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¹⁸ The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

¹⁹ Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 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 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.

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.” ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

“Uni†ed in Marriage”

There is an old Greek legend about a man named Odysseus. We usually know him by an English version of his name, Ulysses. Ulysses and his companions were making an epic journey by ship, when they came to a tiny island where the Sirens lived. The Sirens were enchanting creatures that lured sailors to their death upon the rocks around the islands with their sweet and inviting songs. Ulysses wanted to hear the Sirens, but he also didn’t want to wreck his ship. He had his sailors plug their ears with beeswax so they couldn’t hear the Siren’s song. He gave them orders to keep rowing past the island, no matter what they saw. Then he had them tie himself to the ship’s mast so that when he heard their song, he wouldn’t jump into the sea and die upon the rocks.

Marriage is a wonderful institution that God established at the beginning of the world. As husbands and wives, in our journey through life, we cannot afford to listen to all the things the world says about marriage. The world advocates exploring the sexual side of marriage BEFORE you get married. But that’s like buying some underwear and wearing it for a few days before taking it back to the store. It destroys the intimacy of the marriage union. The world says if you aren’t happy in your marriage, get out, because you deserve to be happy. The world says there should be a perfect person out there who is going to meet all your needs. In reality, there is never a perfect match for you, and marriage requires a lot of effort to make it work. But the Sirens keep singing their songs and tempting us to destroy ourselves and those around us. We even use a similar expression when we say that someone’s marriage is “on the rocks.”

How do we make marriage work? As we study our text for this morning and learn about God’s institution of marriage, we will see what a blessing it is to be tied to one another by a covenant, and second, to be tied to the cross of Jesus.

1. *The blessing of being tied in a covenant*

Before we get to the application of this text, however, let's just look at the words of this beautiful story. And this is not a "story," as in a fable or myth. This is not some ancient way of telling us about the beginning of the world. This is a real event in the history of mankind. The fact that every culture has very similar marriage rites is evidence that the world didn't evolve and make this up. God established marriage when he created man and woman. So in the first half of chapter two of Genesis, God gives us the narrative of the sixth day of creation. He created man out the dust of the ground and breathed into him the breath of life. He then put the man into a beautiful garden. And it is at this point that our story begins.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." We could spend a lot of time on this. You must be asking yourself the question, "Why did God put this tree in the garden? Wasn't God setting man up to sin by putting the tree in the garden?" And the answer to that question is, "No." If you gave your child a thousand dollars to spend during his first year of college, you could argue that you are only tempting him to go out and by drugs or party-hearty his freshman year. Or you could argue that you are giving him the opportunity to learn how to be responsible. God didn't put the tree there so that man could sin, but so that man could honor God by not sinning. Remember what God said after the sixth day? It was very good. So the tree was very good, too.

¹⁸ The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." So why did God say that it is NOT GOOD for the man to be alone? Because he wasn't finished with the sixth day. In our culture today, personal rights and individualism trumps all other values. It's not that way in most other countries of the world. Simon and Garfunkel captured our culture's psyche when they penned the words to that song. "I am a rock. I am an island. A rock feels no pain. An island never cries." More young people today are deciding to live their lives alone because they don't want the hassle of being with someone else. The problem with the song and with the culture is that God didn't wire us to enjoy being alone.

Some years ago, when I worked out in Glacier National Park, I was hiking with two friends when a stranger from New York asked if he could join us. On the third day, he said, "I suppose you wonder why I wanted to join you. I would come to a beautiful scene like this and say, 'Look at that!', and there was no one there to share the moment with."

So God made a suitable helper for man. He gave him someone to share the moment with him. Only he didn't make someone just like himself, but someone who is in many ways his direct opposite. He made someone who would fill in the blanks in his life. When you get home today, try to make a list of all the things that a woman has that man doesn't have. And what does a man have that a woman doesn't have. One example? I thank God every day that God gave me a wife that had the tenderness my children needed as we raised them. God made a woman who was the perfect complement to her husband. If it hadn't been for sin, the differences in the sexes would have never been a reason for strife and conflict. It's only the selfishness of our sinful natures that makes it a problem!

