

August 26, 2018

## “The Kingdom and Singleness”

Matthew 19:10-12

**FCF:** In Christ’s church, no one should be left out - no matter their marital status.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Jesus has called us into kingdom community.

(magnet) We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way - including singleness.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

No one likes being left out. Think of your childhood memories of the playground or just conversations at a social gathering. You try to cover it up but it’s painful. And such experiences always betray disfunction at work. There’s something amiss in social dynamics that causes that.

Here’s the thing. In Christ’s church, no one should be left out. And yet there are some who often are - singles. Which, if trends continue and the median age for marriage keeps rising, is just foolish. But beyond that, it’s just wrong. For we are a body, a family. In Christ’s church, no one should be left out. Jesus speaks to this. Perhaps in more ways than you might think.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Matthew 19:8-12](#)

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

There is an essay by C. S. Lewis entitled “The Sermon and the Lunch”. In it, he tells of a pastor’s sermon on the family and then lunch with the family of the pastor. But there was little binding the two together. And it bothered Lewis, not just because of the inconsistency between practice and precept but the sentimentality of the precepts and the naive disconnect with reality.

The gospel message is of the kingdom. It’s the story of a world made good but gone bad. It’s the story of treason and a tyrant taking control. It’s the story of the true king’s arrival and the rising of His rule. And it’s the story of the king’s people, acting as an insurgency on the ground awaiting the full invasion, an advance force establishing a beachhead. That is the message of the gospel, the kingdom. And that message, rightly heard, is transformative. All will be reclaimed and renewed. And so all is impacted and affected. This is no Sunday morning religiosity.

That is what bothered Lewis at the lunch after the sermon. For the gospel should have a broad and deep impact. Who we are and how we live cannot remain the same. There is nothing that remains untouched. Jesus has called into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way. Last week, we looked at the impact of this on marriage and divorce. This week, at how it speaks to singleness. Again, Jesus has called us into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way, including singleness.

What would that mean? We’re going to consider three points. First, the perspective on singlehood. Second, the dignity of singlehood. And then, third, the struggle of singlehood.

### **I. THE PERSPECTIVE ON SINGLEHOOD**

First, let’s take a look at the perspective on singlehood ([READ Matthew 19:10-12](#)). What are the reasons for singlehood, the explanations of why some are not married? There are three.

*A) Fear of Marriage*

1. The exchange

First, there is the fear of marriage. We see that in this exchange. The disciples had heard what Jesus had just said to the Pharisees and how He had raised the bar on the sanctity of marriage.

2. The reality

“It’s too risky then. Better not to marry at all,” they say. And Jesus says they are partly right. If you’re not “all in” with this covenant, then it’s better not to get married. For some, the idea of a permanent, exclusive, comprehensive commitment is a terrifying prospect - then and now.

*B) Unable to Marry*

1. From birth

So some are afraid to marry. That’s the first reason. But others are unable to marry. Perhaps a genetic disorder from birth would make it impossible for them to engage in sexual intimacy.

2. Since birth

Or perhaps something has happened since birth. They were born healthy but suffered a tragedy - castration in the king’s court or the battlefield. Pushing this further, perhaps they want to marry but are unable to for some reason. That all fits under this second reason, an inability to marry.

*C) Freely Chosen*

1. A decision

Which brings us to a third reason. They have freely chosen not to marry. They made themselves a eunuch - not physically (that would be to dishonor the body) but intentionally giving up and foregoing marriage and family in order to more fully dedicate themselves to God’s service.

2. A calling

Which would have been very unusual in Jewish society. Jesus, John the Baptist, and Paul really stood out here. It’s not for all. It’s a gift and a calling, just like marriage. More on that later.

This is Jesus’ perspective on singlehood - the reasons and explanations behind it.

*Application:*

All that is to say we need to be very careful about our assumptions as to why someone is single. There are multiple possibilities listed right here. So we need to own and check our ideas. It may not necessarily always be because they are immature, irresponsible, unattractive, or gay. It may not be that they are simply too choosy. Jesus has set a range of reasons before us here.

We need to be very careful with our assumptions. Jesus has called into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way, including singleness.

## **II. THE DIGNITY OF SINGLEHOOD**

Which takes us to the next point, the dignity of singlehood (**READ Matthew 19:11, 12b**).

*A) The World’s Views*

Let’s compare. We’ll group the world’s views and set those up against the Bible’s view.

