

The Beginning of Marriage

Matthew 19:1-12, Part 1

25 July 2021 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: How did the Creator make marriage to work in the beginning?

Big Idea: In marriage, God brings together one man and one woman for life.

Introduction

Some governments consider what you're about to hear too dangerous to be talked about.

And I'm not just talking about totalitarian regimes, either.

I'm talking about governments in Western democracies.

My understanding is that, from February 2022 in the State of Victoria, Australia, what I'm about to say will be allowed to be said in a sermon.

But if you or I said the same things to another individual, we could be in big trouble.

Penalties under the Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition bill include up to ten years' gaol time or \$10,000 for individuals and up to \$50,000 for organisations.

That's the best introduction I could think of, the best motivation I could think of, for anyone to listen today... governments don't want you to!

Outline

We're coming back to Matthew's gospel today.

By my reckoning, we've been studying Matthew over the last eight years and we've finally got to the beginning of chapter nineteen.

Don't worry, only another ten chapters and who knows how many years to go!

Admittedly, we are only covering it in small chunks.

As COVID hit, we finished a section in the gospel that ended in chapter eighteen with the kingdom parable about the unforgiving servant.

We're starting a new section at the start of chapter nineteen.

You might remember that Matthew's gospel can be divided up into sections of story and sections of speech.

You get story, followed by speech, followed by story, followed by speech and so on.

The sections of speech all end in the same way.¹

Introduction 1:1-2:23

Story 3:1-4:25

Speech 5:1-7:29

Story	8:1-9:38
Speech	10:1-11:1
Story	11:2-12:50
Speech	13:1-52
Story	13:53-17:27
Speech	18:1-35
Story	19:1-22:46
Speech	23:1-25:46

Conclusion 26:1-28:20

Jesus had just finished saying stuff, we're told in verse one, when he left the region of Galilee and headed into the area of Judea.

The reason this matters is that it's a turning point, a new beginning in Matthew's gospel.

Up until this point, all of Jesus' ministry was in Galilee – from chapters four through to eighteen.

That's where he performed miracles and healed all kinds of people.

Jesus was kind of like a pin-ball there for a while, zipping all around Lake Galilee.

But now he's got places to go, things to do and people to see.

Jesus won't return to Galilee until after he's risen from the dead.

He'll come back to Galilee to give his disciples the final and great commission that we know so well.

This section is all about Jesus starting off towards Jerusalem and the cross which awaits him.

From this point forward, everything will start to point to that day that Jesus will pay the penalty that our sin deserves.

His ministry's all headed to the day when the perfect and innocent Son of God will be condemned to death.

{DP} That's the theme of these section – *Towards the Cross*.

I've got to admit, that I come to this section with some trepidation, knowing that the topic of marriage and divorce is so important and significant to our everyday lives.

Regardless of our past or current circumstances, these words impact us all.

And here's the beauty and the pain of taking ALL of God's word seriously and preaching through even the difficult passages.

Today's also more of a teaching session than a sermon, but it will hopefully lay some important foundations.

That said, I've cut myself and you some slack this morning because we're going to be looking at this passage twice.

Today's part one.

In part one, we're going to be thinking about the beginning of marriage.

Then next week, in part two, we'll be looking at what Jesus has to say about the end of marriage.

And we're going to see that **in marriage, God brings together one man and one woman for life.**

We're going to look at three different points, all of them about questions.

- A Question about Divorce
- A Question of Gender
- A Question of Marriage

A Question about Divorce

Some Pharisees approach Jesus.

Could it be that they're trying to find out who Jesus is?

No, they've already had lots of opportunity to see and investigate his ministry.

The Pharisees have made their minds up about Jesus at this point and decided that at best he's a dangerous fraud.

But large crowds are still following Jesus.

The crowds love him because he's continuing to heal them.

So the Pharisees are looking for an opportunity to discredit Jesus.

Hence the question they ask, a question that's carefully calculated to divide.

The legitimacy of marriage and divorce was perhaps even more of a loaded topic at the time of Jesus than it is today.

Their question isn't really about WHETHER you could get divorced or not.

