

Marriage, Sex, and the Hope of the Gospel

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[0 : 00] This morning we are continuing our series called God's Beautiful Design, and we're looking at these areas of gender and marriage and sexuality. These are real hot-button issues in our culture and our society.

And this morning we are looking in particular at the subject around marriage. L.P. Hartley wrote a book called *The Go-Between*, and the opening lines of this book go like this.

The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there. The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there. In other words, sometimes the past seems so radically different from what we're experiencing now, it might as well be an intercontinental move.

And even though it was just a few years ago, it's a little bit... And I think the one area in which we're experiencing this maybe more than any other is the area of sexuality, gender, and marriage.

It feels in many ways like our culture is a T10 typhoon is moving through our culture, and we haven't even kind of emerged to assess the aftermath, except this typhoon is not just passing through.

[1 : 14] It's here to stay. It's a little bit of an old example, but bear with me. I think one example of how quickly our culture's attitude towards marriage and gender and sexuality is changing is seen in the previous U.S. President, Barack Obama.

In 2008, he was campaigning in his first term of office, campaigned against same-sex marriage.

Four years later, campaigning for his second term, he campaigned for same-sex marriage.

And then at the end of his second term, just three years later, was threatening to withhold federal funding from any states that didn't allow transgendered children to use the bathroom of their choice in public schools.

So here we see an example, just recently, of in a matter of just a few short years, the cultural norms and societal attitudes towards gender and marriage and sexuality changing so radically.

Now, I'm not making a political statement at all about any of those things. I'm just trying to make the point of how quickly our views in society are changing on these matters. Now, it's important to know that while the past may feel like a different country, that doesn't necessarily mean that it's always a better country.

[2 : 28] Sometimes we can think of traditional values as maybe aligning with our own values, and things are changing so quickly that we can think the past is good, the future is scary and dangerous.

And that's not necessarily always the case. There's lots about the past and even traditional values that were oppressive and restrictive, and we should celebrate that much of that has changed.

I think one example is the persecution and the animosity, which generally the church has attributed towards the gay community and towards women.

And we should celebrate that much of that is changing. And the church has not always been on the right side of history. And the Bible shows us that both conservatives and liberals, progressives and traditionals, both of us can be blinded by our own ideas and ideology.

And so this makes things confusing. If things are changing so quickly, and if both conservatives and liberals can get these things wrong, how do we who are followers of Jesus and who love the Bible make sense of all these things?

[3 : 33] Where do we stand? Do we go with culture? Do we not go with culture? How do we make sense of this changing landscape? Well, in Romans chapter 12, verse 2, in the message translation, it says this, Don't become so well adjusted to your culture that you just fit in without even thinking.

Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what He wants from you and quickly respond to it. And friends, that bit of wisdom is going to help us as

the tides of culture sway this way and that, and ebb and flow, and as culture is confusing as it is, God's wisdom about not being so readily swayed by culture, but fixing our minds on the sovereign God who said, I am God, I do not change, is going to give us profound sanctity and security and wisdom, even as culture changes so readily and so quickly.

Okay? Don't become so adjusted to your culture that you fit in without even thinking. Fix your attention on the sovereign God, the God who said, I am the Lord, I do not change, therefore you are safe.

Malachi 3, verse 6. And so, sexual relations have the ability to be uniquely satisfying, but they also have the ability to cause unprecedented pain and trauma and heartache.

And the pain and the trauma that is caused by sexual sin and brokenness is unlike anything else, which is why we want to take the time to look at these things. Now, for those of us that are Christians, I hope you know that the Bible is not just a book of rules and spiritual truth and principles.

[5 : 17] The Bible is, in fact, one big story from beginning to end. And this story has four chapters in it, four divisions or parts to it.

And the four chapters are creation, fall, redemption, restoration. Or another way is creation, fall, redemption, consummation. Okay? And so those are the four chapters or the four points of this morning's talk.

Right in the very beginning of the Bible, the very first few pages, we start off with a wedding. And it's the wedding of Adam and Eve, the very first people that God created.

And then if you go right to the end of the Bible, Revelation chapter 19 and chapter 21, we see another wedding. And this time it's between the ascended Christ and His bride, which the Bible describes as the church.

If you're new to church or new to the Bible this morning, that might sound like a strange concept. But God describes all His people in all the earth as His church universal.

