

Singleness

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 March 2012

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Today we're going to do something on singleness. We've done a whole series on marriage. We've done that, and that's very good, it's very important, but we aren't all married.

For one reason or another, we're single, maybe because we've never been married, or because we're widowed now, something like that. But the point is that marriage is not the only condition that we are in.

There are singles here, and so we want to do a lesson on singleness. So let me tell you what today's lesson is not about. It's not about feeling sorry for singles.

It's not about telling singles to be patient, and I'm thinking of young singles specifically here, to be patient, and if they'll be patient, God and His good timing will provide them with a spouse.

It's not either of those things, because singleness is not something bad. It's not something to feel sorry about. And it's not about telling them to be patient, and God will give you a spouse and His good timing, because that's not a promise anyone can make.

[1:16] God has not promised to do that, and so we can't say that. And so singles, if this is you, you're not gypped out of something good, because you're not married yet.

God has a different good for you. And so we're going to talk about singleness. So you're not going to hear any of those things. You're going to hear something instead from the Bible. So let's turn in our Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 7.

1 Corinthians chapter 7. And in this section, Paul turns his attention to, we're going to read it, but the Corinthians obviously wrote Paul a letter, and they had some questions, and so now Paul, in this part of his letter, is going to go over those things.

So we're going to begin in verse 1, and we're going to read selectively from this chapter as we go through the lesson. Now, for the matters you wrote about, it's good for a man not to marry.

It's good for a man not to marry. Let that sink in for a minute. Married people, do you think you have gained every good just because you're married?

[2:48] And the answer is no. You shouldn't think that. Marriage is good, but it's not the only good state to be in. It's good for a man not to marry.

And as we're going to see later on, if you get married, you haven't sinned. It's a good place to be, to be married. He's not arguing that. He's just saying it's good for a man to not be married. Let's go skip down to verse 7.

I wish that all men were as I am. Paul's saying, I wish all men were as I am, as single. Single, in other words.

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. So let that sink in for a moment.

Singleness is a gift from God. Marriage is a gift from God. Which one is better? Neither. Neither is better than the other.

[3:52] Both are good. And this smacks our idolatry of marriage that we have in this culture.

It smacks it in the face. Yes, as much as we bemoan the state of marriage in our culture right now, where marriage is deteriorating, the whole idea of it is getting worse.

We need to be careful in our grief and in our anger that we aren't mourning the loss of our idol. Marriage is good.

It's a gift of God. But it is not God. It's not God. Marriage is not the greatest gift. The greatest good. It's a gift that God gives to some people at certain places and certain times in their life.

And so hear me out then. Singleness is a gift from God. And Paul says, I look around and it's good for a man to be single.

[4:56] It's good for a man not to get married. It's good for a woman not to get married. Singleness is a good gift. In many ways, Paul says, it's to be preferred. It's to be preferred.

That's the inescapable conclusion of 1 Corinthians 7. Paul says, no, you don't divorce in order to be single. And if you can't handle singleness because of the sexual temptation, then it's not to be preferred.

You should get married. But singleness is to be preferred. If you think marriage is the ultimate good, if you could finally be married, you would be happy.

You are believing a lie. You're believing a lie. You're following an idol. Marriage is a created gift of God. It's not the creator.

And while it's a good gift, it's not the ultimate gift. It's not God himself. So, Augustine, or Augustine, said, our hearts are restless until they find rest in thee.

[6:01] He didn't say, our hearts are restless until they find rest in marriage. So, if you're pining away for marriage, if you're thinking, if I could just be married, I would be happy.

It would solve my problems. Then you're barking up the wrong tree. It's a gift. It's not the creator. It's not the giver. So, let's look at what else Paul says.

Go down to verse 25. Verse 25. Now about virgins. I have no command from the Lord.

But I give a judgment as one who, by the Lord's mercy, is trustworthy. Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for you to remain as you are.