1. Traditional cultures

In traditional cultures, marriage is strongly valued because of the exalted status of family and the bearing of children. That is, the tight allegiance to blood ties and the felt necessity of heirs.

## 2. Non-traditional cultures

In non-traditional cultures, marriage is seen as an outdated construct. Marriage is equated with bondage. Singleness is equated with freedom. And, increasingly, that's just what we see today.

### *B) The Bible's View*

The Bible's view is something different - a high view of both marriage and singleness.

#### 1. Of marriage

Marriage is held up because of its purpose - to reflect our relationship and union with Jesus. That said, marriage is not ultimate. It has its disadvantages. We saw that in 1 Corinthians 7.

#### 2. Of singleness

It's the very same with singleness. Singleness is held up because of the freedom for unimpeded service to the family and work of God. That said, it too has disadvantages - the practical reality of the solo shouldering of daily tasks and the temptation of loneliness. Again, a balanced view.

This view is something unique - the dignity not just of marriage but of singlehood.

### *Illustration:*

They are each their own thing. Think of outer space. We usually think of space as being nothing but a vacuum, a nothingness, just the gap between the something of planets, moons, and stars. Singleness is not outer space. It's more like there are two planets and singleness is one of them. Marriage and singleness are each their own thing. Singleness is not "not being married".

### *Application:*

The Bible's message is that marriage and singleness are equally good - each with their own distinct benefits and challenges. Neither should be thought of as the ultimate prize or our destination. Think of it this way. Marriage is penultimate. Meaning that it is a foretaste and sign of the kingdom, that which we await. It is not what we await but a foretaste and sign of it.

This means we dare not put too much weight or undue expectations upon it. That's a terrible temptation and mistake for both the married and singles. Jesus has called into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way, including singleness.

## **III. THE STRUGGLE OF SINGLEHOOD**

Which brings us to the final point, the struggle of singlehood (**READ Matthew 19:11-12**). Five times, Jesus mentions the eunuch. Five times. It's quite an image and a lot of repetition.

### *A) A Graphic Image*

#### 1. Background

The background is worth knowing. In the Ancient Near East, castrated males were utilized in royal courts. They were seen as loyal, compliant, and trustworthy around women. And while they could be authority figures, they were often excluded from society. Cut off, if you will.

## 2. Significance

Think about Jesus' use of that image here. The image of a eunuch carries a sense of loss, loss for the sake of something greater, a larger cause. In this case, not just the loss of sexual pleasure but any hope of heirs, of offspring, of a guaranteed future and a supporting cast in your old age.

### *B) A Needed Message*

That's worth knowing. But how is understanding that image important for us today?

#### 1. For the larger church

The larger church is called to be a body. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 12. We are one body with many members, none of whom are optional or dispensable. We must treasure that.

#### 2. For singles

That's a message for the larger church. For singles in particular, there is a need to rest in God's care, in His plan and promises (**READ Matthew 19:29-30**). This points to what the 17th century pastor Jeremiah Burroughs described as "the rare jewel of Christian contentment". And we hear that in a striking way in this refrain through 1 Corinthians 7 (**READ 1 Corinthians 7:17, 20, 24**).

This is the struggle of singlehood. Both the struggle and the secret to its flourishing.

### *Application:*

Obviously, this requires a whole new way of seeing in order to prize this gift, to thrive in this calling. It means seeing through lonely circumstances with the eyes of faith - knowing that Jesus, our resurrected King, is with us and cares better for us than any frail, fallen, mortal being ever could. It means seeing through dim prospects with hope - knowing that we don't know our immediate future and what will come. But even if Prince or Princess Charming never comes, the King and His kingdom surely will - perhaps sooner than we think. Jesus has called into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way, including singleness.

### **CONCLUSION:**

"Why is this not discussed more?" you ask. Why not more sermons on this? There are a few factors. First, most pastors are married and forget what being single is like. Second, just the drumbeat of demands. We give a lot of attention to weddings. And to counseling - before and after the wedding. So marriages scream for attention. That's not an excuse. Just an explanation.

But we need to know that the church is not just a center for worship, learning, and service. We are not called into kingdom academy but kingdom community. And we need to be what we are. It's not good to be something you're not or to live in denial. We are a community.

We need to invite and enter into one another's lives and homes. That's easy for some but not so much for others. We need to know and learn how to do that, encouraging each other, no matter our marital status. Jesus has called into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships in a whole new way. That includes marriage, divorce, and singleness.

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