[6 : 18] And one day we will be reunited with God. And there will be such depth and unity of intimacy between God's people and God that it's described as like Christ, who's a bridegroom, marrying His bride.

And so the Bible starts with a wedding and it ends with a wedding. Ray Ortlund said it like this, It's not as though marriage is just one theme along many themes in the Bible. Instead, marriage is the wraparound concept for the entire biblical story, within which all the other themes of the Bible find their place.

In other words, there's an inherent story across the Bible. And it starts off with a bride pledged to her groom, who then gets seduced by a lie by another lover.

And the rest of the Bible story is this groom going on an out-of-this-world adventure to win back his bride for himself. And the Bible story ends with their wedding.

Now friends, this is important to understand because if we don't understand this, so much of what we read in between the first and the last chapters of the Bible won't make sense, right? You read the Old Testament prophets and you think, Why is this guy so angry?

[7 : 29] Why is he so emotional? He needs to just calm down a little bit until you realize it's the passionate plea of a lover calling back his lover to himself, right? You read the New Testament and you think, Why is this guy taking sin so seriously?

I mean, everyone sins. Come on. None of us are perfect. Until you realize that sin is like a lover that's left their spouse and God's calling us, wooing us back to himself.

And so to make sense of the Bible, we need to understand the story of the Bible. Okay, so let's dive in at chapter 1, creation. Jefferson and Betty read for us Genesis chapter 1, right?

Thank you, Betty, for affirming me there. And in chapter 1, we see that God creates mankind, male and female, man and woman, with a particular design in mind.

Now, friends, part of the trauma of our modern society is that we've taken the design that God planned for us and we've thrown it out the window. And we've decided to build our lives without the designer referencing the designer.

[8 : 42] And this is not a good idea, right? It's much like trying to build a house or apartment blocks without reference to the architect. Okay, that's not going to work out well. And so God has a design and His design for us is that we are made in His image or in His likeness.

Now, what does this mean? What does it mean to be made in God's image? It means that everything God asks us to do and everything He asks us to be is rooted in the reality that we are made to reflect Him, His nature, and His glory into all creation.

This is the essence of what it means to be human, to live in a relationship with God, to live for Him, and to live for His glory. And so much of the confusion of our culture and our world is experiencing is because we've rejected this design and we are confused.

We've disconnected humanity from God's design that we are made in His image for His glory and to reflect Him. Now, what does this mean for marriage and sexuality? Well, it means a couple of things.

It means, by design, marriage is meant to reflect God in unity and diversity. Okay? In unity and diversity. So in Genesis chapter 1, we see, we get these hints that God is one God, but He's not merely one.

[9 : 58] He's something more than one. In other words, right in Genesis chapter 1, we start to get hints of the Trinity. The fact that God is one, but He's three. In chapter 1 verse 2, it says, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

And verse 2 says, And the Spirit of God hovered over the darkness. We get a hint that there's something else going on here. And then in the verse that Jefferson and Betty read to us, what does God say?

Let me make mankind in my image. Is that what He said? No? What does He say? Let us make mankind in our image.

And so in the image of God, He made them male. In the image of God, He made them male and female. In other words, the Trinity, which is a great mystery. Okay?

We don't fully understand it. Is that God is three, but He's also one. And though this is hard to understand, marriage in some way reflects or shows, displays the mystery of God's Trinity.

[11 : 00] It reflects the glory of God. And it does this in the fact that God brings two diverse human beings, male and female, who remain male and female. They don't lose their sex when they become married.

But in some deep spiritual way, these two become one. Now, in the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not interchangeable. They've each got a unique role in creation and a unique role in salvation.

They're not interchangeable. And yet, neither one is more important, more God-like, or higher than the other one. They're all equally God. And the same way, in marriage, is the coming together of two people who don't just merely like each other or have the same interests.

You know, you like tennis, I like tennis, let's get married. Now, marriage is the coming together of two people who are distinct from each other. And yet, when they come together like God, there is a two becoming one.

There is a unity in diversity. Does that make any sense? Okay. Likewise, by design, marriage, especially intimacy in marriage, reflects God's self-giving love.

[12 : 07] One of the most essential and important verses in the New Testament to describe the nature and character of God is 1 John chapter 4. Okay? And it says, three words, God is love.

Okay? Not that God is loving or that God shows love to His people, but God is love. Now, how can the Bible say that God is love?

What does that mean? Well, when you take the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the fundamental essence of their relationship is characterized by mutual self-giving, selflessness, and servant-hearted towards one another.