Are you married? Do not seek a divorce. Do not seek a divorce. Are you unmarried? Do not look for a wife. But if you do marry, you've not sinned. And if a virgin marries, she has not sinned.

[7:03] But those who marry will face many troubles in this life. And I want to spare you this. What I mean, brothers, is that the time is short. From now on, those who have wives should live as if they had none.

That's an interesting statement. And he's going to explain what he means by that. So those who have wives should live as if they had none. Those who mourn as if they did not.

Those who are happy as if they were not. Those who buy something as if it were not theirs to keep. Those who use the things of the world as if not engrossed in them.

For this world in its present form is passing away. So that tells us something about how we should live a married life. If we're married, he says, it shouldn't be in such a way that we think it's going to last forever.

It's not a permanent thing. In this life, happiness isn't. Mourning isn't. Buying things isn't.

Possessing things isn't. Using things. None of that is permanent. And that's what he means by you should live as if you had no wife.

[8:15] What he means is you're not you're not to think of yourself as permanently forever and ever and ever eternally bound to this person. Because you're not.

You're only bound to God. Now, Paul says a number of things here. Again, he says singleness is to be preferred to marriage. He says, you know, those who marry will face many troubles in this life and I want to spare you of those.

And he says, virgins, I think it's good for you to remain as you are. And then secondly, he says, it's perfectly fine and good and it's not at all sinful to seek marriage.

So when I say you shouldn't be pining after marriage, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't seek marriage. He's just telling us that singleness is not necessarily a place of, you know, a higher calling.

It's not a better calling. It's not a place of super spirituality. But either is marriage. Marriage and singleness. One is not more spiritual than the other.

[9:23] And then he repeats himself again. Third. Marriage. Our singleness is to be preferred. And then he explains why.

And this is the amazing truth of Christianity. That this world in its present form is passing away. So time is short. So we're in between times.

We're experiencing the now and the not yet. Part of eternity. Eternity future has broken in in our time. Christ has come. The kingdom of God is coming and has come.

And we're living in it now. And that means that marriage is not forever. Mourning isn't forever.

Happiness isn't forever. Passing, possessing things is not forever. And marriage is not forever.

And this truth is world shaking. There's no other way to put it. Almost all other cultures in this world make an absolute value out of marriage and bearing children and having a family.

[10:30] In our culture, we don't experience it like that. It's kind of going the opposite way. But in other cultures around the world, in most cultures around the world, the family is God.

And marriage exists to bring children into the family. The reason women exist in their minds is to bear children. And so there's no honor without family honor. There's no real meaning or significance or legacy without leaving heirs.

If you don't have children, you essentially vanish. You know how people talk. Sometimes people say, well, he lives on in his children.

Or he lives on in our hearts in this way or that way. That's a reflection of an idolatry of marriage and family. There's no hope in their minds except in the family.

If you can have children, then that gives you some sort of permanence. But Christianity says, that's wrong. The only hope that we have is in God. The only hope that we have is in God himself.

[11:35] And to die is not the end. As a matter of fact, this whole present world is not the end. It's coming to an end. But it's not the goal. It's not the final thing. And all that means, and the reason Paul is explaining all this, is to impress upon us that singleness is a perfectly fine and good place to be.

To be single your whole life is not to live a half-life. It's not to be permanently broken. It's not to be permanently wanting and lacking.

It would have been if Christ had not come. It would be if this world was all that there is. But this world is not all there is.

And so, moms, if you have older children and you're pressuring them about who they should marry or whatever, something like that, do you hear where that is contradictory to the gospel?

There is a place, I think, for talking to your children about marriage. I'm not there. I'm not an expert. I'm not going to talk about it. But are you thinking eternally as you talk with your children, your older children, about seeking marriage?

[12:51] Jesus Christ was single. He wasn't broken. He wasn't living a half-life. The Apostle Paul, as far as we know, was single.