They took that as a given on the basis of Deuteronomy 24, where Moses gives instructions about how a divorce should be conducted.

The question they ask is about whether a husband could divorce his wife for ANY AND EVERY REASON.

In other words, are there any limits at all on a husband divorcing his wife?

This question's a trap designed to catch Jesus out and it goes like this:

Matthew 19:3 NIV11 They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

There were lots of different schools of thought about divorce and the legitimate reasons for it.

There was a rabbi named Shammai who said that someone could divorce for some very particular reasons, particularly adultery.

Shammai's ideas were going out of fashion by the time of Jesus though, and the Rabbi Hillel's ideas were in vogue.

He said that a husband could divorce his wife for just about any reason.

And then a little bit later, there was another Rabbi who said that a man could divorce if he found someone younger and better looking to marry.

As far as tests designed to trip someone up, this was a good one because the people who held to each of these views held them tightly.

A bit like how people now hold tightly to whether you should get vaccinated or not.

And – just like the vaccine question – when Jesus answers the question, whatever comes out is almost guaranteed to offend someone.

And with any luck, he might even get himself into some serious trouble.

Back in chapter fourteen, we read about how Herod had married his brother Philip's wife.

John the Baptist lost his head over this because he refused to endorse their relationship.

I bet the Pharisees hoped the same thing would happen to Jesus.

Jesus is the absolute master of giving disarming answers to tough questions though.

His answers are so powerful because he responds with Scripture.

It worked when he was tested by Satan in the wilderness.

Most importantly, he takes them back to the Old Testament Scriptures and what they have to say about this question.

In Jewish thinking, the older the source, the more the answer was trusted.

An old quote carries much more weight than a newer one.

The Pharisees were asking about what Moses said in Deuteronomy.

Jesus goes one step further by asking them if they remember what Genesis says about marriage in the very beginning.

A Question of Gender

In the first part of Jesus' response, he asks the Pharisees if they remember how God created gender.

Have a look with me at verse four:

Matthew 19:4 NIV11 ⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'"

Here's Jesus explaining that when God created human beings, he created them with two categories: male and female.

Jesus is quoting from the very first chapter of the Bible.

It might help to put a finger in Matthew and turn back to the start of the Bible with me, back to the first chapter of Genesis.

We're going to fact check Jesus by having a look at verses 26 and 27:

Genesis 1:26–27 NIV11 ²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Yep, the Pharisee couldn't deny – and neither can we – that Jesus is right.

The last phase of God's creative work before he rested was the making of human beings.

God had already made all kinds of creatures – animals that fly and animals that swim, verse 21.

All kinds of animals to live on the ground – livestock and wild animals (1:24), as well as animals to creep along the ground.

Then God creates humankind.

Just like the winged and sea creatures in verse 22, God calls men and women to be fruitful and increase.

But human beings are also profoundly different in two important ways.

Firstly, they're given the role of ruling over all the rest of the creation that God had made, verse 26.

What separates us from other living creatures isn't just 1% of our genetic code or a couple of evolutionary steps.

According to the Bible, what makes us different is the task God's given us to rule over the rest of creation.

God's given us the particular role of caring for and looking after his world.

We weren't given this task to do however we want though, but to rule God's world under him, submitting to his authority.

The second thing that separates us from other living creatures is that we're made in the image of God.

Exactly what this means is tantalisingly vague since the text doesn't clearly explain it.

I take it to mean that being made in the image and likeness of God means that we're like him without being exactly the same as him.

What IS clear is that this makes humans unique amongst everything God created.

It's also clear that ALL human beings have a unique value, worth and dignity because we bear God's image.

All of that's there in Genesis one, but the thing that Jesus really focuses on is that in the beginning, God made human beings male and female.

In one sense, that's not all that profound because we know that God made all kinds of animals male and female.

Although, of course, God didn't NEED to do it that way.

I imagine that God could've created human beings to all be the same, if he wanted to.

And presumably he could've created several genders, but he didn't.

God created just two genders – male and female.

One of the reasons we need two genders is that we can't fulfil our mandate to increase and fill without another human being who's different from us.

Even with all the technologies and techniques we have, and regardless of the fact that people might try and delude themselves otherwise, we need both male and female to reproduce.

