

Sexuality (Week 2)

I have a very simple goal for this talk and its just this: that you and I will not be afraid. We will not be intimidated by the mockery or troubled by the arguments. We will commit to standing firm on the rock of scripture.

Paul warned the church at Ephesus of the danger of being 'blown around' by 'every wind of teaching'. Teaching on issues of sexuality is blowing strongly around the church today.

You are on the wrong side of history. Modern is good and progressive. The past is a place of ignorance and mistaken certainty.

The Bible needs to be freed from its cultural context. We don't wash peoples feet and we shouldn't adjudicate on people's sexual lives.

God is love. Its all you need to know. He wouldn't want people to be unhappy.

If we are not to be affected by these forces we need to have a very firm grip on what is true. We need to know our story. We need to be clear about our identity.

CREATION

You and I will know the catch phrases of today. "Be yourself, assert your independence". And Walt Disney has taught people they can be anything they want. But of course what we know is we cant be anything we want.

Consequently there are lots of confused people out there.

Genesis: God has spoken you don't have to work it out for yourself.

Genesis 1. There is a creator. The creator operates by separating and ordering things that are opposite one another.

(3) God said let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness.

(6) And God said 'Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water. So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. God called the vault sky

(10) God called the dry ground land and the gathered waters he called seas

(27) God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.

Creation is about contrast, difference, distinctiveness.

Light and dark, land and sea, men and women.

This is fundamental to the created order; it is the way God has organised things.

God's creation albeit disfigured teaches us things about God.

Psalm 19:1-2 Psalm 104:14-18

Now if we ponder to what end God created food, we shall see that he meant not only to provide for necessity but also for delight and good cheer.... In grasses, trees and fruits, apart from their various uses, there is beauty of appearance and

pleasantness of odour..... Did he not in short render many things attractive to us apart from their necessary use?

The world we live in doesn't just work. It proclaims Gods goodness

Maybe even more important than that is the statement that we are creatures made in the image of God. Made to image God, to reveal him. When you looked at Adam enthusiastically and wholeheartedly serving God he reflected the goodness of the God who was his master.

Ed Shaw. Why as someone who is same sex attracted do I choose not to fulfil myself sexually but rather to permanently live as a celibate man?

Because I believe John 10:10. Jesus said: I have come that you may have life and have it to the full.

The creation of human beings as male and female is more than a minor detail in the Bible story. Paul quotes Gen 2:24 when he writes to the Ephesians church on marriage.

Eph 5:31 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

But then he goes on to say this: *This is a profound mystery - but I am talking about Christ and the church.*

The distinction between men and women reflects the distinction between God and human beings. The coming together of a man and a woman in marriage is a reflection of Gods desire for us to be united with him. And this is now possible through Christ.

Marriage has a bigger purpose than creating children or providing society with some stability. It points beyond itself to Gods desire to be united with his people. Two men or two women cant reflect the marriage of Christ and his Church.

FALL

We have exchanged service in Gods world for gods who seem to promise to give us what we want.

we don't live in the garden of Eden. We live east of Eden

We have believed the devils lie that God is not good and what he offers is thinly veiled slavery.

The failure of the first Adam who was not content to be a servant but wanted to be in charge has affected everything and everyone. Sin has gone through the entire system.

Sin makes its presence felt in our lives physically and psychologically. But it also affects our hearts - it shapes what we want and desire.

Made like Adam to find our significance and joy in serving God we have gone in search of other things.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans Paul writes of those who suppress the truth about God that comes through creation.

He goes on: *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged*

the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. (Romans 1:22,23)

When we don't worship the true God we find ourselves looking for other things to worship. And sex turns out to be a major contender. One way our rebellion against God expresses itself in exchanging the natural (heterosexual marriage) for the unnatural (homosexual marriage)

But here is the thing. And in the light of what we have said it should be no surprise. When you reject the word of a good God you end up with life that is seriously sub standard. These things don't deliver on their promises.

The promise of sexual liberation: more and better sex?

The impression is given that cut free from the unhealthy restrictions of religion everyone is having a great time sexually.

Oxford statistician David Spiegelhalter has written an authoritative, easy to digest guide to what we know about people's sex lives today.

He draws together convincing data that rather than decanting us into a sexual paradise of free love the frequency of 'having sex' has actually declined in recent years.

At this rate of decline ... a simple but extremely naïve, extrapolation would predict that by 2040 the average person will not be having any sex at all. I rather suspect that this will not be the case but it still leaves the crucial question: why is there less sex going on.

Marriage, divorce and co-habitation.

We want to think about this in relation to children. Lets put in a marker before go any further. Successful families that deliver great outcomes for kids come in all shapes and sizes. Single mums can do a great job. Co habiting couples can put the needs of the children first. Marriages can be dangerous places that some people need to flee from.

These though are the exception and we mustn't make the exception the rule.

When it comes to raising children the problem today in the UK is cohabiting couples. Between 2004 - 2014 co-habiting couples grew by 29.7%.

Co-habiting couples can be great parents but the arrangement is much less stable than marriage.

More than half of couples who only get married after the birth of their first child have split up 10 years later. This compares with a quarter of couples who have got married before having children.

And where couples don't marry at all two thirds will split up

48% of all children born today will not be found living with their natural parents by their 16th birthday.

