

***Foundations: Flesh Of My Flesh***  
***By Jason Huff***  
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***Mark 10:1-9; Ephesians 5:21-33; Genesis 2:4-25***

Our final Scripture reading today is from Genesis 2:4-25. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens – and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground – the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.”

Marriage is a universal norm regardless of religion, tribe, or culture. Expectations differ; cultures practice marriage differently sometimes. But marriage transcends society. In my research this week, I found that one society – the Mosuo people of southwest China – doesn't practice marriage. It's a small group of about 300,000 people total. The Mosuo men were traders for centuries, gone for long periods in trading caravans, often never to return. Their society got so used to men not being around that they started a system where they didn't expect them to be around. Out of 7 billion people, thousands upon thousands of cultures, I could literally only find one example.

That's because God made humanity male and female and brought us together in a unique relationship, different even from all the other animals. God has intentions for marriage because of the way He created us. While Genesis 1 tells us about the creation of everything, Genesis 2 focuses specifically on the creation of humankind. What it says to us is so important, especially now when we live in a culture that does not understand how we were designed and does not understand the goodness of marriage as it was intended for us.

At first, it might seem like we're getting a different account of creation, but a closer inspection tells us something different. Genesis 2 takes place when no shrub or plant of the field had shown up yet. Now God created vegetation on day 3 in Genesis 1. But the shrub and plant mentioned here are different. They are thorny, difficult plants, crops that require hard work, that die during a drought, that humanity will contend with after sin enters the picture. This is foreshadowing. We're being told that things were better here in Genesis 2.

Before things became the way they are now, the LORD God formed man from the dust. This is the introduction of God as LORD, which in all caps signifies the personal name of God we sometimes say as Jehovah or YHWH, the name so sacred that Jews to this day don't speak it. In Genesis 1, God's name is not specific. Here, it *is* – this is YHWH God.

Already, God has made Himself personally known. He is not just the Creator. He is not just a random God. He is *the* one, true, personal God – YHWH. He makes Himself personally known to Adam. God is intimately involved with the creation of man. God forms Adam and breathes the breath of life into him; that's a very personal picture. Man becomes a living being because of what God does. Man doesn't exist apart from God.

Then God places the man in Eden, in a garden of wonderful trees. It's at the crossing of four rivers, two we still know and two we don't. The descriptions of the lands these rivers run through give us the sense of just how good Eden is; all this goodness flows from out of Eden. I think about going out to the orchards on the outskirts of town and thinking how good they are, all the different varieties, Granny Smiths and honeycrisps and Jonagolds, and at the same time how dull they are in comparison to the richness of Eden. God places Adam there to work it – cultivating it, caring for it, making it grow. It's good work.

Then we come to the twin trees dead set in the middle: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God gives Adam one command – don't eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you do, that very day, you shall surely die. It's that severe.

Let's stop here for a minute and recognize what we see. Two things are central to the garden and to Adam's existence – the blessing of life from God and the limitation of being a creature. God blesses Adam with both life and limits. Not everything is yet meant for him. God would spare Adam this, at least until he is ready. Can you imagine what the world might have been if Adam had waited until God gave His permission, when God had so bonded with Adam and Adam with God that the knowledge of good and evil would not have corrupted us?

God sets up good limits for us, for our benefit. Think how every modern highway has brightly painted lanes. They keep us on the path, away from the side of the bridge or mountain. God was not trying to hinder Adam, any more than a guardrail hinders you from going off the side of a cliff. We'll talk about limitations more in a minute, but remember this: the limits God places in our way are for our good. God desires the best for us. He wants us to flourish. We do best when our limits are clearly established and in the center of our vision – because meaningful and fruitful life is there at the center too.

Then God says, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." God is in relationship with Adam, but Adam is very different from God. Adam will feel alone without a companion like himself. Adam needs a suitable helper. This word "suitable" in Hebrew is more like an equal opposite to the man or an equal corresponding to him. Sometimes we think of a helper as someone below us on the pay scale to help us get done the things we don't have time for. Not here. The helper God has in mind for the man is equivalent to him, different from him yet equal to him, and appropriate for the good work God has made them for.

