

sermon - singleness - 3 Encouragements in singleness (1 Cor. 7:6-9, 25-35)

This morning we continue our series on the family. We have addressed Marriage, Parenting, Children, and this morning we will address the topic of singleness. This is very important topic for us to discuss, and I hope for two main outcomes, that first, the singles in our congregation would be encouraged, and secondly, that we as a faith family would think more biblically about the issue of singleness.

We are talking about singleness, and that's not to call anyone out, it's a shame that I even have to say that, because our culture and the church has walked away from a biblical understanding of singleness. As if there is something wrong with being single. If we are single, we so easily assume this level of shame, and if we are not single, we so easily look on singles as if there was something wrong with them. There is not a ready acceptance of someone's singleness as being good and godly, but rather speculations about why that person is single, be it immaturity, sexual immorality, or selfishness. Now are those things real, yes they are, we will get to that in a minute, what I'm saying in this intro, is that we at least need room in biblical worldview for the acceptance and the celebration of singles.

Our text for today is a passage in Corinthians, where Paul is addressing these issues that were going on with them. 7:1, do not touch a woman. Asceticism. Celibacy raised up as more holy than marriage. Paul has to address this, but at the same time affirm singleness as a godly option.

And what's interesting, is we've actually reversed the situation in Corinth. They wrongly were devaluing marriage and were therefore wrongly lifting up singleness as being more godly. And what I believe our culture has done, for the most part, is completely reverse this and where we have rightly regained, in many respects, an emphasis and understanding on marriage, we have flipped the scale and treat marriage as something special and as which often happens, when we get passionate about something, treat singles as if they are second class citizens in the kingdom.

The Bible presents something radically different. There is a value, joy and celebration to be had in being single.

This morning I want to look at a couple exhortations to singles and then a few encouragements to singles.

1a. If you are content being single and controlled sexually, consider a life of singleness.

1 Cor. 7:6-9, "Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion."

This first encouragement, is given to those who may have the gift of singleness. That's what Paul calls it here, a gift from the Lord. Now when we bring up the idea of the gift of singleness, its funny, at least this was me, its like, "Oh no! Do I have the gift of singleness? Please no God I don't want that gift!" But that's not the way the gift works, its not forced upon upon you. You see, if you are not wanting the gift of singleness, you probably don't have it. The gift of singleness is a gift that you would receive with joy, not with anxiety or frustration, with joy. The gift of singleness leaves one content in being single. But there is this other component involved with the gift, and that's that you are also sexually controlled. So being content in your singleness as you act out sexually, and cannot control your passions, you don't have the gift.

But if you find that you are content in being single and you have your passions under control, the Bible holds out to you singleness as a godly, worthy, and awesome way to live your life.

For the rest of the singles, part b, **1b. If you are discontent being single and/or uncontrolled sexually, pursue marriage.**

These are those that evidently do not have the gift of singleness because they really desire to be married and/or their sexual passions are difficult to control.

Now the first thing I want to acknowledge is that sexual desire is good and godly, but like anything else it can be perverted. What I want to challenge is singles who often allow their strong sexual desires to promote incredible shame and guilt.

You are living example of Romans 7, you do the very thing that you do not want to do, you have all these passions inside of you. And what I want to do is to let that turn into shame, guilt, and sexual confusion, but to allow that desire to do something for you, namely, pursue where it belongs, and it belongs in marriage. So, if you are sinning sexually, yes, stop it, repent from it, but after that, pursue marriage. "But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion." The language here for burn is ambiguous, translators can't figure it out, but the best solution to think that Paul intentionally left it ambiguous to mean both, there is a burning desire inside of you, and that there is a real sense of burning judgement on you if you are living in sexual immorality.

So, your sexual desire is good, it was put there by God, it's part of His design in creation, but sexuality is to find biblical expression and satisfaction, and God's good and holy design for you to experience that is within the marriage covenant. Allow your sexual desire to lead you not another fantasy novel or website, but to pursue marriage.

How do you pursue marriage?

1. Seek the Lord. Don't trust in marriage. Trust in God. Marriage is a poor savior. Seek first His righteousness and all things will be given to you. A desire for marriage doesn't mean you will get married.

2. Instead of seeking someone to meet your needs, seek someone whose needs you can meet. This is where the gospel gives you a radically different approach to pursuing a mate, because its not about you. It's about your spouse. Christ came not for Himself but for the church. So when you meet someone and you think, "they aren't right for me." just ask, is that selfishness talking. I'm not saying marry whoever and that love and chemistry and wisdom and discernment aren't important, i'm just saying the field is much wider than we often make it. Biblical marriage is all about the other person, so you might as well go ahead and start thinking that way.

3. Instead of looking for the perfect spouse, look for a spouse.

This idea of a perfect spouse, or this one soul that's out there that you just got pray and hope you come across, and if you miss it, you missed it, and if you find it it's the best thing ever, that idea comes from pop culture and hollywood, not the Bible. And there's no telling how many marriages haven't happened because you got either guys or girls thinking there is this only one option out there. Is he the one? Is she the one? I've heard it said, if we really take that thought seriously, as soon as one person fails to marry who they were supposed to marry, they mess it up for everyone, the math doesn't work. No, I'll tell you what the Bible says, and its pretty much very quiet on the issue, except that they are a believer. If they are a believer, they are an option for you And once you marry, guess what, according to God's sovereignty, that's the perfect spouse for you, that's the one, no one else. You don't get married and then 5 or 10 years later meet another guy or lady and start thinking, you know what this is really my soul mate. No. No. No.

