

# Divorce & Remarriage pt.3:

## “Singleness for the Kingdom”

Righteousness & Relationships Part 9

Matthew 19:3-12 5-30-10

Summary: The Disciples conclude marriage is even worse than singleness if that level of commitment is required. Jesus responds not by saying marriage is easy, but that singleness is also a life of total commitment (and celibacy). Those to whom singleness is given should accept singleness as eunuchs in undistracted, constant service of the King of kings.

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**Matthew 19:3-12** Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 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'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." 7 "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry." 11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

## Review

We have been studying through the Sermon on the Mount and have come to the section where Jesus speaks about divorce.

And the subject of divorce and remarriage is important enough and complex enough that...

I thought it would be good to take a little time and do an extended biblical theology on the subject before we move on in the Sermon on the Mount.

This is sermon #3 in that series.

The first sermon was all about the main point of Jesus' words – if you divorce without grounds there is a sense in which you are not really freed from that marriage.

You are still bound to it in the sense that you are required to reconcile with your spouse.

You're not free to remarry.

That's the general rule when it comes to divorce and remarriage.

There are 4 places in the Gospels that record Jesus stating that general rule.

Two of those 4 mention an exception, and so last week we took a whole sermon just to examine the meaning of that exception.

It's a controversial issue, but I made a case for what I believe Jesus was saying - that adultery is an exception to the general rule.

If you divorce your spouse you have sinned against the marriage and are still bound to that marriage in that you cannot marry anyone else and you must reconcile with your spouse – all that is true unless your spouse is involved in adultery.

In that case you do have the right to divorce and remarry.

That's my view.

There are numerous other views, and last week I made an argument against what is known as the betrothal view...

(that Jesus was speaking not about adultery but about infidelity during betrothal).

But we didn't have time for me to address any other views, so I told you if you hold to a different view that you would like me to address to let me know on your prayer card.

### **The “Virginity Fraud” View**

One person brought up the question of what he calls the “virginity fraud” view.

That view holds that when Jesus said except for marital unfaithfulness what He meant was...

“except in the case in which the woman is found not to be a virgin when the bride and groom first come together.”

If you get married, discover that your new wife isn't a virgin, then you can divorce her.

The OT penalty for a woman like that would be stoning, but since the Romans didn't allow for that, Jesus allows for divorce instead.

And it makes sense that Matthew would be the only one to mention it because he's the only one who related the account about Joseph planning to divorce Mary...

, and that was a case of that very thing – it seemed that Mary wasn't actually a virgin when they got married.

That's the “proof of virginity” view.

There are a couple problems with it, however.

Jesus uses a word that, in the context of a married woman, would normally be taken to refer to adultery.

So if we are going to assume the original hearers would have taken the word *pornea* to refer to something other than adultery here there has to be some contextual reason.

The contextual reason that is offered is the story of Mary and Joseph.

But I showed you last week that the story of Mary and Joseph was not an issue of suspected premarital promiscuity.

It wasn't a situation where they got married, and 2 weeks later all of a sudden Mary was showing and was obviously several months along in her pregnancy.

Mary and Joseph were already married in Luke 1 when the angel came and told Mary that some time in the future the Holy Spirit would come upon her and she would conceive even though she was a virgin.

(At that time a couple would spend the first year or so of their marriage apart, so that's why Mary was a virgin but she was married to Joseph.)

We don't know how long they had been married before the angel came and said this to Mary; we just know that she conceived after they got married.

So however far along she was when Joseph became aware that she was pregnant, her pregnancy wasn't as far along as their marriage.

They had been married longer than she had been pregnant, so it wasn't a case where Joseph would say, "Oh, obviously she was promiscuous before we got married."

And beyond that, another problem with the proof of virginity view is that it makes promiscuity prior to marriage a more serious offense than adultery during marriage.

It would be very odd for Jesus to be saying, "If your partner was promiscuous before marriage, you can divorce..."

, but if your partner is sleeping around now and committing adultery, you cannot divorce."

That would be extremely odd because in the OT adultery was punished much more severely than fornication.

