

Singleness & Loneliness

Ryan Keeney : March 8, 2015

THE PARADOX CHURCH

*Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him."
Genesis 2:18-20*

It is not good for man to be alone. That is what we are looking at. It is not good for man to be alone. Not good. Man alone, not good. Isolation, not good. This is what God speaks. There has been this rhythm to Creation as God has created the world, and this rhythm has been God creates something--so He imagines it, He thinks of it, He speaks it into existence--and then Moses in capturing this, writes, "it was so." So everytime God does something, everytime that God creates, it says, "it was so." It just says, "it." It happened. Accomplished. Done. Every time, "it was so." And then God looks, and He observes and sees what He's just accomplished; He sees what is just so and says, "it is good, it is good, it is good." And this is the rhythm that God creates. It is so, and it is good. So, light and dark, it is good. Land and oceans, it is good. Plants and animals, it is good. Sky and earth, seasons and days, time and space--it is good. Man alone, not good.

So, it seems like we are on this path and it's building up, and it is kind of anticlimactic. It's good, it's good, it's good; and then, no, this is not good. There is a this and that. There is a corresponding companion in each one of these. There is light and dark, land and oceans, plants and animals. These things work hand in hand; they go together hand in hand; they correspond with one another; they work together. But with the man, he is single; he is the one person; he is by himself; he's alone. So no hand to go in hand with him. This is not good.

This is not good on the backdrop of paradise. Adam is in paradise, in this beautiful--I assume palm trees and pomegranates. I don't know if you like pomegranates. I don't, but that's what I always think of though. Beautiful things around him. This is where Adam is at; he's in paradise. He has a command to work and keep, but he has a God to worship and talk to. He has animals that he names. God sends them. All these animals. He gives them names, like Zebra--Okay. Thank you, Adam. We'll take it--He gives the names to all the animals. And I

assume he has these animals do some work. He hooks up a yoke to oxen so that they can till the land because there's work before the Fall. So, he has a God to talk to, he has animals to work with; but God says, this paradise is not paradise. It is incomplete, because he is alone. It is not good.

And even through this searching, through this naming of these animals, he's searching for a helper to help him, to serve with him. But it says, there was not found a helper fit for him. There was not someone that he can do this with. He's working and living alone, but he needs another. Another to fulfill God blessed command to work and keep it. To be fruitful and multiply, which is seen in Genesis one, "Be fruitful and multiply." And then also to have another for friendship, for companionship, for assistance, for community.

Why, though? Why is this not good? Why is Adam being by himself not good? Because God created Adam in His image, and what is God? He's one in essence, three in person. So there is this perfect community, perfect friendship that has always existed from the Father, Son, and Spirit. That the Father has for all time loved the Son, and the Son has responded in adoration; the Spirit has radiated towards the Father and towards the Son in this perfect community for all time. And now He creates, and this man is by himself, so he can't reflect the beauty, the friendship, the community of God by himself. It's not good. He's created to reflect it, so he needs to be in friendship; he needs to be in community; he is not to be alone, not to be isolated. So, if he can reflect the Godhead, the communal Godhead, the three in one; then he needs another. A partner alongside of him that can help him.

When the commission comes to reign over the land that involves works and tasks, it's accomplished by working together, and this is what Adam needs, He needs another, which means for certain, for humanity to flourish women are necessary and needed. We do this together. Isolation is not the norm. We need one another for God's mission, for life to thrive, to reflect the beauty and glory of God Himself as this perfect friendship for all eternity. Isolation, alone--not good. Not good.

And as you think of this--and I know some of you guys who feel alone, whether you are not married or you lack rich meaningful friendships. And you agree. You are like, "I agree with that; I resonate with that. This is not good. My heart groans, my heart resonates when I hear God's words say is not good. Yes, it is not good. Where I am at in this moment right now, is not good." Some of you are married, and you're like, "I'm married but I can be at a party and there can be thirty people around me, and I'm just in this room, and I'm isolated. I feel alone." And

you are like, "This is not good. No one knows me. No one knows what's happening in my life. I'm just by myself."

