Matthew 19:1-12

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[0:00] Do sit and in your series sheet you should have an outline of tonight's sermon.! It's the same structure over the four weeks of the series on marriage.! I think it'll help you in some ways. I think it's the only way you'll keep track tonight.

So do keep that open before you. And Matthew chapter 19. I want to start tonight by stating the obvious. That between Genesis chapter 2, which we looked at last week, and Matthew chapter 19, a lot of water has passed under the bridge.
Last week, we looked at what God said about marriage and singleness at the very beginning. But between then and when Jesus arrives on the scene many years later, in that time we hear about lots of marriages in the Old Testament.
Some are described in the Bible in very positive terms. But many of the marriages we read about in the Old Testament are downright terrible.
And yet even in the midst of husbands and wives hurting each other and acting wickedly, God is working out his gracious promises and purposes for his people. In particular in the Old Testament, he works out his purposes through children.
[1:15] He promises to Abraham and to David, depend utterly on the future generations. And likewise, God's promise of a Messiah will be fulfilled, won't it, through a significant birth.

So from the perspective of the Old Testament, God's blessings for the world largely come through families who procreate. And in that context, being childless or unmarried is usually seen in the Old Testament in a largely negative light.
To be unable to procreate in the New Testament was a source of great grief and shame. And so there is little or no evidence in the Old Testament of anyone voluntarily choosing singleness.
There is, however, mention a number of times of those who are involuntarily single. They didn't choose it. The Old Testament speaks of eunuchs. Men who are either born without the ability to reproduce or have had their genitalia removed by some kind of overload.
And of course, eunuchs did not have much status in society. They were generally used rather than loved. But not so with God. There's a really famous chapter of Isaiah, chapter 56.
[2:34] And God promises that in the days to come, even eunuchs who obey his word will be welcomed and they'll be included.

In God's house, Isaiah says, and they will be given a name that is better than sons and daughters. A name that will endure forever. Probably the other thing to say about the years since the beginning from Genesis 2 to Matthew 19 is that they included the giving of the law.
And the law of Moses addressed issues which might arise in the course of a marriage. Even in the circumstances of how divorce was to happen. And how remarriage should be seen and handled.
And so all of that is the setting into which Jesus comes and speaks. But of course, another key factor of the context and the setting in which Jesus speaks is this conflict.
That he's in with the Jewish establishment. You don't have to read just more than a few verses in the Gospels to pick that up. The Jewish religious leaders, they are jealous of Jesus right from the start.
[3:46] They see Jesus undermining what they stand for. And in many ways, I guess he is, isn't he? But as a result, the Pharisees and the chief priests, the scribes, they are always on the lookout for ways to discredit him.

And so once again, you see in Matthew 19 that. Ultimately, they're looking to get rid of him. The Jewish leaders in Matthew 19 are trying to trip Jesus up.
And Matthew makes it very clear to us in verse 4 that the questions about divorce do not flow from a genuine or a humble inquiry.

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They come from a desire to test Jesus and to embarrass him. And so whilst the Jewish leaders were seeking to undo Jesus, many of the other people couldn't get enough of him.
Crowds followed Jesus wherever he went. They may not have all been disciples. They weren't. But they were certainly fascinated by him. In our day, I wonder, it's a little bit like when people follow a celebrity online, on Twitter.
[4:52] Do you remember when all those millions followed Donald Trump? They didn't follow Donald Trump. Maybe you followed Donald Trump. You didn't follow Donald Trump because he was supportive of all his tweets. But you just couldn't wait to find out, well, what's he going to say next?

And so it is with Jesus here. Jesus has just finished teaching the people in parables. And we come to chapter 19, verses 1 and 2. Now when Jesus finished these things, the parables, he went away from Galilee.
He entered into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him. And he healed them there. They're thinking, what will Jesus say next? What will he do next? Well, let's think carefully about how Matthew answers that question.
Point 2 on your outlines is out of an exposition. So it begins in verse 3 with a question from the Pharisees. Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?
Now that question is as silly as it sounds, isn't it? Any cause is a lot of causes. Anything from she killed my mother to she burnt the toast.
[6:00] And they must have known that it was unlikely that Jesus would say yes. But of course they could only hope. Because this was the set-up question, wasn't it?