¹⁹ Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. Please notice that

Adam was not a Neanderthal man. He was an intelligent human being that could properly name all the animals God paraded before him. There was higher purpose to this, however. By doing this, God allowed Adam to discover what God already knew. It wasn't good for the man to be alone. For Adam no suitable helper was found. Contrary to popular wisdom, a dog will never be a man's BEST friend.

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 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. Why did God choose this method to make the woman? The Bible doesn't really give us the answer, except that Adam said that this was now bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh. God didn't make someone inferior to Adam, or so different from Adam that she would be a stranger. God made someone perfectly LIKE him and perfectly UNLIKE him so that they could be united together as husband and wife.

And here comes the verse that we've been waiting for, the verse which Jesus quotes and Paul quotes, the verse that beautifully describes what marriage is. **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." ²⁴ For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵ The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.** Adam says that the woman is now "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This is Adam's statement of the marriage covenant. The Bible never gives us the exact words we are to speak in this covenant. The Song of Songs uses an expression, "I am yours and you are mine." A marriage vow is any statement that makes an unconditional and permanent covenant between a man and a woman.

Verse 24 is Moses commentary on what Adam says. A man leaves his father and mother. There is no bond closer in the human race than the bond between a father or mother and a child – except one. It is the bond a man and woman make with each other by making a covenant with each other. The King James used the words to leave and to cleave. That's a powerful world. You literally tie yourself to the other person for life. You make a covenant that is more binding than the natural bond between a child and his mother or father.

Friends, a covenant is a powerful thing. It is so powerful that God chose to make a covenant with you, which he signed and sealed with the blood of his Son, Jesus. How do you know that God loves you? How do you know that God will never leave you or forsake you? How do you know that God will even forgive your weaknesses and stubbornness and sin? Because God made a covenant with you. Do you see how powerful a covenant is?

So let me point out to you some of the blessings of being in a covenant marriage with another person. **It means you will enjoy a wonderful, peaceful stability in your marriage.** It is the opposite of a consumer relationship. I have a consumer relationship with my barber. Every time I go to the barber, I look in the mirror to see if he's done a good job. And if he ever scalps me, or cuts off a piece of my ear, I will go find a better barber. If I am in that kind of relationship with my wife, then I have to prove myself every day. If I don't, if I forget to take out the garbage one week, she might get tired of me and walk away. If I lose my job and can't provide for her at the level that she wants to be provided for, she can walk away and find a better provider. If I gain twenty pounds, she may find me disgusting. When you are in a committed, covenant marriage, you can't just walk away, because like Ulysses, you've tied yourself to the mast so that you won't be tempted to abandon ship. It is for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness or in health until death us do part. Sometimes I wish we still used those words in our wedding ceremonies. There is a wonderful security in a covenant marriage.

It means that you will enjoy a greater intimacy in your marriage. I'm not talking about the intimacy of the marriage bed, even though a covenant marriage beats a consumer relationship in regard

to sexual fulfillment a hundred times over. I'm talking about the intimacy of friendship and conversation. If I know that my wife is fully committed to me, I can let her see the inside of my soul, which I have to confess, can be very ugly. I can tell her things that I wouldn't tell anyone else. I can appear to be weak before her and not pretend to be strong. I can let her see my nakedness and not be ashamed, because I know that she won't leave. Do you see how being in this committed covenant relationship actually promotes greater intimacy? But the world out there tries to convince you it is just the opposite. Don't listen. Put wax in your ears and don't listen to the Sirens.

It means that you will enjoy a greater freedom in your life. When you make a marriage covenant, you do so after much prayer and careful thought. You set a course for life that you declare before God and your witnesses. Without that, your life is going to be determined by the feelings and passions of the moment. Ask anyone who has been married for more than ten years about how fickle those passions and feelings can be. The person who ties himself or herself to the mast of a covenant relationship will be better equipped to steer a godly course through life than the person who sets a course based on feelings and emotions.

Am I saying that love isn't important in a marriage? Of course it is. God commanded it for marriage when he said that husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the church. **But the covenant that you make gives you the room to grow to love each other more every day.** That deep, Christ-like love is something you have to work on. Someone said it like this. When you get married, you are like two rocks with rough edges, tossed into a rock tumbler that slowly turns and rolls those two rocks together. At first, breaking off those rough edges can be painful. You might have an argument or two along the way ... or two hundred. But the longer you stick with it, the smoother it gets. A covenant marriage gives you the time to grow to love each other more every day.