Both were sin and both were punished, but adultery was punished more severely because in addition to the sexual impurity you were also sinning against your spouse and fouling up someone else's marriage too.

So if adultery is the more severe offence, why would anyone assume that Jesus was allowing divorce for fornication but not for adultery?

So I don't think the proof of virginity view is tenable.

### **What about Romans 7:1-4 and 1 Cor.7:39?**

Another question that was asked on the prayer cards was this:

"How do you handle Ro.7:1-4, which says that a woman is bound to her husband until death?"

And we could add 1 Corinthians 7:39, which says the same thing: **A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but he must belong to the Lord.**

Why would Paul twice say that you're bound to your spouse until death without mentioning any exception?

The reason Paul would say that twice without mentioning an exception is the same reason Jesus said it twice without mentioning an exception...

(even though two other times He did mention an exception).

Those passages simply state the rule without mentioning the exceptions to the rule.

God's design for marriage is for it to last until one of the partners dies.

The only way it can be otherwise is if one of the parties is rebelling against God.

God doesn't have 2 different ways He desires for a marriage to end.

And I showed you numerous examples two weeks ago of how a general principle is often stated without any mention of exceptions even though there are exceptions.

### **Divorce for pornography?**

So at this point I remain convinced that when Jesus said, **except for pornia** He meant except in the case of adultery.

If you divorce your spouse and remarry you are sinning – except in the case where your spouse is committing adultery.

Another question that came up on the prayer cards had to do with that Greek word *pornia*.

Someone asked if that's the root of our word *pornography*, and, if so, does that mean if a man is involved in porn is that grounds for the wife to divorce him?

My answer to that is yes, *pornia* is the root of our word pornography, and no, I don't think porn is grounds for divorce.

Jesus said that if you look in order to lust you have committed adultery in your heart.

And if adultery is grounds for divorce doesn't that mean everyone whose spouse has looked in order to lust has grounds for divorce?

If so then I think every married person has grounds for divorce.

I don't know if there is anyone who has never looked in a way that would result in the feeding of a forbidden desire.

Jesus is using strong language to make His points, but we have to be careful not to over-apply what He's saying.

He compares anger to murder.

But are they identical in every way?

Should we execute everyone who has called someone a fool or who has left a broken relationship unreconciled or who has become angry?

No. Anger and killing an innocent human being are not identical in every way.

They both come from the same root sin in the heart, and both are a violation of the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, but they are not identical with regard to consequences.

And it's the same with literal, physical adultery and a lustful look.

They are not identical in every way and don't have the same consequences.

In fact, that may be another reason why Jesus uses the word *pornea* rather than the word translated adultery in the previous passage.

If Jesus used the exact same word for adultery that He used in the passage about looking to lust people might be prone to think Jesus was still talking about that same kind of heart adultery rather than literal, physical adultery.

So no, I don't believe use of pornography is grounds for divorce.

## **Introduction: The Fear of Singleness**

We haven't said much yet on the question of remarriage.

Can you remarry if you divorced your spouse because your spouse was adulterous?

What about if your spouse left you?

Or what about if you divorced without biblical grounds but now you've repented?

Or what about if your situation isn't even addressed in Scripture?

Before we get into what Scripture teaches about remarriage, I think we should take some time to make sure we have a proper attitude about singleness.

If it turns out that in your situation remarriage is not permitted, but you really want to be married... , it's going to be very difficult for you to accept what Scripture is saying in your case because of your desires.

When you really want Scripture to say one thing, it's next to impossible to be unbiased in your interpretation.

Our desires have an amazing ability to skew our interpretations.

And so do our fears.

When you're afraid of something (such as singleness), your soul will make it almost impossible for your brain to see the truth if the truth is that you are to remain single.

So it's crucial that before we study about remarriage we understand what Scripture says about singleness...

, so that our hearts will understand that if God requires you to be single that's a good thing and a desirable thing not a bad thing that will doom you to a life of unhappiness.

## **Disciples' Reaction: A Fate Worse than Singleness**

After Jesus made His strong remarks about marriage and divorce in Mt.19, His disciples had a really tough time accepting what Jesus was saying.

