

Eunuchs for Yeshua Matthew 19:3-12

Introduction: The “abnormality” of singleness

- A. John Stott: “Marriage is the norm, singleness is the abnorm.”
- B. Vera Stinton’s question: How should Christians think about singleness in relationship to marriage?
 - 1. Is it a pathological condition requiring a cure?
 - 2. Is it a privilege -- the special vocation of super-devoted disciples?
- C. Our question: What is it about singleness that needs to be “reclaimed?”

I. A Brief History of Singleness: The Swinging of the Pendulum

- A. OT Judaism: No place for singles
 - 1. Under the Old Covenant, the people of God were biologically defined: they were the “children of Israel” (Exo. 3:10-11; Luk 1:16; Acts 9:15).
 - 2. Structure of Jewish society – family clans. To marry and bear children was a sacred duty. Children were considered a blessing (Deu. 28:4; Psalm 127:3-5).
 - 3. Impact of OT revelation: vague on the afterlife. Future blessing was linked to having a posterity to perpetuate one’s “name.”
 - 4. Impact of Messianic Hope: The coming “Anointed” Deliverer of Israel would be a descendent of Abraham (Gen 17:8; Gal 3:16) and of David (Matt 1:1-16; Luke 1:32-33, 68-70; 2:4; 3:23-28; John 7:42). So procreation was required to preserve the Messianic line.
 - 5. Result: To be unmarried and childless in Israel was personally catastrophic (Judg. 11:38; 1 Sam. 1:5-8; Pro. 30:15-16; Isa. 4:1). To be without spouse and children was to be without inheritors and guardians in old age.
- B. Early and Medieval Church: Singleness is Superior
 - 1. Early church (thru 3rd century): celibacy commended when its purpose was service to God.
 - a. This perspective was an alternative to pressures from pagan culture to marry and have children.
 - b. Other reasons: persecution and martyrdom.
 - 2. Medieval Church: shift from the practical superiority of celibacy to spiritual superiority.
 - a. The influence of Gnosticism – Clement of Alexandria, Jerome and Augustine viewed human sexuality (and therefore marriage) as a necessary evil.
 - b. As Christianity was embraced by the Roman empire, martyrdom was replaced by monasticism (with vows of poverty and celibacy).
 - c. By the fifth century, celibacy was required of all priests. By the sixteenth century, many priests had concubines.
- C. Reformation Era: Marriage is Superior

II. **Modern Myth:** *Singleness should be regarded as a transitional state en route to the ultimate destination of marriage. Problems stemming from the “incompleteness” of singleness are resolved by marriage.*

A. Reasons behind the Myth

1. We are collectively under the impression that while the Bible speaks favorably of marriage, it treats singleness as undesirable.
2. This perception is reinforced by the intense desire of many single people to marry. It is easy for that desire to morph into an expectation.
3. Most people marry. So for many people, singleness is a transition into marriage, by definition.

B. Flaws in the Myth

1. Those who remain unmarried are relegated to second-class status, especially within the church.
2. It is unbiblical. We have inflated a widespread pattern into a universal one – taking what is commonly desired and frequently experienced and making it normative for everyone – without warrant.

III. **Jesus’ Elevation of the Status of Singleness – Alongside Marriage**

A. His example – Jesus was a never-married adult.

B. His teaching

1. About salvation: It is not secured through offspring but through faith in Christ. Our hope is not in our progeny but in our resurrection (see Matthew 22:23-33).
2. About marriage: Because Jesus fulfilled the procreational goal of Jewish marriage and established a spiritual family which supersedes the biologically-defined people of God, human marriage is . . .
 - a. Optional (rather than obligatory)
 - b. Secondary (rather than primary)
 - c. Significant (pointing beyond itself to the ultimate reality of Christ’s marriage to the church)
 - d. Temporary (becoming obsolete the heavenly kingdom to come).
3. About singleness: it may be a preferable choice for some because of the positive potential for service to God (Matthew 19:1-12).
 - a. In Israel, physical eunuchs were barred from inclusion in the covenant community (Deu. 23:1).
 - b. In Gentile royal courts, eunuchs occupied positions of trust, power, and prestige (Acts 8).
 - c. Isaiah foretold a day when eunuchs would be given “a name better than sons and daughters” (Isa. 56:1-5). He was apparently speaking of “spiritual offspring” who are begotten through the ministry of those who forego marriage “for the sake of the kingdom” (see Isa. 53:10).
 - 1) The choice between marriage and singleness belongs to the individual disciple.
 - 2) The determinative criterion for that choice: “for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”

IV. **Conclusion:** “While the first created human beings, Adam and Eve, were a married couple, in the new creation the second Adam, Jesus Christ, was a single man. Singleness and marriage are parallel routes for loving and serving in the world and preparing us for life in the resurrection community. They are gifts from God to be accepted or to be chosen within the scope he gives us for choice. There is no essential problem about being single but a variety of difficulties typically occur” (V. M. Sinton).