Some of you are single, and you desire marriage. You want to get married. And it is a God given desire; it's a good desire. Let me just tell you that. It's a good desire, but then you observe others getting married, and they start having children they kind of out run you in this race of life, and now they're ahead of you, and you are like, "This is not good. This is not where I want to be. This is not where I'm expected to be. This is not good."

And then you begin to think, "Well, this is not good. And if this is a God given desire, then my question is: Is He good? If this is my experience, how do I reconcile this experience with who God is? And that makes me think, is He good? Is He good to me? Is He just good in general, but He's not good to me particularly? He doesn't really care about me? Just like Santa Claus good? Good and happy and jovial. He laughs a lot, but you don't care about me? You're not good for me; you're not about me?" And you think, "Why is He withholding this goodness from me?" And then your friends say things like, "Oh, you're young. You'll have time", or "It will happen one day", or "Just know that singleness is a gift." And you're like, "No, it's not a gift. This doesn't feel like a gift. This feels like agony; this feels like suffering. And you just saying from a distance, 'Oh, it will happen someday' makes me feel lonelier, because you're not in this with me. It just shows me that I'm in this by myself. 'Hmm, this is good.' No, it's not good, because I feel like my loneliness is perpetuated when you just throw truth prongs from a distance and don't enter into this with me."

So let's just unpack this text from Genesis two and a few from the New Testament to understand singleness in God's glorious story. To try and understand what is good and what's not good, and who is good, namely God Himself. So just in the text 2:18-20, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him [It's not good]. Now out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name the man gave name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him." So, not a helper. It's not good. Not a helper, alone, isolation--not good.

Now, note this text. And I'm not sure about all your backgrounds, but this text has been argued for the absolute normality of marriage, like "Everyone must be married, " because of this text. I'm not sure if you've been told that, but some people say you must be married,

because Adam was alone and God gave him a wife. You got to get a wife, otherwise, nothings happening for you. But that's not the case. We got to return back to God Himself, God being three in one. Adam is to enjoy the relationship that comes from a plurality of people, from being with others, with another. Being alone is seen quite negatively from the Creator. He Himself says, "not found a helper fit for him." This is not good, because there is full rich life found in community. Why? Because that is who God is, and He created us in His image. So in His image we live, we thrive, we experience life to its fullness; and that fullness is found with one another in friendships, in community. So God created a helper. God created another. Where there was isolation for Adam, now there is two together. Friendship, community, plurality. Mutual help is necessary for human existence. Mutual help, mutual assistance, mutual care, mutual love support one another.

Tim Keller observes that the passage teaches the overall goodness of relationships between males and females. He says, "male and female 'complete' each other and reflect the image of God together. But this is not something that only married people do. It happens quite naturally in strong Christian community, where the sharing of hearts and lives goes beyond the superficial down to what God is teaching us and how he is forming and growing us." And in this narrative, it shows that the relational capacity that God has given to us, that He has created us with, is not just fulfilled with the relationship with God, right? Adam was with God. We will see in the future, Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. But in Creation, God says, yeah, this is not it. You are to have this relationship with me, this vertical relationship with me; but then also this horizontal relationship with others. This is all by design, all by God creating us that we have this high relational capacity to enter into relationship, to talk with God, to relate with God; but then also with one another and do this together.

So with Adam being by himself that's why paradise is not good, because he's lonely. Loneliness in paradise is a terrible thing. He's got the palm trees; he's got the sunrays--just like every infographic you've ever seen with the sunrays popping from the back--Adam is experiencing all day long. It's this beauty. But paradise is not paradise; it's incomplete, because he is alone. And that's why it's frustrating for me with the men and women in our church. I'll talk about in general first. Just in our American culture, where men and women relationships are overly sexualized. So, I can't have a relationship with someone from the opposite gender, because we think it's only going to be about sex or turn to sex, or that's the only thing that we're heading towards. And so, there's always a trajectory. So, I talked to this person, and what is the immediate thought? The trajectory is going to be towards sex, because in our culture all relationships are overly sexualized. So you're just thinking, "Oh, I have got to protect myself. I

can't have relationships with people from the opposite gender, or I can't have relationships with anyone in a real, intimate, deep way because that's going to turn to sex. And I can't have sex before marriage, or I can't have sex outside of marriage, and I don't want to commit adultery."

