Creator.

A Picture of the Future toward which God is Taking his Covenant People

Now, like many things in Scripture, this particular function of marriage was not as clear to the people in Moses' day as it is to us. For God's people back then, the significance of these verses was tied more to the fact that they affirmed the ongoing necessity and validity and dignity of this institution for God's people.

They lived in the midst of a number of different pagan cultures. And they were about to enter into a land with a great variety of people who had all sorts of strange ideas about men and women, and about how they ought to relate, and about what was and was not legitimate in terms of sexuality. In the face of that sort of social/cultural minefield, they were reminded through the creation account of how and why men and women were created. Further, they were reminded of how both the man and the woman bore the image of God, of the role that companionship played in their relationship, of their mandate to multiply and to

exercise dominion together and, most significantly, of how they completed one another in a one-flesh relationship.

All of these things would have been vitally important for God's people to understand as they entered into their new home. And those things alone, apart from any future significance of marriage, were certainly valuable enough for the people in Moses' day.

However, as the Old Testament unfolds, you see that the institution of marriage, as important as it already is, begins to take on an even deeper meaning. God has more purposes in mind for marriage than just companionship, or procreation, or social stability. In addition to all of that, with this institution he is providing a picture of the relationship between himself and his people.

We see this sort of language in Isaiah 54, where God is the "husband" and Israel is his "bride." We see the same sort of language about Israel as a bride in Jeremiah 2, and again in Jeremiah 31 where God is the "husband". These same sorts of themes are behind Ezekiel 23 and Hosea 1-3, where Israel is depicted as an *unfaithful* bride who nevertheless the Lord loves.

In the New Testament we see this very same language picked up in a number of places where it is tied explicitly to the relationship between Christ and the church. For example, in Ephesians 5:22-27, Paul wrote these words:

Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

And then, in Ephesians 5:31-32, Paul quoted from Genesis 2 and added his own commentary:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Now, of course, there is a great deal in that passage that we're not going to address. But what I don't want you to miss is the fact that Paul says that marriage is a mystery, and a profound mystery at that, and that its ultimate reference is to serve as a metaphor, an analogy of the relationship between Christ and his church. When you begin to understand this purpose for marriage,

that it points beyond itself to this thing that God is doing with the church, you begin to see why it is so important that we not only keep this institution, but that we keep it as it is and preserve it as it is.

A writer named Gage, in trying to describe this deeper meaning and purpose of marriage, does so by showing the parallels between Adam and Jesus. He points out that the first Adam was innocent, was made to sleep, and was then “wounded” (something was taken from him) so that his bride might be formed. In a parallel fashion, Christ, the last Adam, came as an innocent, had his own side wounded, and entered into the “sleep” of death, all for the purpose of gaining a bride — the church — and rendering her clean and pure, that she might be made acceptable for him.

And the fact that the bride has to be made acceptable recalls the language and ministry of the prophet Hosea. In order to illustrate the idolatry and spiritual adultery and unfaithfulness of God’s people Israel, Hosea deliberately took to himself an unfaithful woman — a whore — and made her his wife. And he loved her with a love that was faithful, even when she was faithless.

That picture of an unfaithful, promiscuous, tramp of a woman — what is that? It’s you. It’s us, the church. We might prance around thinking that we are some sort of great catch; some great prize; some beautiful, innocent, virginal bride. But are we any different from the people of Israel? Are our hearts any less prone to wander, to worship at the feet of other so-called gods, to lust after them and their empty promises? Are we any different?

Notice again Paul’s language in Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” And why does he have to give himself up for her?

That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:26-27).

Christ has to give up himself for us because we are like the unfaithful tramp that Hosea loved and kept loving. We are the unfaithful, adulterous bride of our husband Christ. And we, as Paul describes in Ephesians, do not make ourselves presentable to Christ; he is the one who has to make us presentable, because we cannot do it. He labors to clean us up, to make us pure, to clothe us in new garments that are without spot or wrinkle. That’s what the cross was about. That’s what your sanctification *is* about.

And if you do not see this about yourself — that you were not this great prized catch but rather this unfaithful tramp upon whom God has nevertheless set his love — then you do not yet understand your own heart. Until you do see

this, you will not begin to comprehend how great is God's love and mercy, and how great his love and mercy continues to be toward you.

Until you admit that your sin and your continuing rebellion are ongoing spiritual adultery, you will not understand how amazingly patient and kind God has been toward you. You will not see him as the faithful husband who waits at the door, watching as you return home from your latest tryst, who looks you in the face as you straggle through the door, stares you in the eye knowing who you are and where you have been and what you have done, and says without an ounce of guile or deceit that he loves you. He still loves you, and forgives you, and wants you, exclusively for himself. Until you see that reality, you do not understand yourself or your sin.

But when you do begin to see these things, when you do begin to understand this reality, you will see the transforming power of that kind of love — this undeserved mercy and forgiveness that can shatter the hardest of hearts, breaking you and amazing you. And there, under the constant gaze of your faithful husband, you will be loved out of your unfaithfulness, staggered and stunned, humbled and smitten, and forever changed by his transforming grace.