**Matthew 19:9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."**

To them it sounded like an intolerably strict standard.

Even with the exception for adultery Jesus' standard was more restrictive than any they had ever heard before.

The prevailing belief was that a man had the right to divorce a bad wife and remarry.

They believed a bad wife was literally a fate worse than death.

In fact, the rabbis taught that no man who had had a bad wife will ever go to hell.

Others compared a bad wife to leprosy and said, "Let him divorce her and be cured of his leprosy."<sup>1</sup>

Some rabbis taught that it was your duty to divorce a bad wife, and men who failed to do so were cowardly.<sup>2</sup>

So along comes Jesus and says, "No, it doesn't matter if you have a bad wife or not.

Whatever wife you have, you need to stay committed to her until death."

And that was such a blow to their cultural sensibilities that the Disciples respond with this emotional outburst...

– "If that degree of commitment is required it would be better to just remain single.

Did they really mean that?

No one should ever get married – just let the entire human race go extinct in one generation?

I don't think they were really arguing for that – they're just giving an emotional reaction.

The people in that culture did not have a high view of singleness.

It wasn't at all like it is in our culture, where singleness is perfectly acceptable.

They thought singleness was a terrible thing.

The rabbis taught that you had a moral duty to get married and have children.

In fact, there's a good chance Jesus was looked down upon for being single at age 30.

So the Disciples are not arguing here out of a high view of singleness.

A second ago when I used that phrase "a fate worse than death" I wasn't arguing that death is an attractive option.

Just the opposite – when we say "a fate worse than death" we mean death would be horrible, but this fate would be even worse.

It's just an extreme way of saying how bad something is.

And what the Disciples are saying here is if lifelong commitment is the rule in marriage then marriage is a fate even worse than singleness.

And everyone knows singleness is horrible.

## **Jesus' Answer: Eunuchs for the Kingdom**

So how does Jesus respond?

Does He respond by giving them an explanation of how lifelong commitment in marriage really isn't as bad as they think?

Does He speak about the joys and benefits of committed marriage?

No, He leaves the subject of commitment in marriage and moves on to correct their low view of singleness.

And if Jesus' statement about marriage offended their cultural sensitivities, they are about to get a statement about singleness that is even more offensive and shocking.

**11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given."**

What word?

What Jesus said or what the Disciples said?

Based on what follows I think it's what the Disciples said.

Jesus is saying, "You just said if this is the situation with marriage it's would be better to remain single – you're right.

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<sup>1</sup> Barclay

<sup>2</sup> Keener 471.

If possible, people should remain single.

I don't think that's the response the Disciples were hoping for.

This would be like if you were in a debate with someone and you said, "Your position is ridiculous.

If what you are saying is true then marriage would be a fate worse than death" and the other person responds by saying...

, "Yes, those who can accept that would should strive for death."

These guys were either already married or got married later,<sup>3</sup> so they weren't the type who wanted to hear about singleness being the ideal.

But Jesus' words are very strong – everyone who can handle singleness should stay single.

### **Everyone to whom it has been given**

Or more literally, **everyone to whom it has been given.**

Everyone to whom it has been given should accept the statement that it's better to stay single than to marry.

Who are these people to whom has singleness has been given?

Jesus goes on to crank up the offensiveness meter even higher by comparing single people to eunuchs.

A eunuch is a man who is without reproductive capacity.

And if you're not crazy about the idea of hearing me talk about the subject of castration then you can appreciate how the Disciples felt at this point.

That was a topic that was extremely offensive to the Jews.

I'm sure at this point they're sorry they even brought the subject of singleness up.

Jewish people were horrified at the thought of castration, and people who voluntarily did that were considered morally depraved.

The Greek word translated **eunuch** literally means "half man" and was used as an insult.<sup>4</sup>

We have insults today that are along the same line.

And so Jesus comes along and says, "Hey, you should give some thought to becoming a eunuch."