Of course, hydra and bacteria can reproduce all on their own, but God's created human beings so that we can't.

But God's very deliberate creation of male and female is about more than just biology and reproduction.

It's important to see – have another look at verse 27 – that although male and female are different, both are made in the image of God.

Male and female are distinct, but united by the fact that they're both made in the image of God.

One isn't inferior to the other.

I understand this's unique it the Ancient Near East to believe that both genders carry the image of God, instead of a wife just being under her husband.

That's how things were in the beginning, but that's not how things are after the fall.

This side of the events of Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the world, this beautiful picture has been marred.

I would and am arguing that the reality for us now is that gender is non-binary.

There are people who're born without a 23rd pair of chromosomes because they have a different number of chromosomes.

Or they're physically born with male and female genitalia at the same time.

I understand that it's not particularly common, but it is a reality.

But it wasn't that way in the beginning, as Jesus points us back to.

God created male and female but one of the effects of the fall and sin entering our world is that sin messes up and confuses even our gender.

The pattern that God lay down in his good creation has been corrupted and that's not something to be celebrated, but something that should be lamented.

Imagine for a second – perhaps you don't even need to imagine it because you've experienced it – that you don't fit neatly into either category – male or female – and it's not because of anything you've done.

You get ridiculed, teased, shamed, rejected and treated like a freak who doesn't bear the image of God.

That's some people's reality and they need our compassion and our love.

Then there are some other people who experience gender dysphoria – a feeling of discomfort with their gender.

Many of you will have been to gender training, perhaps at work or at school.

Perhaps you've even come across the Gender Unicorn.

The Gender Unicorn is, the makers tell us, an improvement on the Genderbread person.

The makers of The Gender Unicorn assert that sex is merely something that's assigned to you at birth on the basis of your biology.

And that's very different from your gender identity, which they see as a different category that's completely different from the sex assigned at birth.

In fact, your gender identity mightn't just be different to the sex assigned at birth, but might also be different from your gender expression and who you're physically and emotionally attracted to.

They say that gender identity is all about how you feel on the inside and nothing to do with how God made you.

That means that only YOU can determine what your gender identity is.

That's why in 2014, Facebook introduced a choice of 56 genders for users.

That number increased to 58 the same year.

This year, in 2021, Facebook now lists 14 genders plus a "custom" field to make up your own.

Under this system of reasoning, gender becomes a case of choose your own adventure.

In my assessment people who are suffering from gender dysphoria are broken and suffering.

The pain and the alienation that they feel is real and so they're desperately trying to make sense of their reality.

That's why there's new thoughts and theories coming out all the time that try to make sense of it all for people.

They label themselves transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, agender, pangender, genderqueer, two-spirit, third gender, and all, none or a combination of these in an effort to find their identity apart from being a male or female created in God's image.

They are cling to the their belief, their hope, that choosing your own pronoun will be the end of their problems.

People assume that this's a path to freedom, to finding meaning and purpose and identity.

Sadly, instead of finding hope and peace, they're bound to endure constant dissatisfaction.

These people need our compassion and they need the gospel.

If you turn from God, then you'll try everything in your power to find meaning and make sense of the world by forging your own identity.

In choosing your own gender, you're rebelling against the God who created us and the world.

That's the real problem.

Our doctrine of sin tells us that everyone is a sinner, so we shouldn't be at all surprised that people rebel against God with their gender.

When you take God out of the picture, then you run with your own reasoning.

But we need to realise that will including trying to usurp God by overthrowing how he's made the world in an attempt to make sense of it.

And so it should come as no surprise when we, as Christians, are called immoral, unfair and intolerant for trying to point people back to how God created the world in the beginning.

Nor does it come as any surprise to me that Christians get called all of these things because of the WAY that we say them either.

That's why we need to be really clear about what the Bible teaches about how God created human beings in the beginning rather than just buy into the thoughts of the time.

Not because I'm a cis-gendered white male who wants to make himself feel safe and secure, but because confused people need answers.

If the Bible is true – as I am convinced that it is – then the Maker's manual tells us that we were made male and female.