And it just blows my mind that this is how we respond to this. In the church, this is not how it must be, because male and female complete each other. And in friendship, we get to know one another and serve one another. And all the 'one another's' of the New Testament do not fall on deaf ears just because you're a friend to a person of the opposite gender. "Well, I'm supposed to serve one another, love one another, care for one another, help one another, rebuke one another, encourage one another; but that's someone of the opposite sex. So, no. I'll opt out. Thank you, but I don't want to head into something that doesn't need to be."

No! We get to have these deep, meaningful relationships with one another because we're family, because we've been made family by Jesus. I give myself to and pray over those that are of the opposite gender. Some of our closest friends--my wife and I--are people that are single, and many of them are of the opposite gender. That's why I feel the freedom to pray over women when I talk to them about their singleness. And they have a good desire, and they want to be married, and they're crying, and I say, "Now, pause. I'm going to call my wife and ask her if it's okay for me to pray for you." No, I don't do that. I say, "Yeah, I love you, and I want to help you as a brother, as your brother." So I pray for them, and I pray over them, and I weep with them, and I cry with them, and I beg the Father together with them, why? Because, I'm not fearful of where this is going. I'm fearful that I don't enter in and sympathize and empathize and care for them. That's what I'm fearful of, of them just feeling more lonely as I say, "Oh no, I can't really care for you in this moment. Let me find a woman. Let me call someone up. Maybe you should just call your mother. Maybe just call a friend." No, I want to love them, care for them, serve them, and pray for them.

Now, some of you might be jumping ahead of me and thinking, "God says it is not good for man to be alone in Genesis." And you're thinking, "Jesus and Paul. Those are two single dudes, and they say some interesting things about singleness. I'm having a hard time reconciling that it's not good for man to be alone when God, man in the flesh, Jesus Himself lived a single life and taught about it. And Paul, the greatest missionary church planter of all time, lives the single life and teaches about singleness. So how do we connect these together?" Well, let's just go to what they say specifically, and then we'll work it out

In Matthew nineteen, Jesus says this--which He preps us for. If you know that Jesus is going to say a hard saying, this is how He starts, "not everyone can receive the same." Okay, Jesus. Alright. I already know it's going to be a difficult thing. Thank you for prepping us. It's like a little preface. You're not going to be able to receive this, I'm going to say it anyways--Matthew 19:10-12, this is what Jesus says, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

So, Jesus is saying that there are eunuchs. There are people that cannot get married and cannot have children because of how they were born; they were born and are unable to do this. Or they are not able to get married and have children because someone else did something to them. So either by birth or by the hands of someone else, they're not able to get married and have children. But then He goes on to a further one and says, "There are people who willingly give up the blessing of marriage and children for the sake of the King and His Kingdom." There are people that willingly choose, voluntarily offer themselves up as eunuchs. So, I'm not going to get married, I'm not going to have children, why? So that they can be in devoted service to the King and His Kingdom. No marriage, no children for the sake of Jesus.

This is possible, because you no longer needed to be blessed in God's family through marriage and children. Up to the point of Jesus, how did you receive God's covenantal blessings? By being in this family; by being of the bloodline of Abraham; by being in the family tree of Abraham. And so what needed to continue that heritage? What needed to continue that inheritance? You get married and have children, and then they get to receive that blessing as well. So through reproduction, through having children; they get to receive the blessing of God being part of the family.