### **A Third kind of eunuch**

The Jews spoke of two categories of eunuchs: "eunuchs of man" (castration) and "eunuchs of the sun" (birth defect).<sup>5</sup>

Jesus mentions those two categories -

### **12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men...**

Then Jesus adds a third category: **and others have renounced marriage (lit. made themselves eunuchs) because of the kingdom of heaven.**

I believe Jesus is speaking metaphorically.

I don't think He is talking about people literally castrating themselves for the sake of the kingdom because in 1 Cor.7 Paul says if you have strong sexual desire the solution isn't castration but marriage.

What Jesus is speaking about in context here is singleness – people who decide not to get married.

And He's saying people who make that decision are like eunuchs.

So the point Jesus is making here is "the Rabbis are wrong – there aren't just 2 kinds of eunuchs.

There are three kinds."

The third kind of eunuch is... a single Christian – a follower of Christ who remains single for the sake of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

***Singleness = full time attendance to the King***

Why does Jesus call single Christians eunuchs?

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor.9:5.

<sup>4</sup> Keener comm 471

<sup>5</sup>Allison Davies p.22

I think there were probably at least two reasons.

First, the reason men were made eunuchs in the ancient world was so they could serve full time for the king – without any family responsibilities.

In fact, the word “eunuch” appears 45 times in the OT and the great majority of those the word is translated “official.”

When you read in the OT about the king’s officials, the word is usually eunuchs.

So being a eunuch was a life of undistracted, full-time service to a king.

Jesus isn’t talking about people who remain single for other reasons.

He’s talking about people who remain single so they can be an attendant of the King of kings.

### ***Singleness requires celibacy***

And a second reason why Jesus compares Christian singleness to being like a eunuch is because for the Christian, singleness means celibacy.

In 1 Cor.7 Paul gives only two options – get married or stay celibate.

For the Christian single there is to be no sexual activity at all.

It’s the life of the eunuch.

### **Singleness requires just as much commitment as marriage**

So Jesus gives His standard of lifelong marriage, the Disciples respond by saying, “That’s too hard – you’d be better off single.”

And Jesus’ response to that isn’t “Oh no – you misunderstand.

Marriage isn’t that hard.”

Instead He says, “Oh no – you misunderstand – singleness isn’t as easy as you think.”

The Disciples committed the classic error of thinking of singleness as a way of escaping lifelong commitment.

People very often think that way today.

In our culture people are waiting longer and longer before they get married, and in many cases it’s because of a fear of commitment.

Young men don’t want the commitment and responsibilities of a family, and so they wait to get married later and later and later...

– not for the sake of the kingdom but for the sake of extending childhood until age 35.

God’s model is for a person to be a child and then an adult.

But in our culture a lot of men especially have said, “I’ll be a child until age 13, then I’ll be an adolescent for about 20 years after that...

, then I’ll settle down and take on the responsibilities of adulthood.”

And so instead of getting married and raising children they are setting record high scores on their X-box and going snowboarding and watching movies basically just goofing off.

They graduate from school and think, “Oh, now life is just one, unending Spring Break.”

That mentality is a form of spiritual retardation.

When an adult functions like a child mentally we call that mental retardation.

So postponing the responsibilities of adulthood is spiritual retardation.

You should make the transition from childhood to adulthood as soon as you are able.

So many young people today make the same mistake the Disciples were making here – thinking that you can avoid lifelong commitment by staying single.

For the Christian, staying single requires just as much commitment and responsibility as marriage.

If you want to avoid lifelong commitment you’re in the wrong religion.

No matter what station you have in life, being a follower of Christ makes radical, wholesale demands on your life.

Staying single to avoid commitment is not an option.

### **The Advantages of Singleness**

So singleness is just as hard as marriage.

But Jesus is saying more than just that.

He's not just saying singleness is hard – He's also saying it's desirable.

He tells the Disciples that singleness of the kingdom should be embraced by all to whom it is given.

It's a gift to be received.

Paul also calls singleness a gift and a desirable thing, and he gives some details about why.

### ***Exempt from the trouble of marriage***

The most obvious advantage is if you remain single you avoid all the troubles of marriage.