Broken people need hope, compassion and healing which can only be found by turning TO the Creator rather than away from him.

We weren't made to choose and decide our gender for ourselves.

That's the gender question and I've been speaking for a while now, but you might still be wondering what this's got to do with the question that Jesus was asked.

Jesus wasn't talking to people who were facing the same questions we do today, in the way we do, but I think that he also knew what was coming.

Well, it's the foundation for everything else that he's about to say.

Getting the question of gender wrong will undermine everything that Jesus's about to say about marriage.

It wasn't an accident or mistake that God created male and female.

That difference and yet unity is what makes marriage possible and beautiful.

A Question of Marriage

The second part of Jesus' question, "Don't you remember?" takes the Pharisees – and us – from chapter one of Genesis to chapter two.

Jesus reminds them about a second principle from the Scriptures that helps us understand the beginnings of marriage and what its purpose was from the beginning.

Jesus quotes from Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:5:

Matthew 19:5 NIV11 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'?

It's worth noticing that creation happens twice in the first two chapters of the Bible.

These two chapters tell us about how the world was created from two different angles or perspectives that work together to give us an understanding of what God did.

In chapter two, we get a bit more detail of the specifics about how God created humanity.

God says that it's not good for the man to be alone, verse eighteen.

That's the first time that something in Creation's been described as NOT being good.

The man – the Adam – needs a helper.

God brings all of the animals that he'd created to be named, but none of them were suitable, verse twenty.

So God does something amazing.

All of the land animals had been formed out of the ground,² just like the man himself was in verse seven.

So, we're expecting that he's going to make the man's helper in exactly the same way.

Instead, of taking her from the ground though, he takes something from the original man he made – a rib, or better still, his side – and he uses that rib to make a woman.

The word translated 'rib' isn't translated this way anywhere else in the OT and understanding it as 'side' overcomes the issue of Adam starting with three ribs.

It brings a whole new meaning to sidekick, doesn't it?

Genesis 2:21 NIV11 ²¹ So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²² Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

God created someone who's just like the man, but different.

Made from the very same stuff, the same substance, yet different.

In verse twenty, he named all the livestock, birds and wild animals.

Now, the man names the woman, or the *ish* (ʾîš) names the *ishah* (ʾiššá).

The wordplay works in Hebrew and in English.

Verse 23:

Genesis 2:23 NIV11 ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."

Now we finally get to the bit that Jesus quotes.

We're told that it's "for this reason".

What reason?

It's because the woman was taken out of the man.

They're connect by being made of the same stuff.

Male and female are different, but they go together.

Genesis 2:24 NIV11 ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Jesus explains that this undergirds our whole understanding of marriage.

In the original context of Matthew 19, he's directing their attention to Genesis because he's saying that the Pharisees are misunderstanding divorce because they're misunderstanding marriage.

In marriage, man will leave his father and mother.

He separates, he stops being part of his parent's family in the way that he was.

He leaves.

It was just a given in the ancient world, that the woman would leave her family too.

It's great when families get on well, but even today, it causes all kinds of problems when either the husband or the wife don't really leave their family.

When the bond of loyalty to parents is stronger than the bond between husband and wife, there will inevitably be misplaced loyalties and arguments.

Sometimes because they don't want to leave and other times because their parents aren't really willing to let them leave.

Parents, we invest the best part of two decades in our kids, but in marriage, we need to let them go.

Husband and wife come together to form a new family unit.

They cling to each other and have loyalty to each other.

They cleave.

And the two become one flesh.

The two here's really important.

In marriage, two different individuals come together to form a new family.

The Bible makes clear elsewhere that the two people who come together mustn't be from the same family.

Since 2017 in Australia, marriage is defined as: "the union of 2 people to the exclusion of all others, voluntarily entered into for life."

But that just doesn't go far enough.

Marriage, according to the Australian Government, is "no longer determined by sex or gender," and according to our government that's true.

According to the one who made the world, since the beginning it's been more than that.

We think of the one flesh happening when a married couple come together in physical, sexual union.

And that's definitely part of what's going on here, but it's also more than that.

Remember that it's "because of this".