They were planning to sting him with their follow-up question. But even though it wasn't a very serious question, Jesus responds with a very serious answer. Look at verse 4.
Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female and said, therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife. And the two shall become one flesh.
So they are no longer two, but one flesh. And what therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. Oh, there's a little barb, isn't there?
Look at the start of verse 4. Haven't you read? No, he's saying the answer to your question is there in black and white on the pages of the Bible.
[6:57] Genesis chapter 2, actually. And not only is this the best of ancient wisdom, these are the words of your creator. Effectively, Jesus answers their question with a very strong and emphatic no.

It is not lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason. So God created marriages to be a profound and sacred union between a man and a woman.
So profound, in fact, that God describes them as being one flesh. And what is more, Jesus says they are one flesh because they are joined by God, joined for a lifetime, not to be separate.
And Jesus is basically saying divorce is never good. If God has joined two people together, then divorce is man undoing the work of God.
Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. Well, you see the Pharisees, they think they've caught Jesus.
[8:07] They're happy with his answer because they think Jesus has just contradicted Moses. Is Jesus saying that Moses got it wrong? So in verse 7, they refer Jesus back to Deuteronomy, chapter 4, and this is their second question.

Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and send her away? And Jesus responds to them, doesn't he, in verse 8, and the first thing he does is correct the Pharisees' understanding of the law.
He tells them Moses didn't command divorce. Very carefully, Jesus uses the word permitted or allowed. Verse 8, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning, it was not so.
And Jesus' explanation is that the law of God permitted divorce for sin. I think that means for hardness of heart. But the law wasn't turning its back on Genesis 2.
The law was making provision for human sinfulness. Since marriages were ending and men were sending away their wives, there needed to be legislation.
[9:22] There needed to be protection for the defenseless to regulate how those sort of tragic circumstances be handled. But Jesus says, it wasn't like that in the beginning. He's reminding them

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again of Genesis chapter 2.

And I don't think Jesus' argument is very difficult for us at all. If somebody breaks into your house to steal your computer and you happen to catch them red-handed, the law may allow you, I think, to detain that person, but it prevents you from using excessive force.
There are laws like this today that describe how people should react in unfortunate or difficult circumstances. So just because there's a law about how to treat a burglar, it doesn't mean that the law thinks burglary is okay, does it?
In the same way, just because the Old Testament law described how to respond to the ending of a marriage, it doesn't mean that the ending of a marriage is fine. In fact, Jesus says the ending of a marriage is not fine.
It is not what God wants. It is not how God designed us. And he underlines that again in verse 9. Look what he says. He says, He's saying that in the eyes of God, there's no difference between a man having sex with another woman behind his wife's back and formally divorcing her and then going to have sex with another woman, even if the other woman becomes his wife.
[10:59] Now, of course, Jesus' position on this matter isn't actually that black and white. Because as you'll notice in verse 9, he allows an exception. The verdict that he's just given doesn't apply universally, he says.

He's not saying remarriage after divorce is adulterous in every case. He seems to be saying in the case of sexual immorality, divorce is not a sin.
And by extension, remarriage after divorce on those grounds is not adulterous before God. Now, what are these grounds that he's talking about?
What does sexual immorality mean in this passage? Sexual immorality is any sexual conduct which exists outside the boundaries of moral sex between a married man and a woman.
So it certainly refers to adultery. But it also refers, I think, to a wider category of sexual unfaithfulness as well. So Jesus is saying, if your marriage comes to an end because your spouse betrays you sexually, then there is something about that act which unravels what God has done in a unique way.
[12:22] And under those circumstances, God permits divorce and does not consider adultery, remarriage adultery, adulterous.