### **1 Corinthians 7:28 those who marry will face many troubles in this life**

Marriage is trouble.

You sometimes hear about people who have a troubled marriage – according to 1 Cor.7:28 every marriage is a troubled marriage.

I do a lot of counseling, so I get exposed to a lot of suffering (people usually come for counseling when they are in pain).

And of all my observations of people's suffering in life I would have to say that I don't know of anything in this world that has caused more pain than marriage.

Nobody can hurt you like a spouse can hurt you.

And no matter who you decide to marry, that person will be a sinner and therefore you're going to get hurt – guaranteed.

### ***Continual Attendance to God***

So marriage is trouble, and beyond that, it creates a difficult kind of divided attention.

**32... An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs--how he can please the Lord. 33 But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world--how he can please his wife-- 34 and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world--how she can please her husband. 35 I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.**

What does that mean?

Are married people unable to be fully devoted to Christ?

Can we not love Him as much or be fully committed to Him or obey Him completely?

What exactly does this word “devoted” mean?

Actually, “devoted” really isn't a very good translation of that word.

The literal translation would be “to sit beside,” and the word means to continuously attend.

To pay assiduous or constant, continuous attention to someone.

The word says nothing about how devoted you are – it speaks only of how constant your attention is.

When you are married your attention can't be set on Christ is as continuous a way as when you're single.

A spouse requires a great deal of your attention.

You spend time thinking of how to please the person you're married to.

If I'm going to be a godly husband I need to live with my wife in an understanding way.

I need to be alert to her feelings, alert to ways I can make her happy, alert to things that might cause her sorrow...

– I spend time thinking of things to write in birthday or anniversary cards, every decision I ever make I need to take her into consideration.

That all adds up to a whole lot of hours that I'm not paying any direct attention to God.

But does that mean I'm less devoted to Christ (less commitment, less love, less dedication, less obedience, less faithfulness)?

No. Peter was married and he was crucified for Christ.

A married person can be just as devoted to Christ as a single person.

What we can't do is attend to Christ as constantly.



When I love my wife or serve my wife – write her a card or clean up the living room for her or go for a walk with her – I do all that for Christ’s sake.

It’s all part of my calling, and so every bit of it is done out of devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So as a married man it is possible for me to serve Jesus Christ 24 hours a day.

It’s possible for me to be obeying Him and serving Him around the clock in total devotion...

, but what’s not possible is for me to be paying attention to Him around the clock.

There’s a difference between serving someone and attending to that person.

If I take our car in to get new tires, I’m serving my family by preparing a vehicle that they can drive that is safe.

So I’m serving them by getting the tires – but I’m not paying any direct attention to them.

I keep a time log of how I spend all my time every day with several different categories.

And I have two categories of family time – time spent serving the family and time spent actually paying face to face attention to my family.

Those are two different things.

And it’s the same with God.

There are lots of times when we are serving God but not paying any direct attention to Him.

And one of the benefits of being single is the fact that you can spend a lot more of your mental energy in direct, personal interaction and fellowship with Him.

### ***Greater flexibility in ministry***

And on top of that is the increased amount of time and flexibility you have in ministry.

If you just watch the various people in ministry at Agape there is such a difference between the married people and the single people.

The married people are so restricted in the amount of time they can spend...

, and their schedules are so limited because of constantly having to attend to the needs of their spouse and children.

And the single people can so often spend more time and be more flexible and do so much more.

### ***The folly of dating***

This is one reason why I think dating is a foolish thing to do when you’re not in a position to get married.

Dating gives you all the disadvantages of marriage and almost none of the advantages of marriage.

I just think it’s tragic – especially when I see teenagers get caught up in dating.

God has given you this amazing gift of being single.

You probably won’t have that gift for very long, and so it’s a tragedy if you squander it while you have it.

You have this great advantage of being able to attend constantly to the Lord – take advantage of that while you have it.

Being a Christian single is like being a eunuch – a full-time official of the King of kings.

That is a high, high calling and it is a tragic thing when it is squandered.