But you say, "No, that's not the case. You're not mine; you're not my people by being born into a specific bloodline; you're mine because of my blood. So enter into God's family now because we are born into the bloodline of Abraham. We enter into God's family by putting our hope in the blood of Jesus. And, so Jesus saying--back to the eunuch--there are people that willingly choose to withhold, to not enter into marriage, to not have children so that they can serve. They can be loyal to the King and give their life, their undivided attention to the King and His Kingdom. And I love this picture of the eunuch, because that's the picture of what a eunuch does. He's just devoted in the service to his king. He doesn't have family, he doesn't have

children, he doesn't have a spouse; so he is just devoted to his master or to his king. So he's always thinking, "What does the king need? What does the king want? How can I make the king's life better? What can I do to help the king? How can I serve the king?" He's not going over and checking on like, "Oh, I need to make some soup." No, he's always thinking about the king. He's like, "Oh, I've got to figure out what school I'm going to put my kid in." No, he's always in service to the king. So with this eunuch, he's undivided in his focus, in his attention for the king. And this life, this voluntary eunuch life, is the life that Paul himself lived and encourages other people to live--people who choose to stay single for the sake of serving the King and the Kingdom, and that's why Paul can say it is good. Which he does in First Corinthians seven, he says, "to the unmarried and the widow I say, it is good for them to remain single as I am." Remaining unmarried is good. Not marrying or remaining sexual pure is good, which means we know that Paul is not contradicting Genesis two, right? He's not saying that it is good to be alone.

The big idea: Paul does not connect singleness to loneliness. That's the connection we make so easily--I'm single, so I'm lonely. Paul does not make that connection. In his willingness to be single, he actually says, I have many more friendships. It seems like he has deeper friendships than if he would have chose to be married. Because all the time in his letters, "love and kisses to you" and "this is the person I saw come to faith" and "this is who I baptized", and "this is who I love, and this is who my family is." All the time he's in these deep relationships, these deep beautiful friendships with people. So, it's good to be single. See, he doesn't connect singleness to loneliness.

And that's what God speaks of at the beginning. It is not good for man to be alone. So if you are single that doesn't mean you are alone or should live in isolation. If that's what you believe, you can rip that lie out of your head and replace it with this: this life, the life Paul describes repeatedly throughout the Scriptures, this singleness is lived in close community and friendship with the new family of God in Christ. If we look at Jesus and Paul, our examples from the New Testament, they have deep, rich, meaningful relationships. And they are not married! They're not married, and that's where it gets so skewed. In our minds, we think that marriage is the place for rich, meaningful relationships; and singleness is the life to have fun, and do your own thing with your own time. But that's a lie. The church is the place for rich, meaningful relationships; that's the place. So, alone, isolation--not good. But singleness is good; so much that Paul can say, yeah, I enjoyed it, and I want others to stay as I am: An undivided attention to service of the King and His Kingdom.

The Genesis one command is to be fruitful and multiply. The Matthew twenty-eight command is the same thing: be fruitful and multiply. The question is, how does this happen? In Genesis one, it's through getting married and having children. In Matthew twenty-eight, it's seeing people come to put their faith in Jesus. So, it's still be fruitful and multiply. So that means proclaiming the Gospel so that your friends that don't know Jesus would know Jesus, would put their faith in Jesus, repent of their sins, and turn to Jesus. That they would be given new hearts. That those who are non Christians would become Christians. This is how the family of God grows now. Not through reproduction, but through regeneration. By people being born again. By putting their faith in Jesus. This is how the family of God grows. And that's what you are going to see in Paul's life. Different places and different locations proclaiming the Gospel; people that were not Christians became Christians.

So if you are going to say anyone is a father and a blessed father, I think Paul is one of those. Why? Because the family just kept on getting added to, because of his ministry, because he proclaimed the Gospel, and people putting their faith in Jesus. And then they're getting baptized, and they're becoming part of churches, and they're becoming elders and leaders, and they're serving, and more people are meeting Jesus. So the thing about Abraham, who has many sons, right? Many sons had father Abraham, and Paul as well! In this new family, it continues to grow through regeneration, through people putting their faith in Jesus. And Paul says this is why I'm single, this is why I choose this, so that more people might come into the family. More people might meet Jesus in this context of rich, meaningful relationships.