It's this selfless love they give of themselves to one another. And it's this aspect of God's nature and His character which marriage most clearly is designed to represent an image, to reflect God in His glory in His initiating self-giving love to the other person.

Think of the greatest commands in the Bible, right? Remember one day a young man comes to Jesus and he says, Rabbi, what is the most important command?

[13 : 16] And Jesus says, get married and have sex, right? No, He doesn't say that. What does He say? He says, love the Lord your God and love other people.

Why is this the most important command in the Bible? You'd think of the way our culture thinks about sexuality, that relationships and intimacy would be the most important thing. But Jesus says, the most important thing is to love God and love others.

Why? Because that's when we're fully human. That's the way that God has designed us, is that we're most alive, we're most like God, when we are selfless and self-giving of ourselves and pour out our love for one another.

This is the essence of what it means to be human, that we are most like our maker, most alive and most imaging God, when we pour ourselves out in loving God and loving each other.

Because we are made in His image, all people, particularly in marriage, God's design is that it's built on the principle of not consuming love, but giving love.

[14:17] One of the ways that we do this, that we pour out ourselves for our spouses and one another, is that we love our spouses by helping them to love and see Jesus more.

As Francis Chan said, we help prepare our spouses for eternity. God doesn't give us marriage to make me happy, but that I can help my wife or my spouse become more like Jesus.

Friends, is your spouse more in love with Jesus? Is he or she more secure in His love? Is he or she more grateful for grace, more thankful for His mercy, more worshipful in His presence?

God's design is that marriage is for two people to come together, not to consume love, but to give love to one another. And then finally, marriage by design is meant to reflect God's forgiveness and His grace.

Remember, in the book of Jeremiah, God reminds His people, and He says, Remember how God has said to you, I've loved you with an everlasting love. I've drawn you in with an unfailing kindness.

[15:24] Now, we don't need to read far in the Bible to recognize that the way we reciprocated God's unfailing kindness towards us was with self-centeredness and self-glory. And that's the cause for so much heartache and pain.

And yet, the glory of God shines through and is never-ending, never-giving up, always and forever love. And so, Psalm 103 says, The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

He does not deal with us as our sins deserve, nor repay us according to our iniquities. And in many ways, the permanency of marriage, the fact that at your wedding vows, you say, Until death do us part, that I will look over your sin, that I won't hold your sin against you, the fact that I forgive you and extend grace for you, is a reflection and imaging of God's amazing steadfast love for us.

You see, in many ways, marriage is meant to be like a picture, right? A photograph. And it's a picture of who God is, His incessant, unending love. But it's also a picture of His profound love for us, His covenant people, for those who have come to know Him and be in relationship with Him. But it's also a picture of, for those who know God, the depth of intimacy that they will one day experience in heaven when we do get to know God. And sex and sexual intimacy in the context of marriage is a picture of the oneness and the unity and the intensely beautiful and intimacy, intimate relationship that God's people will one day have with Him in heaven.

[16:55] Now, what does that mean for us? Because, let me say it this way. At my desk in our room, I've got a picture of the family, right?

And Claire and the three girls. And it's a picture, and when they are not there, it shows me how amazing they are, beautiful they are. But I don't fall in love with the picture.

The picture is just merely a picture of a greater reality. I don't, on my anniversary, go and take that picture out for dinner and just say thank you for what an amazing picture you are.

These last 10 years have been really wonderful. And I'm just looking forward to the next 10 years of me and you together at the desk, right? The picture is just a picture. But marriage is the real thing. Now, in many ways, what God is saying is that marriage is just a picture. It's a picture of a far more deep and profound reality, which is who God is, which is His deep, covenantal, never-ending, faithful promise to us, His people.

[17:59] But it's also a picture of the reality that we will one day experience when we get to heaven, to be with Him. Now, what does this mean? Well, it means that we take marriage and we take sex and marriage very seriously.

Very important. Marriage is a picture of who God is. And it's a picture of His profound covenant with His people. So we take marriage very seriously. This is why divorce and casual sexual relationships are so serious, because it's a misrepresentation of God and His love and His glory.

And so when we don't take marriage seriously, in a way, it's like defacing this image. It's like saying, drawing a picture on the image and defacing it. We take marriage very seriously.