Like in so many situations, God doesn't just state a truth; He illustrates truth. God doesn't just say to Adam, "Hey, you need somebody." God allows Adam to name all the animals. Adam's job is to exercise dominion over this world, to care for it, so it's an appropriate job. He has authority over them. They get through all the animals, and Adam's like, "Hmm. Lots of animals here. But there's still no one who can help me with the task God's given me." God lets Adam see all the life He's made, and God lets Adam realize, "I'm not complete."

Once Adam realizes this, God puts him in a deep sleep, takes a rib from Adam, and makes a woman. God forms woman from the same material as the man; they are indelibly linked. We might be curious about, "why the rib?" The Bible never comes back to it. The great church theologian Thomas Aquinas suggested that she wasn't made from his head so she wouldn't rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled by him, but from his rib to always stand with him and beside him.

When he awakens, Adam is astonished. He exclaims, – "At last! Finally! One like me! Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone!" Just like in English, where the word *woman* is directly related to the word *man*, her name in Hebrew is *ishshah*, the word for man being *ish*. After long searching, here is the one made for me, Adam says.

This is why marriage exists, why a man leaves home and unites to his wife. They're meant to go together. This is what we were made for. We were made for companionship. It is not good for us to be alone. We are meant for someone who compliments us, both the man for the woman and the woman for the man.

And at this early stage, not having clothes didn't make a difference. There was no shame. We get antsy talking about it, but *they* weren't embarrassed. In a relationship blessed by God, without sin entering into the equation, without lust, without fear, without brokenness, what was there to be ashamed of? There was nothing unbecoming about it. Before the corruption of sin, everything was honorable about Adam and Eve.

Let's finish today looking at two major points we learn from Genesis 2. The first thing I want to emphasize today is this: *Christians respect women*. Sin has thrown a monkey wrench into this truth. Sometimes men have insisted that Scripture teaches women are subservient and lesser. It does not. It teaches that women were made from men – they are not lower, but made of the very same stuff. They are equal to men on a spiritual level and deserve the respect of men.

Women are among the most brave, loyal, and dedicated believers we read about in Scripture. Women supported Jesus' earthly ministry financially. Women were the first to Jesus' tomb and the first to see Him alive again, and they held their ground against the men who scoffed at their story. They received the same spiritual gifts from God like prophecy.

Ancient Near East culture saw women as property, except Judaism. Ancient folklore saw women as entirely different, a different species, a different race. Not so with the Israelites. Now sin often entered the equation, as the Bible attests. Women were often treated with dishonor and disrespect, to the culture's shame. But from the very beginning, God states that the creation of men and women, distinct, separate, unique, but equal and distinctly complimentary, is good.

Does this mean that men and women have absolutely no differences in our roles or physics or priorities? No – but that's not what we mean by equal. What we mean is that we all have equal spiritual standing before God. We all matter to Him. We're not to replace one another but to compliment one another. A woman doesn't have to strive to be a man. As she is, as she was made, she is made in the image of God, just as man was. Just like the man, she is now sinful and flawed, but she is saved through faith in Christ through His grace, just like the man.

As Paul writes in Galatians 3, the dividing lines of Jew and Greek, slave and free, man and woman, mean nothing when it comes to knowing Jesus as Savior and Lord. Despite our differences, we are united through Jesus. As our sisters in Christ, women are due our utmost respect. I say this especially to the young men in our congregation listening today. Respect the young women in your path. Be kind, thoughtful, never aggressive. They deserve nothing less.

When we read in Scripture of a wife submitting to her husband and a husband loving his wife, Paul is teaching us how to deal with the ramifications of sin. And yet, in Christ, order is restored and genuine good comes out of it. In Ephesians 5, women are called to submit to their husbands – not other men, just their husbands – as the church submits to Christ. That submission is not meekness in response to dominance, but willingness to help the husband do what is right before the Lord rather than demanding her way.