He goes on and makes this point a little bit further about the life of a voluntary eunuch that's focused on the glory of God. In verses 32-35. I'll read it. First Corinthians 7:32-35, Paul says, "I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord." In your singleness, you'd be undivided. You would be thoughtful, concerned with, focused on the things of the Lord. Focused on pleasing the Lord. But again, this doesn't mean that for Paul to not be married that he forsakes deep, rich, meaningful friendships. He's saying in this life is where I enter into deep, relational friendships, submitting to King Jesus, following King Jesus, seeing other people submit to King Jesus.

So I'll tell you this, some of you singles should prayerfully consider and then choose to remain single like Paul for undivided service to the King and His kingdom. That's the case. Some of you should prayerfully consider this and say, "Should I stay single and choose to be single, either for this certain amount of time or for the long haul, so I can be undivided in my service to the King and His Kingdom?" I can say at the same time, some of you singles should pursue marriage. Prayerfully consider pursuing marriage. It's both/and. Because, singleness is not loneliness. So, it's not a bad thing. Singleness is good, and you can pursue that. And some of you should for a specific season commit to that; or for the long haul, like Paul, and commit to it like that--voluntary eunuch. Commit for the long haul for service to the King and the Kingdom. And some of you guys should pursue marriage. So you need to pray and talk to your community, talk to your friendships, to the people that are in your life that know you and know what's going on.

If the church is the place of rich commitment and meaningful friendship, then all Christians, single or married, are called to these rich, meaningful relationships. Everyone. It's not exclusion. It doesn't mean one group gets to have the deep, meaningful relationship, or this other group. It's for us all because we've been made a family, made brothers and sisters by Jesus. If you are in Christ, you have been invited into the community of God, into the relationship with the Father, Son, and Spirit. So, you've been brought into this community with God. And then also, you've been given brothers and sisters with those that have put their faith in Jesus. So, you have a good Father, you have a great big Brother, you have a Spirit that is present with you and present with the other people in this room, other people that have put their faith in Jesus. So you have been given friendships, brothers and sisters with you. This family will not pass away.

These past few days, I've spent some time in west Texas with my grandmothers. They live in separate places, but I got to see them both; and as I talked to them, we talked about things from the past and laughed at some things. And you start recollecting some things, like "Oh, I forgot that that happened." And then we start talking about other family members, and we start laughing and having a good time. And I love that time; I love that time with my parents; I love that time with my grandparents. But you know what? Marriage and that family will pass away. Marriage is a temporary institution looking to something greater; and when we get to new creation, marriage will pass away. It's temporary.

So, I love my family, and I'm grateful for my family, but you know what? The bond I have with you is greater than that bond. Because on this side there is this bloodline. Yeah, I'm part of

this bloodline, I'm part of this family, and I love them; but on this side, I'm made family together by the blood of Jesus. And so in a familiar way, I can talk about things, and we have those connections where you are like, "Oh, me too." Why? Because we are kind of similar; we have some of the same experiences. But the connection that comes from someone else who has put their faith in Jesus, that's a connection. When you say, "I have put my hope in Jesus. He is my rock. He is my anchor. He is my refuge." And you are like, "Yeah, me too!"--that's when we connect. And that's deeper than any bloodline can do for you.

Jesus is at the center of who I am, and this is just my big idea: You were created for rich, meaningful friendships; you were created for deep, beautiful relationships. A life isolated, lived by oneself, for one's self, independent, radically individualistic--that's not good. A life of rich, meaningful relationships; deep, beautiful friendships is good. It is good and will continue forever; it will not pass away. The relationships I have with you, my brothers and sisters, because the blood of Jesus will not pass away. We are on this trajectory heading towards, coming around the throne of Jesus forever, worshiping him together, forever. It's not a temporary institution; it's going to continue. It's not going to pass away. These friendships where we build one another up and there's fruit that just comes from it, that is eternal. That will not pass away.