But at the same time, it means we don't take marriage too seriously, because it's just the picture. It's not reality. It's not the end for which we were made. It's as if life and meaning are found in marriage. As if being single somehow means you're subhuman or your life is not fully fulfilled. Marriage is a picture, but in the end, it's only a picture. It's not the ultimate reality for which you were made.

[19 : 06] There is a true and a better and ultimate reality which awaits those who come into this covenant relationship with Christ. Friends, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, you're not a believer, can I urge you to see that all the pleasures in this world and all the pleasures for which your body craves and all the sexual pleasures which your body desires are merely pictures, merely photographs of what could be yours if you are in Christ.

Friends, that's why, that's what Jesus is offering you this morning. And that's why I want you to become a Christian. That's why I want you to turn from sin and to find ultimate hope and ultimate joy in the person of Jesus Christ.

That's why I want to beg you this morning to turn away from false idols that don't really satisfy and come to the true satisfaction which is Jesus Christ himself. Marriage and sex is never going to fulfill you, but Jesus Christ is at my right hands of pleasures forevermore.

And so come to Jesus this morning. Come to Jesus this morning. Okay, so all of that is creation. Chapter one, creation. By design, God designed that marriage is a picture of unity and diversity. By design, marriage is a picture of the selfless, self-giving love of God in us. And by design, God has pictured that marriage should reflect his forgiveness and his grace towards his people.

[20 : 31] Okay, chapter two, the fall. Now, in Genesis chapter three, which we all, actually chapter three, which we read this morning, the world took a dark turn and Adam and Eve sin against God.

And the way that sin enters the world is through a lie. But it's a lie that's big enough to reframe and reinterpret all of reality. And to this day, this lie still colors everything in which we see in the world. It affects you and it affects me. Remember, what does Satan say to Adam and Eve in the garden? Okay, what is the first question he asks? He says, what did God say?

Can you eat anything? And Eve says, God has told us not to eat, in fact, not to even touch of this tree in the middle of the garden. For if we do so, we will die. Okay, and what does Satan say back to Eve?

Can you remember? He says, you will not die. For God told you this, why? Because God does not want you to be like him.

[21 : 37] Okay, so after questioning God's word, Satan then questions God's character and his goodness. He's saying, God is insecure. He doesn't want you to be like him.

He doesn't want you to know him. He doesn't want your eyes to be opened and to see things as they really are. Satan, in verse six, it tells us that Adam and Eve buy this lie, the lie that God is not good, that God doesn't have your best interests at heart, and that if you want, you can be like God. And friends, what Satan was offering humanity is not just to reflect God's glory, but actually to own a piece of the glory themselves. Okay, do you see that? He says, God doesn't want you to be like him.

Friends, that temptation is the essence of every other temptation. And temptation, when Satan comes to us, is not just a distortion of some petty rule in the Bible, like we broke rule three, subsection two, subsection A of the Bible constitution.

When we sin, it's not just breaking some petty rule. Actually, temptation is a distortion of the nature and the character of who God is. It's a distortion of who you are, what it means to be human, and it's a distortion of our relationship with God.

[22 : 51] You see, when we sin, it's not just that we've got some black mark against our name on the school teacher's report. It actually distorts our view of reality, and it changes us. And one of the ways that sin distorts reality is that we now tend to view our identity in terms of marriage and sexuality.

Before the fall, we were God's children. We were made to experience God's love and to enjoy His love and to be caught up in His love, delighting in His glory, imaging this to the world around us. But now, because of sin, we are cut off on the reality of God's love and His intimacy. And now we only have the image. We've got the picture. We've got the photograph. But we can't even see or understand the picture properly because, as Augustine said, sin causes us to what?

Be turned in on ourselves. And so now, instead of sex and marriage being the ultimate expression of God's self-giving love to us, a picture of how we don't pursue our own interests, but we pursue

the interests of others, now sex and marriage are viewed as self-validation for our hurting identity. Does that make sense? So God's design for marriage and sexuality is you pour yourself out to please another. You give of yourself for well-being and the benefit of the other.

[24 : 07] But now, because sin causes us to turn in on ourselves, we view relationships and marriage and sexuality as, how can I please myself? How can I fulfill myself? How can I make myself happy at the expense of another?

Friends, the irony and the tragedy of this is that this makes us even more insecure and more invalidated than ever. The more we use people and sexual experiences to fill the void in our own hearts and to validate us and affirm us, actually, the more insecure we become and the more invalidated we become.