And single adults are not less formed. They're not less realized. They're not less fully human. They aren't broken. They aren't half of a whole waiting for the other half to come and make them whole. Jesus Christ, a single man, was the perfect man. He wasn't lacking anything. Now, in our Western culture, the culture that we live in, marriage and family is not seen as the ultimate goal, the absolute, have an absolute value.

But even though I think it swims around in the back of our minds, and we wrestle with it, and maybe in our subculture of conservative Christians and things like that, that might be a part of it.

But instead, Western culture, the culture where we live, they put an absolute value not on being married, but on getting married or falling in love of this romance, this apocalyptic, world-ending romance.

[14:09] And so they put an absolute value in finding complete spiritual and emotional fulfillment and finding the right person and falling in love with them.

So you've seen that movie, haven't you? What happens in Cinderella? The Disney version, we're talking elementary, the elementary story that we're talking about.

Well, Cinderella, something separates Cinderella from Prince Charming. And there's all sorts of problems that keep her from him. But through magic and through perseverance and through believing or whatever, all the troubles are moved out of the way, and Cinderella and Prince Charming come together, and they live happily ever after.

Or, I just thought of another example. A romantic comedy, You've Got Mail. And in You've Got Mail, you have Tom Hanks, who's Joe Fox, and you have Meg Ryan, who's Kathleen Kelly, and they work in different bookstores, and they're enemies against each other.

But they secretly, on the internet, have this friendship and this relationship that they don't know it. The problem, what I'm saying is, there's these horrible problems that separate them from each other.

[15:29] And through the movie, all these problems, you know, they fight through them, and they persevere, and they endure. And then, if you know how the movie goes, this is how it ends.

They are walking in a park, and they see each other. They, you know, it's the grand finale. And on this little bridge, in this beautiful park in New York City, they kiss.

And it's fade to credits. And it's, they lived happily ever after. Now, that's the story of our culture.

That's the story that we like. And we tell it over and over again in lots of different ways. But it's essentially that. The meaning of life, where you find happiness, and where you find fulfillment, is finding romance, and finding marriage.

Everything else is prologue. It goes before, and it's not the real part of the story. And even everything afterwards, after you find the marriage, after you find the love of your life, that stuff doesn't matter either.

[16 : 34] We don't talk about those things. So, what is traditional culture, where the family is so important, has absolute value, and what is Western culture, with its view of, we gotta find someone, if I can just find a love.

If I can find romance, then I'll be happy. What do both those things have in common? It's this, that singleness, is a bad thing.

Being single, is a grim, sub-human condition. And so that's the story that singles here, over and over again in our culture.

And that's the story that married people here, over and over again in our culture. That's why there's such great dissatisfaction in marriage. Because, people going into it, thought that they were going to find everlasting fulfillment, and instead they found a sinner just like them, who's empty and broken.

But the Bible sets us straight. 1 Corinthians 7 says, marriage is good, and singleness is actually to be preferred, because the time is short. Now, someone might say, what about Ephesians 5?

[17 : 51] We quote Ephesians 5 a lot, because it's a very, it's a very beautiful, very powerful passage, you know, where he says, husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church.

And then he says, and a man shall leave his father, and his mother, and be joined to his wife. This is a profound mystery, but I'm talking about Christ and the church. So, what about that?

Ephesians 5 says that, Christ and the church, and husband and a wife, or the husband and a wife, is a beautiful picture of Christ and the church. So how could singleness be preferred?

Why would singleness be a preferred situation to be in, for many people? When we could participate in this beautiful picture of Christ and the church.

And, I think, we only ask that question, because we are so stuck on the sign, and we're not looking at the reality. The fact is, is that marriage is a sign, it's a picture of something greater.

[18 : 58] It's a picture of, Christ's relationship to the church, my relationship to him. So marriage is a sign, but, it's pointing to something greater.

And so, what is better, when you're driving down the road, and you're hungry, to see a sign of McDonald's, with its, you know, french fries, and you're so hungry, is it better to see that sign, or is it better to have the hamburger and the french fries, right in front of you, eating it?