So married couples, pursue single people in friendship. Single people, pursue married couples in friendship. All people, pursue rich meaningful friendships in the church. The power of the church, this family, is when you turn from your desire to be loved and choose to love and serve others. That's the power of the church. That's the power of this family. It's not when we sit back, waiting for someone to love us, but we choose to love and serve others because of how we've been perfectly loved by our Father. It not only blesses others, but it's also the life of God experienced in the Spirit in the very moment. As we serve, we are following Jesus. As we serve and love and lay down our lives for others, we are following Jesus.

So try this: Give, love, serve, befriend and see what happens with your loneliness. Pour out. Serving, following in the footsteps of Jesus for the other and see what happens. That's what deep, rich, meaningful relationships come from. That's the picture of discipleship. That's a picture of friendship from the New Testament. It's all the 'one anothers'. Serving one another, helping one another, caring for one another, praying for one another, carrying one another's burdens.

I think we have a hard time understanding, sometimes, when we talk about brothers and sisters. Like, I'm your brother. And if you're a female, you're my sister because of Jesus. And we

get accustomed to that. There's not really a weight to that. It doesn't hit us. So, maybe we need to think about, we're friends. I'm your friend. You're my friend. We are friends in this thing together. That's a huge thing. Oftentimes our culture doesn't talk about community. There's not a lot of people thriving on community, saying, "I was having a hard time. I was dealing with some hard stuff, and my community came and helped me." And you are like, "You're neighborhood Association?" No one knows what you are talking about. You know what they talk about? Friends, friends, friends. "I was having a rough time with this, I was thinking about this, I was planning on buying a house. You know who I talked to? I called up my friend."

These rich and meaningful friendships that I have, that I pursue, and I know, and they help me, and they encourage me. And I serve them, and I love them, and I pour out to them, because this bond of this new family--and I'll say friendship--through Jesus is stronger than the one of our physical, earthly family. Which means, this is good; the church is good; being a family is good; God is good. God's goodness is not based on your Facebook status of whether you are single or married. It doesn't change. It's not like, "Oh, God is good because I'm married, or God's evil because I'm single." That is not the benchmark of God's goodness. God is good because He sent His Son to be forsaken and be cut off that we might be made sons and daughters. That we might make Him family. God is good because He's working, whatever Facebook status you have now, to make you more like Jesus. God is good because in your suffering, He's refining you to enjoy and worship Him above all things. God is good. So, there is no question about that. So we know that whatever He's doing in, whatever season you're in, whatever state you're in, it is for your good to making you more and more and more like Jesus. And because of what's He's done in the past, and how He's pursuing you now, and His Spirit's with you, there is no question to say, "Is He good to me? Is He for me? Is He withholding good?" No, He is for me, and He is good to me.

Now I know some of you that are single are wrestling with pursuing marriage or not, or what to do in your current status. And those that are married please don't check out, because we have got to understand how to serve our brothers and sisters, and know how to love them. But I know that you wrestle because like the town I was just in, west Texas that's more a traditional culture, more of an eastern kind of culture in the sense of, you are a freak until you get married. I'm serious. That is the idea. That is the thought, and that's the thing that you grew up in and you know. And so when I talk to my family about my cousin, and they talk about how he's twenty-eight, and he's getting married in April. And I hear them respond, and they are like, "Yeah, finally." And I'm like, "Finally, why?" Because his life was on hold until he got married. He's not a legitimate person; although, he has a good career, and he's working in the oil field,

and he's making money, and he's taken responsibility for himself, and he's thinking about other people. "Oh, he's not really a legitimate person until he gets married." Where does that come from? So, you are a freak until you get married. And so that's why some of you guys don't like to go back to see your family, because you don't want to hear those questions, because that's the only questions you get. "So, how's the relationships? Are you pursuing marriage? Have you gotten engaged yet? And you're like, "Man, I just wanted to eat some chicken pot pie and sit by the fire. That would have been nice." You are just grilled, because you're a freak unless you get married.