The other idea of looking for a perfect spouse is that you are looking for someone who is perfect. She or he is a 10 on every scale. I'll tell you right now, if that is your standard, you will be single the rest of your life. Or if you do get married its because you didn't really know the person, and you will soon be disappointed and looking elsewhere.

other advice: men we got to step up, lead, get out of our comfort zone, pursue the ladies.

women: we men need help, you might need to get in our way.

So whether you content in your singleness or single and pursuing marriage, it still remains, how to glorify God in your singleness. And these next two encouragements are ways, or advantages, to being single that you can leverage for God's glory.

2. Use your singleness to proclaim the sufficiency of Christ and His coming kingdom

1 Cor. 7:25-31, Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away."

A right view of singleness begins with a right view of the world in light of eternity with Christ. Point is- Marriage is of the world, and marriage is passing away. Listen to what John Piper says in his sermon, singleness: a name better than sons and daughters, which I highly recommend. He says,

"I am not sentimentalizing singleness to make the unmarried feel good. I am declaring the temporary and secondary nature of marriage and family over against the eternal and primary nature of the church. Marriage and family are temporary for this age; the church is forever. I am declaring the radical biblical truth that being in a human family is no sign of eternal blessing, but being in God's family means being eternally blessed. Relationships based on family are temporary. Relationships based on union with Christ are eternal. Marriage is a temporary institution, but what it stands for lasts forever. "In the resurrection," Jesus said, "they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30)." -John Piper

This world is passing away. Our job is to live in this world and not be of this world. It's ending. It's already ended in some sense. The new kingdom and new age is dawning and has dawned. That's what he means when he says the time is short, we are in the last days, if you are living for your value in this life, which includes marriage, you are deceived. As John says, do not love the world or anything that is in the world, if you do the Father's love is not in you.

Loving the world is to say to everyone else you value the world, but when you do not love the world but love Christ, you show the world that Christ is infinitely better, more satisfying, more glorious than anything the world has to offer. And as a single, in a culture that puts, so much weight and glory on marriage, when you live content, you make heads turn and people start asking questions. I don't have to live for marriage because I'm not living for this life, and Christ is my husband, my king, my Lord, He satisfies me.

Singleness gives us a unique ability, opportunity to proclaim Christ.

One of the pitfalls we have with something like singleness, or anything where we are tempted to look across the street and covet, is to believe God is holding out on us. God does not hold out on us. How can he? As Paul argues in Romans 8, "If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare His own Son, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things." The best thing that you could ever be given is God Himself, and that's what God has given you in Jesus. If you have been given Jesus, you've been given everything. It's the testimony of God's goodness toward you. He's sovereign and He's working all things together for your maximum pleasure and joy. That's His promise in Christ.

Is being single easy? No, and I'm not going to stand here and say that it is, I was single for 10 years, I've been there, but what I'm saying is the Bible presents to you a Christ that is infinitely better than the joy you can

experience in marriage. And the Bible is asking you to trust God through the pain, through the confusion, through the trial, trust Him that He is sovereign and He is good. Is there a promise in the Bible that you will get married? No. Is there a promise that God is with you. Absolutely.

So if you are single, for whatever season, whether temporarily or long term, you are to trust that God has given you a particular blessing in being single. You might say, well it doesn't feel like, to which I would reply, well just wait, God's going to blow your mind one day, as again from Rom. 8, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time do not compare to the glory that is to be revealed."

3. Use your singleness to serve the Lord (28b, 32-35)

28b Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that.

32 I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. 33 But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, 34 and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. 35 I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord.

He's saying married people experience certain worldly troubles that single people may be spared (now we have to be pretty cautious here because of what Paul says in v.26 that at least this commendation may refer specifically to their context, some distress that we are not privy to, is it famine, is it the death of some in the community, is it persecution, we don't know, but the idea is, in light of what is going on, why add to this the responsibilities and burdens of marriage). Single people can most surely have worldly troubles, but there may be particular ones in marriage, which Paul doesn't clarify, so I don't want to speculate too much, in which single people would not have to face.

But then he gets down to 32 which seems to speak more generally to us.

So the single person will not have certain troubles, and they will not have certain concerns and cares that married people have. If we were to sum up the argument, we would say singleness affords a particular advantage, or freedom, to serve the Lord.

This is not automatic. It doesn't just happen. That's why the application verb here is leverage. You got to leverage your singleness to make it function in this special, God glorifying way. Singleness is not leveraged by laziness, it's leveraged with diligence.

As a single person, you have more freedom than you can possibly understand. You ask any married person, or married with kids, and the response will be very similar, two things, "I don't understand what I used to do with my time.", "there's no way you could have prepared me for this."

Listen, once you get married and have kids, you have to be so intentional about everything you want to happen,

Community / Service: Small group, serve the body, disciple others, get involved

Missions / Evangelism: service, short/long term missions, how can you leverage your freedom for missions?

Devotional life. Use your singleness well to cultivate devotion to the Lord. You have so much time to read, to pray, to spend time worshiping the Lord, fasting, talking with others.

So how do you waste your singleness? Here's how you waste it. You fall in love the world, you live for the world, rather than with God. Don't waster your singleness. Proclaim Christ, Trust God, sacrifice for Him.