Marriage is a glorious, it's a good sign, but it's pointing to something greater. It's pointing to something better. And that something better, that relationship with Jesus Christ, singles have.

Yes, they don't see the sign, they don't have the sign, but instead, they have the thing that's better. They don't have a partner on earth, but they have a perfect spouse, in heaven.

So singles, wherever condition you are, older or younger, if you don't see that, what you have in Christ is enough, then, you're making an idol out of marriage.

[20 : 14] If you don't see that Christ, is the thing to have, he is the one to have, then marriage won't help you. Marriage won't fulfill you, if you get it.

Because, and I'm thinking of younger singles here, if you think that, being married is going to solve your problems, it won't, because your marriage, is still going to be the functional idol of your heart, the functional God of your heart.

And, and it's, it's a broken cistern. When, when, two broken pieces of a puzzle come together, you don't get a whole puzzle, you just get more brokenness.

And, you don't get something whole, you get something more broken. Only a love relationship with Jesus Christ, only union with him, can fulfill you.

Only it can satisfy. Um, so don't think about marriage in a way that, exalts it to the place of God, exalts it to the place of Christ.

[21 : 15] Um, the most important thing for you as a single to do, is to pursue Christ. Because, when, money is gone, and happiness and mourning, and life, and, and marriage, and this world is all passing away, at the end, you will have Christ.

Even though you've lost everything else. Um, Christ is your wholeness. And when you have him, you have everything else. You have everything else that you need. And, we've been talking about that on Sunday nights.

And him is everything that you need. And him is every good. And you need to trust him for it. Rely on him for it. Now, I have a few other things that we, I want to say to singles, and to you folks who are parents of singles, friends of singles, things to think about.

Things to, I just want you to hear, and to mull over, and, I'll leave that for you to apply in different ways. And they're all taken from an article called, Singled Out by God, for good.

By, this article, I printed out some copies, and put them on the table. It's by, a woman named Paige, um, Benton. And, she's a, single woman.

[22 : 30] Um, it's a really good article, but most of this is straight from there. So, first of all, just a few things for you to think about singles. And for you, parents, to maybe encourage your singles with, or your friends, to make sure that you're encouraging, or thinking about these things.

One, first, God is good, even if you're not married. God is good, even if you're not married. If you are in Christ, God means, you're good.

He means it. Maybe it doesn't feel that way sometimes. Maybe, on a lonely, Friday night, when you're seeing your friends go off.

It doesn't seem that way, but God is good. And how do I know? Because, on one, lonely, Friday afternoon, Jesus laid down His life, for you.

He died to save you from your sins, He died in agony, and in loneliness, separated, and in pain, and He did it out of love.

[23 : 40] He loved you. And God did that. He punished His own Son, to rescue you, from your biggest problem. He died to save you from your sins.

He died to reconcile you to God. Jesus Christ didn't die to give you a husband. He didn't die to give you a wife. He died to give you God. And if you have God, then God is good, and God is enough.

He died so that for eternal ages, forever and ever, God will be showing, and pouring out, and showing you the kindness of His heart, in Christ Jesus, for you.

Jesus died to give you a new heart, to make you triumph over sin, to save you from hell. God's goodness, and God's love, is not fully demonstrated, at the marriage altar. It's demonstrated, at the altar of sacrifice, where Christ laid down His life.

And so, if you're lonely, if you're struggling with this, dear brother, dear sister, if you're starting to feel sorry for yourself, be careful that you don't run to a fantasy, of if I was just married, then I would be happy, or if I just had this, then I would know that God loves me.

[24 : 58] God demonstrated His own love for us, and this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So don't run to a fantasy. Run to the cross.

In the gospel, there is comfort, for every broken heart. Now, a few more things. Secondly, watch out for false explanations, of your singleness.

Watch out for false explanations, of your singleness. This is how, sometimes we can reason. This is how some people, at times churches, talk to singles.