Because no human being was meant to fill that void in our heart. In our heart. It's like drinking salty seawater to trying to quench the thirst in your body, right?

Not realizing that by drinking that water, you're actually starving your body of the liquids that you need. And so the more thirsty you become, the more seawater you drink to try and quench that thirst. And that's what happens when we use sexuality and marriage and relationships to validate ourselves.

In doing so, we actually cause ourselves to be more insecure and to feel more invalidated. And that's why we live in such an overly sexualized world. Because we're addicted to the drug of self-validation, not realizing that it actually undermines the validation that we seek.

[25 : 24] And so the fall, the sin, causes us to be turned in on ourselves and to now use relationships rather than to pour ourselves out for relationships. Well, what does this look like?

Well, the first thing it does is marriage now has become self-serving rather than self-giving. I remember when I first became a pastor seven or eight years ago, I used to do a lot of weddings. And at first I used to tell people, you can write your own wedding vows, right? It's your wedding day, you say what you want. And I thought this was such a good idea until I quickly realized this was a terrible idea.

And so I quickly stopped that and I made people say the vows that I wrote for them, okay? And the reason was because of the terrible nature of those vows. People would stand up and say things like, you are the stardust on my magic carpet, right?

Or I promise to be the sunshine on your flower patch, okay? Or I promise to love you more than I love sushi or to make your heart sing like the birds in the morning, right?

[26 : 33] Friends, that's not a wedding vow. That's a Valentine's card, okay? Valentine's Day card. That's what Disney make movies about. But a real wedding vow, a marriage vow is something like I promise to love you.

I promise to serve you. I promise to put your interests before my own. I promise to put your desires before my own. Whether I am comfortable or not, for better or for worse.

Whether I feel sick or whether I feel healthy. Whether I have lots of money or whether I've got no money. Whether it makes me rich or not. I promise to pour out my life for you to help you become the person God's called you to be.

To help you see God's glory. To help you love Jesus more so that you can become more like Him. That's a wedding vow. But we don't say those vows anymore, right? We talk about sunshine on our flower patch and sushi and stardust and nonsense like that, right?

Why? Because romance and sex and relationships have become about us. About what you can do for me. And ironically, this actually destroys the intimacy and the relationship that we actually desire.

[27 : 45] When we use somebody else or we see somebody else's hard to please me or fulfill my pleasures, it destroys the trust and the vulnerability that actually a true intimacy desires or needs to flourish.

I remember last year when we were living in Cape Town, there was a young lady, late 20s, who was a pretty strong atheist, didn't believe in God at all, and became a Christian.

She had a dramatic encounter with God. One night she goes to bed, not believing God exists. The next morning she wakes up, has this encounter with God, believes in Jesus, confesses her sin, and there in her house on her own becomes a believer.

And her whole life changed dramatically in one day. And so a few months later, I'm talking to her about her conversion and I'm asking her what happened. And she said something amazing. She

said, you know, I've always lived with my boyfriends and slept with my boyfriends. And as much as I love them and they love me, at the back of my mind was always this lingering question. Do you love me for my body or do you love me for me?
[28 : 58] Do you love me? Are you in this relationship because I'm giving myself to you and I'm pleasing you sexually? Or are you in this relationship because you really want to serve me and are pleased for me?

And friends, that's what sin does. When sin causes us to be turned in on ourselves, relationships and sexual intimacy now and pleasure become about us, about what my partner can do for me. And what this means is that any relationship that's built on sexual intimacy and the pleasure of sexual experiences, rather than a commitment to serve the other person, is destined to fail. Because sexual intimacy and pleasure is not the essence, it's the foundation of a relationship. Selfless giving of yourself to the other person is. And that's one of the dangers of being involved with someone sexually before your marriage or cohabitating, living with someone. Especially if you're trying to work out, is this relationship going to go the distance? Is this going to work? Because the pleasure and the desires and the height of emotional experiences that sex produces gives you a skewed view of the relationship.

[30 : 05] You think, I so love this person and they so love me. We were made for each other. But it's built on a shaky foundation. It's built on a house of sand. It's a house of sand. It's a house built on sand.

And it's only a matter of time before it's destined to fail. Friends, in our city, there are millions and millions of people who every day are buying the lie that says life and love and fulfillment are found in having sexual experiences.