### **What if it’s not by choice?**

Now some of you might be thinking, I’m single, but it’s not because I’ve renounced marriage for the kingdom.

I just haven’t found anybody yet.

So does this apply to me?

Am I a eunuch for the kingdom?

If you’re a Christian I would say the answer is probably yes, because even though you plan on being married if you get the opportunity...

, there is still a real sense in which your current singleness is for the kingdom.

If you’re a Christian then I assume you wouldn’t consider marrying an unbeliever, since that’s forbidden for believers.

And I assume if you are a woman you wouldn't consider marrying someone who isn't a good spiritual leader for you.

And if you're a man you wouldn't consider marrying a woman who wouldn't be a suitable helper to enable you to fulfill your calling.

In fact, isn't it true that you wouldn't marry anyone unless you were convinced it was God's will for you to marry that person?

No wonder you're still single – that eliminates most everyone in the world.

You're commitment to Christ has reduced your pool of candidates to a very small number.

Not only that, but you also wouldn't consider getting married outside of the Lord's timing.

If the Lord made it clear that now's not the time for you to get married, you would stay single for now.

So your singleness right now really is for the Lord.

Everything you do is for the Lord.

And it seems to me when Jesus speaks of those who are celibate for the sake of the kingdom it would include all people who are single for Christ's sake...

– whether it be a lifelong decision or just for now.

### ***Not everyone can***

So Jesus says if it's been given to you, then accept singleness.

If you can handle singleness then stay single.

But if you can't, then don't pass up an opportunity for marriage to a godly spouse.

**1 Corinthians 7:1 Now for the matters you wrote about: It is good for a man not to marry. 2 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband.**

**7 I wish that all men were as I am. But each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that. 8 Now to the unmarried and the widows I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am. 9 But if they are not exercising self-control they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with desire.**

Very often people think of 1 Cor.7 as an argument in favor of singleness, but in reality it's just the opposite.

Most scholars agree that the problem in Corinth was someone was pushing celibacy for all Christians.

They were telling people not to get married, and telling married people to be celibate within their marriages or even get divorced.

And Paul says, "Look, I admit celibacy can be a good thing – but it's not for everyone.

In fact it's not for most people.

So if you're already married, stay married.

And if you're single and burning with desire – get married.

And if when you're married – act married.

Because if you try to be celibate when you're not supposed to be celibate you're going to make yourself vulnerable to temptation.

The people promoting celibacy for everyone are wrong – it's better to get married and enjoy physical intimacy with your spouse than to risk falling into sexual sin."

That seems to be Paul's argument in 1 Cor.7.

Does he say some strong things about the value of singleness?

Yes, but if you look at what he is urging people to do, it's mostly in the direction of marriage.

If you're single and full of desire, get married.

If you're already married, stay married.

And don't just stay married; act married – don't be celibate.

Marriage is a good option too.

If you're married you can raise godly kids, you can do some ministries as partners that you wouldn't be able to do alone...

, and most of all you can live out a vivid picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church.

So marriage is not a secondary, lesser option – nor is singleness.

**1 Corinthians 7:7 each man has his own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that.**

God has blessed some of us with the gift of marriage and the others with the gift of being single.

And despite the way it sometimes seems, neither one is a curse – both are a blessing.

They are both a gift to be enjoyed and utilized for the kingdom; not a curse to be complained about or neglected.

If you're married, use your marriage for the kingdom.

And if you're single, use your singleness for the kingdom.

And don't fall into the error of thinking one is better than the other.

Singleness is nothing to be afraid of.

If that's God's desire for you then it's a good thing for you.

There are some married people who put no effort at all at putting their marriage to use for the kingdom.

And there are single people who are the same way – all they can think about is the benefits of marriage, and they squander their singleness.

And there are also married people who undervalue singleness.

There are cases where you have a single person in a church, and married people put pressure on that person to get married.

The opposite should be true.

If there is a person who is a faithful Christian, who is single because he refuses to marry an unbeliever or someone who isn't spiritually mature...

, or for the sake of his calling, that person is to be commended and highly respected and honored in the church.