How sometimes, married people, talk to singles. How we talk to ourselves, as single people. And these are all, false explanations, false, answers, for our singleness.

Here's the first. As soon as you're satisfied, with God alone, He'll bring someone special, into your life. Have you heard that one before? If you were just, more satisfied with God, then God would, bring you, that person in your life.

[26 : 08] As soon as you're satisfied, with God alone, it's like, as soon as you don't want a spouse, God will give you a spouse. Since when is God's blessings, determined on our contentment?

When do we, or ever could we, earn or deserve, or arm wrestle God, to bless us?

Married people, single people, at the end of the day, we're all unprofitable servants. We've just done what we've been told, and we've done a bad job of it.

And so if God blesses us, it's not because we're going to be, you know, it's not because we're super content, we're super righteous, and we've finally arrived, and so God can do this for us. It's of his grace.

That's the reason, this explanation, that as soon as you're satisfied, with God alone, he'll bring someone special, into your life, is a lie. Because it's a gospel of works. It's not a gospel of grace.

[27 : 09] Here's another bad explanation. You're too picky. You're too picky. Now, do you see how that could be, partially true, and partially false?

If, maybe you do have too much of a Barbie doll, or a Ken doll, guy in mind, but that isn't to say, that God is somehow, handcuffed or frustrated, that if you would just loosen up, your standards a bit, he could do this for you.

Again, maybe you do need, broader parameters. Maybe you need to be, more realistic about, who you're going to marry. But, we should never, think, that, that if we would just, somehow get our, expectations right, God is going to bless us.

Maybe we need to be, less picky. Maybe we need to be, more picky. It, that's really irrelevant. Especially if we're saying, God, you know, we need to do this, or God won't bless us.

Here's another bad explanation, of singleness. And, I can remember hearing this, or just telling myself this. Before you can marry, someone wonderful, the Lord has to make you, someone wonderful.

[28 : 34] Or, maybe it comes down, to this lie, that you tell yourself, if I were a better person, then I would be able, to find someone. If I were just, more holy, more sanctified, then, then God would give me, a spouse.

Again, who knows what God's, plan and timing, for this is. Sometimes, seriously, I think, yeah, that person, that single, is not ready, for a spouse. You know, they want me to ask, God to find them, a spouse, but I'm thinking, why would I wish, that person on anyone?

Do you know, what I'm saying? There are places, and times, where, I don't, I think, honestly, we're not ready. You're not ready, to be married. But, that is not, to say, that, that marriage, is somehow, some sort of, second blessing, for being a holy person.

Like, once you finally, get to this point, then you've, earned a spouse, or, God can entrust, a spouse to you, or something like that. A lot of times, what we need to grow, and mature, is someone, God knows those things.

We don't, know those things. And so, singles, don't fall into the trap, of thinking, if I could just be a little better, then maybe God will give me something. Again, go back to the gospel.

[29 : 51] It's by grace. It's not by works. If, if we can earn his blessings, like, as if we could just, earn these things. If we can bargain with God, and, if we do this, he'll do that for us.

Marriage is a gift. That's what Paul said. Now, Friday is my birthday. And, my wife will probably give me some presents. And, I will not have deserved them.

I won't, I don't work for them. She'll give them to me, because she loves me. Marriage is a gift. And, God gives it to some people, because he loves them. And, singleness is a gift.

And, he gives it to some people, because he loves them. Now, so, what's the truth? What's the truth behind singleness? Behind your singleness?

Listen to, how Paige Brown, what she says. Accepting singleness, whether temporary, or permanent, does not hinge on speculation, about answers God has not given, to our list of whys.

[31 : 04] Does that make sense? When we finally, coming to terms with our singleness, with your singleness, it's not going to come, by God answering all the whys, and the wherefores, for your singleness.

But, rather on celebration, of the life he has given. I am not single, because I am too spiritually unstable, to possibly deserve a husband, nor because I am too spiritually mature, to possibly need one.