But men! We are called to love our wives like Christ loved the church, helping them be clean before the Lord, giving up our lives for them as Christ gave Himself up for the church, loving them like we love ourselves, because they are a part of our selves! Before we say a word about submission, we need to clean up our act! A man who is that righteous and loving and good to his wife – let's just say that if we all acted this way, this would not be a point of contention.

And that leads me to my second and final main thought for today: *Christians believe in natural marriage and the reality of gender*. This is a loaded topic in today's world where very few in either the world or the church respect either one. Let's start by defusing this a little bit.

Christ called us to love all people, even our enemies. There is no room for hate in the Christian heart. We care about all people, no matter what choices they make or how they identify themselves. Nothing convinces others of Jesus' love and truth like a life of love lived out in front of them. We approach this topic with tenderness towards a world in serious moral confusion about these issues, and honesty that the church has often condemned "those people over there" without dealing with the moral problems under our own roof.

Genesis 2 speaks to the reality of marriage as God designed it between a man and a woman and the uniqueness and specialness of gender. God intends marriage for great good, not just for procreation but for personal intimacy, for love, for help, for sustaining one another, and even to point us to the relationship between God and His people. It was meant to last. It was public because a stable society needs stable marriages and families. And it was meant for a man and a woman, two separate genders, precisely because they aren't identical but complementary, meant to counterbalance and harmonize each other. God means for us to flourish! And God brings about some of that flourishing in this particular way.

Earlier I spoke about how God places limits on us for our protection and benefit. God created marriage as a sacred, lifelong union between a man and a woman to protect us, benefit us, and, yes, to set limits on us. As our Creator, God has the right to tell us who we are and who we aren't, what qualifies as marriage and what doesn't. We do not believe that we can redefine marriage or gender. God sets those limits for us intentionally, again, so we could flourish.

As we learned in Genesis 1, God brings order and stability to what would otherwise be chaotic. The boundaries God places on relationships bring order and stability to society. We do not live as truly independent agents; our choices and decisions affect society, whether we believe so or not. Modern culture says that our relationship choices don't affect anyone else, but they do. We learn by imitating our parents, our mentors, and our peers. The vast cultural changes in the last fifty years surrounding divorce, cohabiting, and sexual liberties show this is true.

To decide that marriage is unimportant, or that marriage is whatever relationship combination you want it to be, that you can be a gender that doesn't conform to basic anatomy and science, that your sexual identity is your most important trait – all of these put us in the place of God. They crash headlong into the boundaries God set for us, boundaries found in nature. We may feel like we're finally free of rules and restrictions, finally becoming who we are "supposed" to be, but it ultimately does not lead to the flourishing God intended for us. We may find temporary happiness of a sort, but not the genuine joy and thriving God alone can provide.

We may genuinely feel as if something's wrong, something's out of place, that our attractions are different than what most people have, that we don't fit the body we're in. Those can be real struggles. All of us have some place where our feelings conflict with God's intentions for us. All these things point to the truth that we live in a broken world where we struggle with sin and brokenness in our world that affects us in different ways. But we have choices. Those issues we face, whatever they are, they can point us to a relationship with God, where we turn those things over to God and trust in His grace to get us through them, or they can point us to a life without the guardrails God intended.

This isn't to say that we don't all make mistakes along the way. That's why God gives grace to all who would trust in Christ and follow Him. All of us have sinned in failing to fully embrace the role God has for us. We do not condemn anyone. We believe that Genesis 2 shows us God's intentions for us, how we were made to be, and how we can best thrive even now in the broken world we inhabit. We embrace the truth of natural marriage and gender not because it's easy, but because God made us this way and declared it very good, and He blesses us when we live according to His will.

Next week, we'll see just how we got into the mess we're in still today. But for now, let's rejoice in the fact that God made us, that He made men and women to compliment each other, and that we can still experience the joys He intended for us when we follow His paths and respect His limits.