But friends, it's a lie. It's like drinking seawater, thinking it's going to quench your thirst. And it's actually going to dry you up and leave you more lonely, more dissatisfied than ever before. Secondly, marriage becomes about scorekeeping rather than gracious self-giving. I'll do this quickly. I remember just before I got married listening to Dr. Ravi Zacharias and he said something and I thought, speak for yourself, buddy.

That's not going to happen in my marriage. Right? And this is what he said. When you first get married, as a guy, you love serving your wife. Your wife needs anything and you jump up to help her.

[31 : 13] Right? She has a little cough in the night and you jump up and you get a glass of water for her and you bring it to her side. And five years later, you hear the kids crying in the middle of the night and you just fast and you pretend you fast asleep.

Or you think to yourself, I got up last time, I'm pretty sure it's her turn this time. Right? And I thought, that's not going to happen to me. Friends, ten years later, that's exactly what's happening. Right? Love, I just want to say I'm so sorry for all the times I've pretended to be asleep. When sin causes us to be turned in on ourselves and we think of marriage as a way of self-serving, not self-giving.

Finally, let me say this. Sin causes marriage or the problem with this is it causes us to misrepresent God's love. You see, by representing a false view of God's covenantal love, we actually tell the world that God's love is something central, something self-focused, something that we use for our own means rather than the extravagant love that it really is.

And unfortunately, that's exactly what has happened. Inside the church and outside the church, we view God's love as something selfish, something that we view God's love as God only loves us as long as we serve Him.

[32 : 31] God only loves us as long as we come to the party. And we've completely misrepresented the extravagant, radically generous, always and forever, incessant, never-ending love that God's love really is.

And for those of us that are not Christians this morning, I want to just say that maybe one of the reasons why you're not a Christian is because you're interested in the person of Jesus but as you've looked at His followers, their lives and especially our sexual lives and our relationship lives don't represent anything different from the world.

And maybe we've represented to you that God's love is something sensual and self-seeking. And friends, if that's you, I want to say we are so sorry. I want to say our testimony is not true. We have misrepresented the profundity of God's love.

Don't look at our lives and our selfishness and think that that's what God is like. God's love is exceedingly abundantly far more profound than that. Can I ask you to forgive us and forgive us for our self-centeredness.

Come and know Jesus. He's far better than we'll ever represent. So all of this is the four. Okay? God designed us to represent Him and image Him. God designed that marriage and sexuality is a picture of the selfless, self-giving love and yet the sin caused us to be turned in ourselves and now we use marriage and relationships to serve ourselves rather than serve the other.

[33 : 56] The question is is there any hope? Well, chapter 3, redemption. At the end of Genesis chapter 3 and onwards for the rest of the Bible, the story of the Bible is the consequences of sin, the consequences of the fall, but it's God's redeeming love and the great rescue plan that God goes on to redeem us from the fall.

You see, the effects of sin are far-reaching. They affect every area of our life. They affect our finances. They affect our marriages. They affect our singleness. They affect our sexuality. They affect our work life.

Sin causes us to be turned in on ourselves and affects every area of our lives. But Jesus did far more than just come and forgive us of one or two individual sins.

Jesus came to redeem us and to heal the brokenness that is a result of sin. Jesus came to reverse the effects of the fall from creation. And he starts off by redeeming and rescuing our hearts.

And the way that Jesus in the gospel gives us hope in the midst of our broken and hurting world is threefold. Firstly, Jesus comes and he gives you a new name and he gives you a new identity.

[35 : 07] So in the Bible, whenever one of God's people has a dramatic encounter with God, God gives them a new name, right? Think Abram becomes Abraham. Think Jacob, which means the cheat, becomes Israel, which means one who has wrestled with God.

Simon, which means little stone, becomes Peter, the rock. And of course, Saul, the guy who wanted to kill all the Christians, meets Jesus and becomes renamed Paul. Now, in Isaiah chapter 62, there's an amazing passage about how when God comes to his people to rescue and redeem and heal them and restore them, he renames them.

Look at what Isaiah chapter 62 says. He says, when I come and meet you, the nations will see your righteousness, all the kings of the earth will see your glory and you will be called by a new name and the name that the Lord will give you, a name that the Lord will give you.

You will no longer be called forsaken, you will now be called my delightful one. For just as the bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so the Lord your God will rejoice over you.

Friends, where sin causes us to be turned in on ourselves and because of the powerful bonding nature of sex, the distortion that sin causes is that it takes God's good gift and it turns it into a tool for much pain and much hurt.