Now, notice he's not commanding divorce in those terrible circumstances. No doubt, God would be delighted to find that two followers of Jesus that suffered the worst kind of betrayal could still show each other repentance and real forgiveness so that the marriage could be saved.
I'm aware that would be very, very hard. But it would also be very wonderful. But it's not always possible, is it? And Jesus is acknowledging that where that is not possible, this exception can apply.
I just want to take a step back here for a moment. And I want to acknowledge how hard Jesus' words are here. And for many of us who are here tonight and maybe you are watching, how painful. There'll be some people here tonight who've lived through the aching sorrow of a broken marriage. Others of you will have experienced it as a child in a broken home.
[13:42] others of you have supported people that they love as they go through divorce. I'd be really surprised if the vast majority of us have not been affected by the pain of divorce in some way or another.

And for some here tonight, the very mention of the word brings a sick feeling to your stomach. Tears to the back of your eyes. And I'm conscious of those in our church family who will be listening to this and finding it very difficult.
I don't find any joy in stirring up those emotions. But we must hear what Jesus says to us. The sheep need to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd.
And this is what the Good Shepherd says to us. On the one hand, he says something very black and white which is his major point. Marriage is for life.
All divorce is a terrible departure from God's intention. And for the record, I think those who've maybe experienced divorce first hand would probably be the first to agree with that.
[14:51] They know all too painfully that that is not how things were meant to be. But Jesus also says something that is less black and white and more great.

Here is his minor point. He says in the case of a marriage being torn apart by sexual immorality, there is an exception to this principle. Let's move on to verses 10 to 12.

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Because there we hear from Jesus' disciples. They are listening to Jesus and they answer the Pharisees' question. They've got a question of their own. Look at verse 10.
They say if this is the situation between a husband and wife, it's better not to marry. It's not entirely clear what the disciples are referring to, reacting to.
But they seem to be saying if this is the kind of commitment that God expects, that if God is really serious about this lifelong faithfulness thing, then wouldn't it be better just to stay single?
[15:57] In verse 11, Jesus seems to allow that there's a strong logic in what the disciples say. Jesus says in verse 11, some can't accept that logic that is.

There are those who won't choose singleness because God hasn't given them a life of singleness. But there are others who've been given a single life, verse 12, and Jesus says there in that verse, there are some also who are born incapable of a sexual relationship.
There are some who've been cruelly made that way at the hands of other men, and there are still others who willingly choose a life of singleness so they might serve the kingdom. And in any of those situations, God has given them singleness.
And so Jesus says to the one to whom has been given, the one who can accept it should accept it. The culture that we live in today hates celibacy.
Can't understand it. But once again, we find the Lord Jesus butting heads with our culture. He describes people who've been given a life of celibacy by God, some by virtue of their birth, some by virtue of the circumstances by which they live.
[17:19] And there are some, Jesus says, who voluntarily choose singleness for a time, either for a time or permanently, in order to devote themselves to God's work. Jesus himself would be an example of that last category, wouldn't he?

Jesus lives like a eunuch, to use his phrase, for the sake of the king. And so by the words he speaks here, and his own celibate singleness, Jesus affirms what we saw in Genesis 2 last week, that marriage is not the ultimate thing, sex is not the ultimate thing.
sexual intimacy is not ultimate. For some, marriage is a precious and wonderful gift from God, but for others, the unmarried life is God's gift.
Now, let's take some time to kind of pause and think through the implications of this. What is Jesus saying for both marriage and for singleness? So, two things about marriage.
number one, Jesus teaches that marriage is a joining by God. I think Jesus is taking something that's implicit in Genesis 2 and making it explicit in Matthew 19.
[18:43] Jesus thinks it's really crucial that you don't miss this tonight. marriage. And I think this conclusion is central to the whole way that Jesus thinks about marriage and everything else he's saying in these verses.

I don't think it's saying, I don't think it's overstating to say that the crucial five words of this passage are there in verse 6. What God has joined together.
together. What God has joined together. It's really struck me this week as I've studied this, that when a man and a woman get married, they are not just joined by their mutual consent and promise.
They are certainly not just joined by the words that a minister pronounces. when a man and a woman get married, they are joined by God. When you go to a wedding, what do you see?
You see, you witness a couple making vows to each other, joining hands, exchanging rings, kissing each other, being given away by parents, being pronounced man and wife by the person who officiates.
[19:59] But the most significant thing that happens at a wedding, you can't see. there is a somber, really serious, quite terrifying moment that is invisible at every wedding, which is the thing that matters most.