I am single, because God is so abundantly good to me, because this is his best for me. It is a cosmic, impossibility, that anything could be better for me, right now, than being single.

The psalmist confirmed, that I should not want, I shall not want, because no good thing, will God withhold, from me.

Does that make sense? It's not, the explanation for our singleness, it doesn't come from, I'm too spiritually immature, and I need to grow up.

[32 : 09] And it's not, I'm too spiritually mature, so I don't need one, a spouse. It's, I'm single, because God is so abundantly good to me. God loves me, and right now, the best thing for me, is to be single, and he means, well, he means to do me good.

Now, do you see the gospel truth, behind all that? God is good. He's good to us in Christ, he's good to give us marriage, he's good to give us singleness. Marriage is in a higher life, and singleness is in a higher life.

There is only one higher life, and that's in heaven. And one day, whether we're married or we're single, if we're in Christ, we're going to be there, and it won't matter what path we got there, but that God will have brought us there.

And we'll be done with the sign, married people, and we'll be experiencing the reality, the thing that's greater. Now, listen to Brown, how she finishes her article.

Let's face it, singleness is not an inherently inferior state of affairs. If it were, heaven would be inferior to this world for the majority of Christians.

[33 : 24] Is heaven going to be worse for you or better? Well, it's going to be better, and you're going to be single. And then she puts in parentheses, mom is reconciled to being unmarried in glory as long as she can be daddy's roommate.

Now, isn't that true, married people? The only way that we can, like in our brains, think, okay, I could handle being single in heaven is if my, if Stephanie was right there with me, being my best friend.

But anyway, she goes on, but I want to be married. I pray to that end every day. I may meet someone and walk down the aisle in the next couple of years because God is so good to me. I may never have another date and die an old maid at 93 because God is so good to me. So do you see the balance?

Is it good to be, is it perfectly fine and good to want to be married? Yes. Pray for that if that's what you want. But you know, it might never happen.

[34 : 29] And if it doesn't happen, God is not any less good. Your singleness won't be a half-lived life. It will be a whole life because in Christ, we have the fullness of God in bodily form.

It's not a half-life. It's not a cursed life. It's not a diminished life. It's not a subhuman life because God, in His grace, loves you. So, singleness, singles, don't make a martyr out of yourself.

Married people, don't make a martyr out of them. Why? Because Jesus lived and He died and He rose again so that they could be, you could be with Him forever.

And then, like I said, it won't matter which way we got there. It won't matter that we are there. We're with Him by His side. His nail-pierced hands will bring us to Him and then we will see and be completely convinced that God loves us no matter what we've experienced in this life.

That's all the time we have. Let's pray and then we'll be dismissed. Heavenly Father, you know the heart of every person here and you know the heart of every single person here.

[35 : 55] I pray, Holy Spirit, that this lesson would be an encouragement to them. that the gospel would be an encouragement to them and that we who are married would understand that this reality, this relationship that we are in right now of marriage, it is a temporary one and it's going to give way to something greater.

And so, not to invest ourselves in marriage in such a way that, or to think that marriage is the answer to all of our problems when we know that Jesus Christ is the answer to all of our problems. He is our Savior. He is our Rescuer. Will you please keep us from making marriage into a false Savior, whether we are single or whether we are married?

Lord Jesus, I pray that you would bring hope and comfort in the gospel to those who are single and who are lonely and who are struggling.

This world is so hard on them. I pray, Lord, that you would show that you are good, whether we are married or single. And will you help us to learn to rely on your love so when we have those times of loneliness, when we have those times of brokenness and sin and despair, that your gospel would come and, Holy Spirit, you would come and pour out the love of God in our hearts and that he would remind us of your great love for us.

[37 : 34] Pray that you would help us now as we come to worship. Will you help us to love one another as we sing, as we listen, as we talk to one another, as we have our fellowship lunch.

Will you bind our hearts closer together in your grace? In Jesus' name, Amen.