God didn't tear the man apart to make the woman, but he did take part of his side to make the woman.

In marriage, the one flesh is a uniting of not just two people, two DIFFERENT people – one male and one female.

$1 + 1 = 1$ in the divine mathematics of marriage.

A man on his own isn't one flesh.

A woman on her own isn't one flesh.

Two men can't make one flesh.

Two women can't make one flesh.

One flesh is made when two people – one male and one female – come together.

That means that homosexual marriage isn't really marriage.

It also means that polygamy or polyamory isn't marriage.

Anything other than male and female is a violation – a rejection, a rebellion against what God's planned.

If you're wondering where this leaves single people, then please know that I'm actually intentionally not going there this week.

I hope to be able to get to it next week (or the week after) though.

Why do Christians insist on this definition of marriage?

Why is one man and one woman for life the right definition for everyone?

Is it just because we're traditionalists? In some cases that might be true, but it's not enough.

Is it because that's the way that it's always been and is almost universally across cultures? Kind of.

It's because God says.

But why should OUR God get a say above any other god or even no god, you might ask?

It's because he's the one who created the world and made it this way from the beginning.

Marriage isn't just a human institution that human beings have made up – like I've even heard some Christians claim.

It's part of the way God has made the world to work.

If you come back to Matthew 19:6, we read Jesus' commentary on this.

He stops quoting Genesis half way through verse six and then adds his own application.

Matthew 19:6b NIV11 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Since the beginning, God's the one who joins together every marriage.

I take it that since God's the one who joins together every marriage and makes them one flesh, he does that regardless of whether they're a Christian or not.

It really shouldn't surprise us that when people abandon God, they'll define marriage differently.

That's the natural – perhaps inevitable consequence – of rejecting God.

But from the beginning, it wasn't the case.

Marriage, according to the Bible is one man and one woman joined together by God for life.

They make a covenant with each other, witnessed by others and consummated physically.

Two quick applications from this.

Firstly, this shows us the importance of not seeking out to be married to someone who doesn't profess to be a Christian.

The word is the word for God joining is the word for yoking together.³

I'm not talking to people who might find themselves in the situation where they find themselves married to someone who doesn't believe.

Nor is my intent to make you feel guilty.

But to those of you not married, elsewhere, Paul says:

2 Corinthians 6:14 NIV11 ¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Honestly, it always seemed to me that it could be a bit of a stretch to apply this to marriage, even though I think it's right.

But the language of 'yoking' is the same in both texts.

God does the yoking (Matthew 19) and so don't be yoked to an unbeliever (2 Corinthians).

Secondly, it matters who you make a one flesh union with.

In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul warns that it's wrong to unite yourself with a prostitute because you become one with her in body.

1 Corinthians 6:16 NIV11 ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

And it's why it's ungodly to sleep with someone outside of marriage.

It violates the exclusivity of the one flesh union that God's created to be between one man and one woman.

It doesn't matter if you're intending to get married, if you're not married yet, don't make a one flesh union with someone.

If you're not married, you don't know if you're going to be married – anything could happen.

To make a temporary one flesh union overthrows God's plan and intent for marriage.

It's meant to be one man and one woman from different families brought together for life.

That's the question of marriage.

Conclusion

To understand the meaning and purpose of marriage, we need to go back to the beginning.

That's why Jesus goes to Genesis when he answers the Pharisees' question.

Jesus affirms that God's intent has always been for one man to be married to one woman for life.

¹ 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1.

² Genesis 2:19

³ This makes sense of 2 Corinthians 6:14 where Paul speaks of being unequally yoked.

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Big Question: How did the Creator make marriage to work in the beginning?
Big Idea: In marriage, God brings together one man and one woman for life.

Discussion Questions

1. How does chapter nineteen fit into Matthew's gospel?
2. Why did the Pharisees ask Jesus this particular question?
3. What makes human beings similar and different to other animals?
4. What makes male and female similar and different to each other?
5. How has sin changed gender from the way God created it?
6. What reason does Genesis give us for marriage?
7. In light of Genesis, how is Australia's definition of marriage insufficient?
8. What does Jesus' commentary in Matthew 19:6 tell us about marriage?