[36 : 29] But Jesus Christ came to dismantle the lie that we believed in the garden and he comes and he speaks a true and a better word for us. He dismantles the lie that says God is not good and you can't trust him.

He dismantles the lie that says God is only looking after himself and he dismantles the lie that says you can be your own God and Jesus Christ comes and he tells us that the self-worth and the validation that we look for as humans is not found horizontally.

It's not found in our spouse or in society or what people think of us. It's not found in our sex appeal. It's not found in the affirmation or the generosity of even a spouse's wife. Jesus Christ comes and tells us that our affirmation and identity is found in who we are in Christ and what Christ says about us.

It's found in delighting in Christ and Christ's delight in us. Friends, Jesus comes to those who trust him and he promises to be a redeeming lover. He promises to be a lover that rescues us out of our own sinfulness and to restore us and to make us new.

And Jesus comes and he gives us a new name. He gives us a new identity. Friends, where sin and the fall of the world tells you that you are a nobody, Jesus comes and he calls you his beloved.

[37 : 44] Friends, where sin and brokenness and the effects of the world tell you that you are ordinary and unloved, Jesus says, I chose you before the foundation of the world to set my love upon you.

Friends, where sin and the brokenness of the world calls you shamed and dirty and used, Jesus calls you cleansed and righteous in his sight if you are in Jesus.

Friends, where sin and the brokenness and the fall of the world tell you that your worth and your identity are found in what men think of you or what women think of you, Christ says, you are his and he delights in you.

And friends, the love of Jesus is so steady and it's so rock solid because he doesn't love you because of what he sees in your heart, he loves you because of what he sees in his heart. And that is unshakable. It's not going to change. Jesus doesn't love us because of the goodness he sees in us but because of the overflow of the love in his own heart towards us.

[38 : 46] And so Jesus gives us a new name and he gives you a new identity. Second thing he gives you is this. He gives you a new nature. He actually changes us from the inside.

The book of Colossians is all about this new identity that God gives us when we're united with Christ. And Paul tells these new Christians in Colossians that their new self, their new identity is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Okay, so think about that. He says, when you come to Christ you're being renewed in knowledge, understanding after the image of your creator. In other words, as the gospel gets deeper into our heads, as in our hearts we understand more of who Jesus is, how glorious he is, what he's done on the cross and the reversing effects of sin, God actually starts to change us on the inside to make us more like him.

Okay, in 2 Corinthians he says it like this. He says, a Christian is someone who's being changed into the likeness or the image of God. Now remember in Genesis chapter 1 what did God say? He said, let us make mankind in our image or our likeness. Okay, our image and our likeness. Now in Corinthians Paul writes, a Christian is someone who's encountered Jesus and is being changed in the image and the likeness of God.

[40 : 10] In other words, a Christian is somebody who's encountered God and God starts to reverse the effects of sin and make us once again like he designed us in the garden of Eden.

And he's changing us from one degree of glory to another. So friends, a Christian is someone who because of the supernatural experiential work of God in our hearts is someone who's becoming more secure in God's love, more secure in the gospel and as a result is becoming more like Jesus in life, in love, in character, identity and in purpose.

Friends, the good news of Jesus is he didn't just come and say, oh I see you've broken another one of the rules, I'll forgive you this time but let me help you not to break the rules again. Friends, Jesus comes and he takes out our heart of stone which is self-centered and self-seeking and he gives us a new heart after his own nature and his own character, a heart which resembles him and he gives us a new disposition and he gives us the Holy Spirit to live inside of us and he empowers us to say no to self-centeredness, to say no to the lie of the devil and to say yes to Jesus and to say yes to becoming more like him.

And he therefore sets us free from the destructive patterns of behavior which have marked so many of our lives. Friends, the road that Christ calls us to walk is a long, slow, messy road of becoming more like Jesus.

And sometimes there's ups and sometimes there's downs. Sometimes there's victory and we overcome sin and sometimes there's defeats. Sometimes there's good moments, sometimes there's painful moments.

[41 : 48] But for those of us who know Christ, it's a road of slowly, steadily becoming more like him. God changes our nature to become more like him.

And friends, that is unbelievably good news. Remember Chris shared the story last week of a friend of his who said, I wish I could become like you but I'm addicted to my own desires. Friends, Jesus changes our desires.

He makes us more like him. He sets us free. Some of us want to be free from pornography and we cannot do it on our own. Jesus comes to change us and our desires and our addictions. He sets us free.