If they decide to marry, there should be no stigma attached, because they have every right & freedom to do that.

But as long as they are single they should be especially honored.

And that goes for all single people regardless of their past – no matter what sins they have committed, as long as they are repentant.

In fact, it even includes people who are single because of the actions of others.

Jesus speaks of those who were made eunuchs by men.

That is a reference to literal castration, but given the fact that Jesus makes the metaphorical application regarding those who have renounced marriage on their own, so that being single is compared to being a eunuch, I think we can do the same thing here.

I can't help thinking about people who have been abused as a child in a way that left them with no attraction to the opposite sex.

I'm not saying that's the case with all people who are not attracted to the opposite sex, but sometimes it happens.

And when it does the world will tell you that you should just revert to homosexuality – because if there is one thing this world cannot abide it is celibacy.

But Jesus here puts those people in the category of celibacy.

It's not wrong (assuming they remain pure).

Those people don't have to get married, but if they don't, they should use their singleness for the kingdom.

## **Conclusion: The honor of attending the King**

This was a very hard word in Jesus time.

It would have been next to impossible for the people of that day to conceive of singleness as a good thing.

In OT times the people of God was an ethnic people.

The way to build Israel was by having babies – that's the way people were born into God's kingdom back then.

So if you're not having babies you're not contributing.

And so being a eunuch was detestable.

Even in the Law of God eunuchs were forbidden from entering the assembly of God's people.

(Dt.23:1)

In a symbolic picture that illustrated God's holiness, no one with that physical defect was permitted to come in.

Nor was it permitted to offer a sacrifice with that defect.

(That's not to say there was anything sinful about being a eunuch – any more than it was sinful to be a leper or for a woman to give birth.)

Those ceremonial uncleanness rules were illustrations and object lessons – not issues of morality.)

Nevertheless, being unmarried or childless in OT times was horrible trial, because of how much blessing God attached to marriage and child bearing.

But God sent the prophet Isaiah to announce to the people that it would not always be that way.

**Isaiah 56:3-5 Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people." And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." 4 For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant-- 5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.**

Notice those words "within my temple."

Isaiah said there is coming a time when eunuch will be able to enter the Temple of God.

Gentiles and eunuchs will be able to approach the very presence of God.

And not only will they be able to approach God, but they will be given a name better than that of sons and daughters.

God will give them blessings better than the blessings of marriage.

To the people back then that must have sounded like nonsense.

A name better than that of children?

There is no name if there are no children.

Remember what Saul said to David?

**1 Samuel 24:21 Now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."**

Don't kill my children because that would forever cut off my name.

So what in the world is Isaiah talking about when he speaks of a name better than that of sons and daughters?

He was looking forward to a time when the kingdom of God would not be increased by having babies physically, but by having children spiritually.

Paul was single, but he said to the Corinthians 1 Corinthians 4:15 in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

He calls Timothy and Titus his sons in the faith.

People are born into this kingdom not by procreation by proclamation of the Gospel.

And the earthly legacy of having children is of zero significance compared to the eternal, spiritual legacy that comes through the ministry of the Gospel.

And so there is no higher calling than to be called as one of the attendants to the King of kings.

If God hasn't provided you with a spouse at this time don't assume God has passed you by.

He hasn't passed you by; He's singled you out.

Most people He calls to be married, but a select minority He blesses with the gift of being a eunuch in His service.

So let's be careful not to idolize marriage.

Let's not make it more than it is, or imagine that it's the ideal situation.

If it were the ideal – if marriage were the most joyful possible situation, then wouldn't there be marriage in heaven?

Heaven is the most joyful, delightful situation possible, and there is no marriage there.

Marriage is a temporary institution that is much like the OT ceremonial law.

It's a temporary institution designed to illustrate the love of Christ and the Church in this age... , but when Jesus returns for us marriage will be forever abolished and will give way to the greatest, most joyful possible existence...

– and that will be an existence of eternal singleness.

We will all have the most joyful and fulfilling position possible for a human being – the high privilege of continuous, undistracted attendance to the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Benediction: Ro 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34"Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.**