Some of you guys grew up in cities and more urban centers, and the marriage is more seen just as a personal fulfillment. It is just about you. So, what you have always understood is that marriage is about me. So, it's like a disposal asset. I'll add it to my life if it adds to my bottom line. So if it will make me more happy, or if it will give me more financial stability, or if it will work for my social status; then I'll add it to my life, because it's about me, and it's for me. And you got people, Christian people, saying to go to one or the other, without exposing the idolatry of both. Like, just return to the good ol' days, so you got to get married when you're twenty. Okay, but that means you're saying I'm a freak if I don't get married at that time. That means I'm not validated, I'm not justified if I'm not married by this certain point of time. You're saying, that I'm not justified until this happens.

But that's not the case. You're justified by the blood of Jesus, not by connecting to another person, coveting to another person. Which says that marriage and singleness is all about Jesus. And the marriage that you are pursuing or thinking about is not going to give you what only Jesus can give you. So, you don't try to dive into it or try to validate yourself. But then you're also not fearful of it, thinking that this is just about my help, this is just for my happiness. So, I'll add it if I want to. I'll add it when I think about it, but I'm generally fearful of it. So, it protects you. The Gospel protects you from either over desiring marriage or being fearful of it. Because, why? Because of what Jesus has done, because of who Jesus has made you. That's central. You're not ostracized. You're not put away. You're not trying to fix yourself up to get to be married, so that you can actually finally be a person. No, Jesus has made you a person; Jesus has made you new, a new creature, a new person. Because of Jesus, you have worth and dignity and value. Not because you put a ring on another person's finger.

It also shows you that it's about Jesus, so marriage is not just about me. It's not just for me. It's not just for my happiness. It's actually often times the opposite. It's to grow you; it's to serve you' it's to shake off, ground off the rough edges of your heart. You see here, it's about

Jesus. Whether you are single or married, your life is about Jesus. It's because of the good news of Jesus making us His, making us His family that you don't have to drift into the idolatry of either over desiring marriage or being fearful of it.

But some of us do both simultaneously; like, you lived in west Texas and then moved to Fort Worth. And so on one hand, you beat yourself up for not being married yet, like in a traditional sense; and at that the other hand, you seek personal fulfillment through sex or living together with someone outside of marriage. And you go back and forth. I'm not married, ahh. I'm not a real person. But, I'm not going to give into marriage; I'm just going to have sex with this person; I'm going to cohabit; I'm going to live with this person. And we go back and forth, back and forth. So some of you just need to repent of your traditional view of marriage, and your modern western view of marriage and put your hope and life in Jesus. Trust Jesus that He has you, He's for you, He's with you. And He's working this out for your good, which I love.

Often times when we talk about the beauty of Christ in this church, we talk about Ephesians five. That's how Paul lays it out. So Paul does not make less of or minimize marriage by any means. We don't minimize a good thing to make wherever you're at to lessen your pain. That's not what he does. He says marriage is a beautiful thing; it shows off the love that Christ has for His church. If you're single, your life gets to show off the glory and grace of God as well. You get to show it off in beautiful ways. You get to display that the family of God grows not by reproduction through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ. Your life shows that off. That voluntary eunuch life that shows off that the family of God doesn't come through just having children, it comes through people putting their faith in Jesus. That's a beautiful picture of salvation that you get to proclaim with your life.

You also get to grow. Your singleness is for your growth that you would grow more progressively into the image of Jesus, through the pains of singleness and the joys of singleness. Through the pain of like, "This is difficult, and I kind of want this, and this is what I expected." Or "This is not how I thought my life might go." And in those pains of singleness, you get to run to Jesus. You get to cry out to your Father. And in the joys of singleness, you get to serve when you want to serve. Like, I talked to a gal this week, and she said in her mind she was going to graduate high school, go to college, get married, and have kids. Like that was the natural regression that she saw in other people's life and that's the expectation that she had. Like, when I'm twenty-two, I'll be married and then probably twenty-three, twenty-four, twenty-five, I'll have kids. And it hasn't happened for her in that way. And at first she said that that stung, and that it was difficult, and that was painful for her. And then she said, "Now