The God who imagined marriage and who created it to be a profound and intimate union, the God who is the author of love, that God joins people together.
And so, if you're married tonight, God has done something to you. He has glued you together with your husband or wife. And it's on that basis that you must think of your marriage as lifelong, not to be unjoined.
It is because your lives have been merged by God himself that you must not unmerge them. God has joined together. Let no man separate.

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Now, as we've seen, that's a really black and white statement. But there's also some gray, isn't there? And the gray we see here is because of sin. And Jesus speaks specifically about sin on two occasions here, I think.
[21:20] Verse 8, where he says that the relevant Old Testament laws have been given because of hard-heartedness. And then secondly in verse 9, where he acknowledges that marriages are shipwrecked by the sin of sexual immorality.

Yes, there is sin. And sin brings with it all sorts of brokenness and complexity. And so life is not always to be lived with just the black and the white in view.
And sometimes we need God's help to find the best thing to do in a terribly broken situation. And the scriptures give us guidance here in verse 9, as we're going to see in 1 Corinthians 7 next week.
But I want to focus tonight on the black and white because that is Jesus' major point. And I want to tease out the implications of Jesus' major point. Whether we're divorced or married or single or looking to marry, and I want to speak to each of those groups in turn.
Firstly, to the divorced. because life is messy and broken as a result of sin, some of us may have lived through the tragedy of a broken marriage.
[22:37] I want to point out to you tonight that Jesus did not speak these words to make divorced people feel guilty. Jesus knows the circumstances of every divorce.

And Jesus is able, well able, to look compassionately on his people who have lived through that pain. As you know, God has made a way for people to be forgiven for every sin.
And depending on the reasons for your divorce, it may be that you need to repent of having gone down that road. may not be the case, but some may have divorced for reasons that Jesus does not permit.
And if that is true for you, your divorce was not right. And you ought to confess it to God. If there's any way to be reconciled to your former spouse, then you should consider that seriously too.
Now, of course, in many cases, that is not possible. And it may not be possible, maybe because you've married again. And if that is the case, God certainly wants you to be faithful to your new spouse.
[23:46] The Bible never advocates a repentance for divorce that involves divorcing someone else. There may be other reasons why reconciliation isn't possible.

Whether it is or not, a Christian who is divorced when they should not have divorced needs to trust God for his forgiveness and for his cleansing. unforgiveness may not mean that you're free to marry again.
It may not mean that you can avoid some of the painful consequences of your decisions. But it certainly does mean this, that you can rest in the arms of the unqualified love of God.
The blood of Jesus spilt on the cross means there is grace without exception. And we are clean in his sight. And so God does not hold your past against you.
And nothing can change that. And secondly, to the married. Because the primary application of Matthew 19 is towards those who are married, and to us he says this, he says, what God has joined don't unjoin.
[25:03] and what God has knitted together don't unravel. And he wants us to work tirelessly at an extreme cost, if necessary, to protect our marriages from harm.

And so tonight, I want to ask you if you're doing that, that's not a light thing, it's not a little thing.
You've been joined together, not just by a minister, or your shared consent, but by God himself.
A one flesh relationship like this is to be treasured, it's a very precious gift. But if it's something to be treasured, it's also something to be protected, isn't it?
Will you do whatever it takes so that your marriage will last a lifetime? That might mean as you've listened to this sermon, you realize that you need to meet with someone to work through some issues.
It might mean getting some help to tackle an addiction. It might mean dropping a friendship if that friendship is an impediment to your marriage in some way.
[26:17] It might mean a complete reorientation of your life's priorities. It might even mean a new job. Whatever else it means, it certainly means this, daily hard work, daily thoughtfulness, daily repentance of sin, daily prayer, daily grace towards your spouse, and daily forbearance, and daily attentiveness to this relationship.