I remember Selma and Walther Thun sitting on their couch, so close that you couldn't have slipped a penny between them. After seventy years of marriage, they loved each other deeply, probably more so than when they first got married. They held each other's hands like teenagers in love for the first time. When you make a covenant promise in marriage, you don't just promise to love each other. You promise to BE loving and to BE faithful – even in the times and seasons when that is difficult.

Have you kept your marriage vows? Yes ... and no. I pray that you haven't broken your marriage vows in a way that has or could destroy your marriage. Jesus called it marital unfaithfulness. If you have, then let me remind you that Jesus saw your sin and he carried it to the cross and he atoned for that sin forever. It can never be held against you in God's court of justice. At the same time, we all break our vow or at least fracture it a little almost every day. Let's say that you and your wife have a disagreement about something. You bought a fishing pole and you paid two hundred dollars for it and it's not in your budget. She called you on it. So what did you do? You didn't argue about it because you knew you were wrong. Instead you just took a few steps back. You withdrew. You pulled away. And that's not "cleaving" to your wife, is it? When that happens, remember the covenant you made. But even more important, remember the covenant that Jesus made with you. Because nothing binds us closer together than the cross of Jesus!

2. *The blessing of being tied to the cross*

As I wrote this sermon, in the back of my mind, I kept thinking, "What am I going to say to the single people in the congregation who would love to find a faithful, caring spouse? After lauding the blessings of marriage, won't I just make them feel miserable?" And then it dawned on me that the Savior of married couples is also the Savior of married people. If you are single and you think that

finding a wonderful spouse is the only thing that can bring happiness and joy into your life, you are wrong. Marriage is a good thing, but it is also filled with sadness and unhappiness as well, because we live in an imperfect world. The only person who can fill your life with joy and happiness and make you complete is Jesus.

Jesus calls himself our heavenly bridegroom. Paul spoke of this in Ephesians 5, verses 25-27, **“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”** When Jesus looked down from the cross, what did he see? He saw a world of sinners. He saw the soldiers playing dice for his clothes. He saw the angry faces of his enemies. He saw the disappointed faces of his friends. And he saw much more. He saw the whole world of sinners that include you, and me. And what did he do? He stayed. He remained true to his covenant to us, his bride. And by his redeeming love, he made us much more than we ever could have been. He made us spotless and holy and radiant.

Do you see that Jesus is the only one who can fill your life and love you like this? If you are single, you will find joy and comfort in his love. And if you are married, it is just as important to find your joy and fulfillment in Jesus. If you think that you will find it in your wife or husband, or if you are searching for a wife or husband who can fill that spot in your heart, you will always be disappointed. In a way, marriage brings out the worst in us, because our spouses get to see us close up and personal. We can't hide our faults from them, can we? But you will never be disappointed in Jesus!

More importantly, you will learn to love your spouse in a Christ-like way that can redeem your marriage. How do you find it in your heart to love your spouse in those seasons when love is scarce? How do you love him when he is just being mean? How do you love her when she doesn't even notice you? That's when you draw on a resource of love that goes far beyond anything you can find even in a very good marriage. In those moments, then you love as Christ loved the church, as he loved you. You love without reason. You love without pause. You love with a purpose and a passion that doesn't make any sense at all except for Jesus. Such a love is possible, when you are tied to the cross.

I have been married for almost 39 years. My love for my wife grows deeper every year. I love her to the moon and back. I thank God for that blessing – for the covenant that has tied us together, and even more, for the covenant that has united us with Jesus and his cross. A long time ago, there was a man I knew that had several disastrous relationships which ended badly. I talked to him about marriage. He said, “Pastor, I could never trust a woman.” I told him I trusted my wife. “How can you trust her completely?” he said. I told him, “I could see her walking away from me, but she could never walk away from Jesus. That's why I trust her.” When you are tied to the cross and tied by a covenant, you can have that kind of marriage. Amen.