Pornography.

A recent survey commissioned by the Office for the Childrens Commissioner reported that 'pornography is everywhere'

Its how young people get their sex education

Its offers no argument against casual sex provided its done 'safely'

I spoke to someone who is involved in Biblical Counselling. He counsels Christian men mostly over marriage difficulties. All of those he was meeting with had issues with pornography.

The trouble with these substitute gods is they turn into addictions. It doesn't stop at sex.

Duguid : I counsel many earnest young Christians who are struggling with addiction. The substances to which they are addicted vary a great deal but the heart desires that drives these addictions are the same. They are addicted to food, health, drugs, porn, good grades, exercise, thinness, sex, work, alcohol and even parental approval. The driving force behind this behaviour is the quest to feel good - in the broadest sense of that term.

There is no room for superiority and condemnation. Rom 2:1
But the sexual revolution is not delivering on its promises.

RESTORATION

Jesus Christ is in the restoration business.

Our culture takes the lego kit view of life. Put it together in whatever way you want. "The only limit is your imagination"

For us as Christians understanding ourselves to be made in the image of God **we take the art restoration approach.** Art restorers don't take liberties with their portraits.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

He does not live as a free agent. He lives in submission to the will of his Father. He is the Lord's Servant. He is not independent but sustained: through the Word, through prayer, through his friends, through the Holy Spirit.

There is progress in his life as he engages with difficulty and opposition and set back and disappointment.

Jesus does not come to promote an agenda of self fulfilment. He is not averse to bringing cost and challenge into people's lives. But this is the restoration agenda - its what it means to be like him.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace.... (Matt 10:34ff)

If we change the picture from issues like homosexuality to Islam.
Nabeel Qareeshi. Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus.

He describes telling his parents that he has become a Christian.
His father: Nabeel this day, I feel as if my backbone has been ripped out from inside me. The words tore through me. It felt like patricide. I had not just given up

my life to follow Jesus, I was killing my father.
He has never stood as tall since that day. I extinguished his pride

His mother asked: Why have you betrayed me?

Her eyes seared my soul and remain branded in my memory. They were the final images I saw before my father ushered my mother out of my apartment and across the street to the hospital. None of us knew if she would make it through the night. She survived but her eyes have never been so bright since the day I extinguished the light.

He describes himself being decimated before God and asking God why didn't you kill me the moment I believed rather than making me break my parents hearts. *It would have been better if you had killed me the moment I believed so that my family would never have had to taste betrayal. This is far worse for them than my death would have been. At least our love would have lived on.*

At that moment its was as if God picked up a megaphone and spoke through my conscience,

Because this is not about you. Its about God and his service.

Rosaria Butterfield describes her feeling everytime a new member is welcomed into their church and her husband reads the vows a new member makes

Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you believe in the one living and true God.....

Do you repent of your sin..... etc etc

She says this: taking these vows explicitly marked me as a traitor in my LGBT community

She hasn't lived casually as a lesbian. She has been deeply involved in this community. These were her people. And in their eyes what she did was betrayal.

But both these people reveal a man and a women who in different ways have to abandon what comes to them by nature: the filial love of a Muslim family, the same sex attraction of a group of similarly ordered people - for something bigger, more important, something better.

To bring the gospel into those situations is going to involve someone paying a high price. But what of the alternative - higher price still.

Mark 10:28-30

I have food to eat that you know nothing about . My food is to do the will of my Father and to finish his work.

Its because we are clear about the destination that we are able to deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Christ.

We ought to look like a pilgrim people. A church in waiting

We want to say to others - come with us. We are headed to a worthwhile destination.

DESTINATION

The gift of sex points beyond itself to life in the new creation.

The last book in the bible presents the return of Christ in terms of a wedding. Christ and his Bride the Church, finally are united.

Back in Genesis the gift of sex functions in a relationship of rich companionship and deep unity. These are people who are at ease with one another, they trust each other, they enjoy each other. They help one another to serve God. And what is true of their relationship with one another is true of their relationship with God.

When sin enters, companionship is an early casualty. The image of God is distorted. They cover up before one another and they hide from God. From being at ease they now become wary. Competition enters personal relationships. You look at these people and its not entirely clear who God is. Our world is a place of brokenness.

The new creation is a place of completeness.

Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man. (1 Cor 15:49)

Part of this 'image' involves our bodies.

1 Cor 15 makes a great deal of Christ's bodily resurrection. Note the word 'appeared' (v3-8). This is said in a context where the prevailing view discounts the 'body'. All that matters is the soul. Not so - this future is an embodied one. Albeit a transformed one. (42-44)

It will be imperishable rather than subject to death. It will be physically glorious, lacking any signs of weakness. It will be spiritual in the sense of being empowered by the Holy Spirit.

And this new creation is a place of consummation. It not individual but corporate

In a passage about marriage we are told Christ will present the church to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

This is a place where all needs are met.

John 21. When they landed they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread. Jesus said to them come and have breakfast....he took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish.

It is a place where faith gives way to sight.

All questions answered, all mystery removed

It is a place of satisfaction.

Every healthy relationship, every significant conversation, every shared experience points in this direction of the Church enjoying and responding to the love of their Bridegroom. It's a future worth waiting for.