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Anything less than this kind of commitment will make it very hard for you to do what Jesus asks of you here. and anything less than that kind of commitment leads you to become another statistic. And so you probably know that the statistics on divorce amongst Christians are horrifying. I read one writer this week who said Jesus would be appalled at the ease and frequency with which divorce takes place today.
And I suspect he's right. In fact, I wonder whether future generations will look back at this kind of period of church history, and what will they say when it comes to the issue of marriage and divorce? You know, we look back, don't we, on slavery, and we think to ourselves, how was it that so many Christians did not have a problem with Christians owning slaves? How was it that so many Christians helped perpetuate slavery as an institution?
[27:48] How blind were they? And I wonder whether future generations might look at ours and say the same about marriage. How did so many Christians not have a problem with getting divorced and marrying again?

How is it that so many Christians helped perpetuate a kind of casual attitude to lifelong enduring marriage? Is the Bible not clear?
Yeah? How Christians in our day come to see Matthew 19 verse 6 if you just look at it? Do we see that maybe more as an ideal to aim for but something that's regrettably beyond us?
But many of you wonderfully thankfully are living faithfully in your marriages. And so I don't want to just offer a challenge to the casualness that might be in our view of marriage.
I also want to remind you of the beauty and the wisdom of living God's way. And so I wish I had ours. I could tell you stories about this.
[28:59] I don't have ours but if I did I tell you of Mark whose wife came home and told him of the colleague that she betrayed him with. And I tell you how he still lives with the hurt and struggles with trust but how he stood by her from then on till now.

I could tell you of Jennifer whose husband is an alcoholic who hid it from her for years and still often lies about it now who keeps forgiving him and supporting him and loving him as he battles his addiction.
I tell you about a man called Sam a lady called Sam whose husband is a shell of the man she married because of the grip of mental illness on his life.
I tell you about how much her life has changed in order to care for him. How few of her emotional needs are met by him. How she faithfully walks her lonely road alongside him.
I could tell you about Tom whose wife has dementia and who now often doesn't recognise him and forgets his name and regularly shouts abuse at him and even throws things at him.
[30:17] But I tell you about how he tenderly brushes her hair and how he patiently prays for her and reads the Bible to her with her in her calmer moments. I tell you about Jan who comes to terms with the confusion that she feels about her husband's repeated visits to a prostitute.

I could tell you what it looks like to be faithful to her husband even though she feels sick to look at him lots of times. I've changed the names but the stories are all true.
Stories of happy marriages no but stories of Christian brothers and sisters who are as serious about marriage as Jesus is. Beautiful stories of Christians who treat Matthew 19 verse 6 as if it's a non-negotiable.
stories of wise people who are deeply convinced that God's way is best. So finally on this point let me speak to those of you who are single and would like to be married.
To those who hope for a husband and wife. If you don't think that you could stay married to someone who developed a serious mental illness and was no longer meeting your needs then marriage isn't for you.
[31:39] If you don't think you could stay married to somebody who broke their wedding vows then marriage isn't for you. If you don't think you could stay married to someone whose personality really changed and became unkind and unresponsive marriage isn't for you.

If you don't think you could stay married to somebody who started taking illicit drugs then marriage isn't for you. The thing about getting married is you don't know what the future holds.
but you nevertheless make binding promises that bind you to be a certain kind of person. And so unless you're really up for richer or poorer in sickness or in health for better or for worse then don't walk down the aisle.

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Don't make a liar out of yourself before your family and friends and before God. you'd be better off like the disciples not get married at all.
Which brings me to point four about singleness. What do the words of Jesus mean for those who are single? And again two things.
[32:56] I think they mirror what I said last week from Genesis 2. The first is to acknowledge that singleness in one sense is a deprivation.

What I mean by that is that the single person really is experiencing the absence of something good. Just like Genesis 2 taught us. Jesus affirms doesn't he the essential goodness of marriage.
A profound unity of two people becoming one flesh. The rich blessing of what it is to be bound to another person by God.
And so to not be married is to be deprived of one of God's blessings. So it's not a surprise to find Jesus talking about singleness by discussing the life of eunuchs.
Because eunuchs by definition live life with deprivation against their own will. Although Jesus acknowledges doesn't he that some eunuchs live voluntarily like that for the sake of the kingdom.
[34:10] But even if somebody does choose to live this life they choose to go without something good. And by doing so they testify that God himself is more precious than his gifts.