recently, I'm just thinking the life that I'm doing, how I'm serving the city, and how I'm serving those that are caught up in the sex trade, like it's just a beautiful thing. I get to serve without hindrance, without divided attention, without thinking about this." She gets to serve with another lady that is married and she said, "You know, we got to do that, we need to respond to this, and that gal is like, 'okay, let me check my plans, let me check my schedule, let me check what we are going to do, let me call my husband.'" And she said, "And I love that I don't. We need something, let's go. I'm ready to go. Let's jump up and move towards it." So she just loves this lifestyle that she gets to be an undevoted, focused service to the King and His Kingdom. She loves it. So there are pains, but there are also beautiful joys of singleness. And in both, God is making you more and more into the image of Jesus through them.

Which is the third point that I'm going to make. It captures more of the nondomestic ministry that is so necessary in this world. Having ministry focused towards the home, and caring or focused on the family, or loving and serving your spouse and your children--that's a beautiful thing. There is also things that are going on that need help, that need to be served, that people need to be cared for, that need love. That life that Paul lived, that's how this happens. So in your singleness, you get to partake in that. You get to join in with the gal that I gave the example as. You get to join in that life with her. Serve in that specific way.

And lastly, your singleness is to magnify the all satisfying worth of Christ that sustains lifelong chastity that sustains lifelong sexual purity, because you're saying that I treasure Christ so much. He is so valuable that that fuels me not to pursue sex outside of marriage. "That sounds good, and that's a good thing, but do you know what's better? Jesus! And I treasure Him so much, and He's so good; He's so beautiful." Or as one person said, "That gal looks good, but my God is more beautiful." That is the idea. You are just treasuring Christ so much more. He's so much more valuable and pleasurable that that fuels you for lifelong chastity. That's a beautiful thing you get to show off by your singleness. That Christ is our ultimate treasure. That He is all satisfying. That He is sufficient. So there are good reasons for getting married, and there are good reasons for remaining single. And Jesus said, that some chose not to marry for the sake for the kingdom of God. Let anyone who can accept this accept this.

So I encourage, I want you, if you are single, to not just cope with your singleness or to resign to bitterness in your singleness, but to embrace it with the joys and the pains that come along with it. That it might be used by God to grow you more into the image of Jesus. To ask God what are you doing with and through my singleness. So live as a person that's been placed where you have been placed in your current state. And that's true for everyone. If you're

married, don't try to live the life as an unmarried person. If you're a parent--"Like, I really want to try to and get out to where I'm no longer a parent and live this nonparent lifestyle. You know what would be great, if I could just go out, hit Bar Louie at ten p.m. on a Monday. I'll see how that works. Oh, my kids, yeah. Should have thought about that." You don't pursue something that's not yours, so whatever state you've been given, whatever state you are in, you follow in that. And that's true for everyone. So what you've been blessed with and given in this moment is for your good. God is good to you. You trust Him with whatever place that is. Married, single, parent, God has placed you there in this moment in this time.

But let's come back to that singleness does not equate to loneliness. And the church does not equate to loneliness. The church is the place of rich, meaningful friendships where we know, we care, we love, we serve one another. These friendships that will last forever. And so I encourage you to cultivate these deep, beautiful friendships for all of life, because doing this life alone--not good. Not good. Being a part of God's family, that is good. Rich, meaningful friendships, that is good. Doing ministry with those that we will worship Jesus with forever, that is good. Jesus is good. So I pray that we just turn and respond to Him, worshipping Him for His goodness, grateful for where He has placed us, even if sometimes it's difficult to deal with or a hard pill to swallow, because God is good. And He does good.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for your goodness. I pray for us as a church that we would be the place, the context for rich, meaningful friendships. That people would not live in isolation or alone, even those that think it is good to be alone or maybe they enjoy that. That you would convince them, show them that you're family that these friendships and these relationships are good. You are good in giving us one another. Father, I pray that we put our hope and our life in you. We trust you. That even when our experience does not feel good, or we're questioning it, that we would anchor to and cry out to our good Father. In Jesus name, Amen.