Jesus gives us a new nature. And then the last thing is this. He gives us hope for sinners. Friends, some of us, if we're honest, have such a stained and a checkered past and a history of relationships that we cannot bear the thought of anybody finding out what we've done.

And some of us maybe here this morning we think, if anybody in this room found out what I've done, where I've been, who I've been with, you would kick me out of this church straight away. Friends, I'm here to tell you this morning that the message of the gospel is that you are far worse than you think you are.

[42 : 58] And your situation is far more hopeless than you think it is. And you are far more lost than you actually think you are. But I'm also here to tell you that what's true of you is true of everyone in this room.

That every single person in this room is a sinner who has fallen short of God's astounding glory and therefore stands condemned. But I'm also here to tell you that the wonderful, extravagant good news of Jesus on the cross is that if you are in Christ, you are extravagantly loved and chosen by God before the world was even made.

Before you were even conceived in your mother's womb. If you are in Christ, God chose you to pour His love out upon you. Jesus hung on the cross for you and as He died, He said, the debt has been paid in full.

That is the hope of the gospel. That though the situation is worse than we think it is, it's far more better than we will ever think it is because of Jesus. Friends, I don't know what you've done, but if you come to Christ in faith and repentance, the blood of Jesus which was shed on the cross for you and for me has a final and a better word over our sin.

And it stills the accusations of the devil. And when the devil comes and lies and accuses you, there's a better word that says, not guilty because my blood has been shed. That is the hope of the gospel.

[44 : 21] This is Christ's redemption, chapter three. Finally, chapter four, the consummation. We come out to close. The final chapter of the Bible is called the consummation, which is ironic because we think of consummating a wedding, right?

Yes, in some ways, sex is an amazing picture of what heaven will one day be like. A blissful union of God's people and God for all eternity.

Marriage and sex in some ways in our world is a faded black and white picture of the glories of heaven and what it's going to be like. That those who are in Christ, this blissful, intimate relationship between us and God for all eternity.

Revelation 21 says that when Christ comes, he will bring his bride back to himself for the house that he's been preparing for us. Think of how every Disney movie ends, right?

How does every fairy tale story end? And they lived happily ever after. Friends, there's one fairy tale story which is not a fairy tale. We really will live with our spouse, the lover of our souls, happily ever after in all eternity with him.

[45 : 34] Friends, in this lifetime you may never get married. Maybe you've been married and you've suffered a difficult marriage. Maybe you've suffered the trauma of a marriage coming undone.

Maybe you've been in an abusive marriage. Maybe you've been in a loveless marriage. Maybe you've been in a marriage where your spouse has spoken words of you that have wounded so deeply.

Friends, regardless of who you are today, if you trust in Christ one day, very, very soon, there is coming the perfect husband, the perfect spouse who will bring you back to himself, who will love you more fully and more completely and more tenderly than any human being could ever.

Who will love you so deeply that you'll get to enjoy the reality of the perfect marriage. Not just a copy of it here on earth. Not just a faded black and white image. The reality, the real thing for all time in all perfection.

Happily ever after. And friends, that's why our hope is not in marriage. Our hope is not in sex. Our hope is not in finding the perfect spouse, having the perfect marriage, having the perfect sex life or being married.

[46 : 46] Our hope is in Jesus Christ who died on the cross. Our hope is in the one who came to reverse the effects of sin and the fall. Our hope is in the one who has chosen us in him and is calling us back to himself.

Our hope is in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so on that note, let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ, oh how desperately we need you.

God, we need you today to affirm us and to validate us. We need you today, God, to counter the lies of the devil, who tells us that you are not good and you are not trustworthy, who tell us that we can own a piece of our own glory if only we'll follow our own desires.

Oh God, won't you come and speak a true and better word to our hearts? God, won't you come and heal and restore where sin has hurt us and destroyed us?

Jesus, won't you come and open our eyes to see how glorious you are? God, we do pray for healing and restoration where we've been hurt.

[48 : 06] We do pray for a miracle, God. God, we do pray that you come and fill the longings of our hearts, those that are married and those that are not married, those that are enjoying marriage and those for whom marriage is difficult.

For every one of us, Christ, come and be first in our hearts, we pray. Come and be center. Jesus, come and pour your transcendent glory into our hearts and open our eyes to see you and to love you.

Come and draw us closer to yourself, we pray.