They testify that God can be trusted utterly even in the face of deprivation. deprivation. So Jesus' language affirms here at one level singleness is a deprivation like Genesis 2 does.
Jesus dignifies the grief that many single people feel in not being married. And he affirms the goodness of the desire to be married. But at the same time Jesus is able to speak about how in another way singleness is better than marriage.
You notice that better is the word that the disciples use in verse 10. It's interesting isn't it? Jesus doesn't contradict them.
What is in the disciples' mind is that singleness might be better than the extremely high commitment that Jesus expects of those who marry? And it seems to me that if the question that the disciples ask in verse 10 has never found its way into your heart and to your lips then you haven't really understood what Jesus is saying about marriage.
[35:44] Because if you haven't grasped all the implications of being joined to someone by God then the disciples' question of verse 10 is an obvious question to ask.

Of course Jesus doesn't challenge the disciples for thinking that singleness might be better than marriage. He also suggests a reason of his own. He says in verse 12 that singleness might be better if you want to serve the kingdom of heaven.
Now singleness is the first normal state for every Christian. Everyone is single at some point in their life. Many are single to begin with, then they're married, and then they're single again.
But we often think of, don't we, singleness as a kind of precursor to marriage. One writer calls it a calling in incubation.
We think singleness, well it has some value, but only some value on the way to something else. It's alright as far as it goes, but it might be better when we graduate to marriage, but that's not how Jesus thinks.
[36:52] In fact, if we had time, we could jump to Matthew 22, and read the passage where Jesus says there'll be no marriage at the resurrection. We'd see how it is that Jesus argues the opposite.

He tells us that marriage is temporary. In the end, singleness is permanent. Marriage might be lifelong, but it's not eternal. And that reminds us again of what we saw last week.
Marriage is not ultimate. Sex is not ultimate. intimate. There's a greater intimacy in the universe than anything that is possible for two human beings to enjoy. And Jesus seems to suggest in Matthew 22 that a day is coming when the intimacy of Jesus' relationship with his people will utterly dwarf any kind of intimacy we've ever known.
on that day, if a husband enjoys an ongoing relationship with their spouse, it won't be based on marriage. It will be based on their shared membership of Christ's church in eternity.
Singleness will be universal. And it's because Jesus believes that the kingdom of heaven, that that is the ultimate thing, he can suggest even in the here and the now, singleness might be better than marriage.
[38:09] Because serving the kingdom of God will last forever. the marriage won't. That's really consistent with what Jesus says in the Gospels, isn't it? How he speaks about family, Mark chapter three.

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He tells us that his family aren't mother and brothers standing outside the house trying to see him, but his family are all who do God's will. This is Jesus who in Matthew chapter 10 says he's come to turn a son against his father and a daughter against his mother.
And that anyone who loves their father or mother more than him is not worthy of him. This is Jesus when Luke chapter 9 told a would-be disciple if he wanted to go and say goodbye to his family, he wasn't fit for service in God's kingdom.
And Jesus constantly subverted the ideals about family in his day. And if that was true then, how much more is that true now? In our society and in church life, which often idolizes family, Jesus drives a bull dozer through our cultural values.
time after time, Jesus insisted that the kingdom mattered more than the family. And the kingdom must come first.
[39:23] That's the same imperative we find in verse 12. So he says to those who can accept singleness, they should accept it. He's not saying it's an option you should consider.

Jesus is saying if you can accept depriving yourself of marriage to serve Jesus, then you should. So it makes perfect sense that some will choose singleness for the sake of the kingdom over marriage. It's not far-fetched, I don't think, to say that when it comes to being devoted to the kingdom, singleness is better. So let me summarize everything I've been saying at my fifth point, the kingdom of God.
What does Matthew 19 tell us about living life in Christ's kingdom? About following Christ Christ as king? So firstly, the kingdom gives you a reason to stay married.
Who was it that made them male and female in the beginning? It was God the king. Who decreed in the beginning that a man will leave his father and his mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh?
[40:29] God the king. Who is it that really joins two people together when they get married? It's God the king. Who was it that said what God has joined together, let no one separate?

It was Jesus Christ, God's king. It's hard to think of a passage in the Bible that makes the lifelong nature of marriage so clear.
So to the marriage, can I say this? Even if you can't think of any other good reason to stay married to your spouse, here is one very compelling reason. Do not unjoin what God has joined.
And that's a matter of submission to God the king. But to those who are currently single, I say to you, here is a compelling reason to stay single. There are two reasons, actually.
The reason that the disciples gave because the commitment of marriage is so great. But there's also the reason that Jesus gave that living life as a eunuch may be the best way for you to serve heaven's kingdom.
[41:38] And of course, no one will voluntarily choose singleness for this reason unless they are powerfully convinced that the kingdom is the ultimate thing. No one will make this choice unless they are persuaded that marriage and sex are part of a fading world and not part of the eternal one.

No one will choose singleness for life unless they've come to believe that deep in their soul Jesus offers to all who follow him a far greater joy than marriage can provide.
Did you hear that sentence? No one will choose singleness for life unless they've come to believe deep in their soul that Jesus offers to all who follow him a far greater joy than marriage can provide.
We don't really have many models of people who've chosen singleness for the sake of the kingdom. And I wonder whether that is because we've just not thought seriously enough about these parts of the Bible. I certainly know I didn't before I got married. And I wonder if we really do struggle to believe that the kingdom of God is ultimate.
[42:53] Ultimate in a way that marriage is not and could never be. And I wonder if future generations of Christians will not only ask us why were there so many divorces amongst Christians but why there were so few that chose intentional singleness for Jesus.

Jesus' own intentional singleness for the kingdom took him to the cross. He spent his single life in order that the kingdom of God might welcome people like you and me.
Jesus does not ask anything of us that he has not already done for us. Jesus does not ask anything of us that he has not already done for us.
And so if you are single here tonight this evening, Jesus looks you in the eye. Jesus looks you in the eye and he asks whether you would be willing to follow in his single footsteps for the sake of the kingdom.

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As I wrap up, finally, fidelity to the king's words. It's ultimately the core issue in the kingdom of God. In a very significant way, God's kingship is exercised through his words.
[44:14] He rules us by speaking to us. And to live in the kingdom of God is to hear his words and obey. It is to hear words from Genesis 2 like the ones we heard last week that Jesus quotes here and to think very deeply how our lives conform to those words.

It's to hear the words that come from the lips of King Jesus himself and reorient our thinking and our feeling and our living around those words. And so tonight we've heard these words from Jesus that marriage is an act of God.
That for better, for worse, we're never to unjoin what God has joined. And we've heard a word of invitation from Jesus to consider singleness for the sake of the kingdom. And that invitation comes with a very provoking challenge in verse 12, isn't it?
He says the one who can accept this should. So the question I finish tonight with is will you listen? Will you be faithful to the king's words? Of course, because of the road Christ walked for us, we know forgiveness.
Forgiveness for all our failures. And we have the strength of his Holy Spirit to help us in our obedience. But the key challenge remains. Will your life be marked by fidelity to his words?
[45:30] If you were to flip back to Matthew 17, you would come to the Transfiguration. You'd read the story where Jesus is seen at the top of the mountain with Moses and Elijah. And God's voice thunders down from heaven.

This is my son, whom I love. With him, I'm well pleased. Listen to him. And in that moment, God calls on us to recognize Jesus as the greatest voice of human history.
He is the one to listen to, even if we listen to no one else. He is the one who tells us what God says. He is the one who tells us what we desperately need to hear. There is nothing more sensible in the world than doing that. He knows you better than you know yourself. Hearing and obeying him is a great act of trust.
And so I'm not pretending for a moment tonight that it's easy. But he loves us. And everything he tells you, he tells you for your good. He's the most trustworthy person there is.
[46:35] He is the good shepherd. And so let me ask you, amidst all the voices you're hearing in your life, are you hearing Jesus more loudly and more clearly than any other?

And does your life reflect that his voice is the greatest voice in human history? And so I want to urge you tonight to listen to him. And then with humble honesty before God, accept his word and be faithful to it.
God says, this is my son whom I love, with whom I'm well pleased. Listen to him. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.

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