
“Singleness and Sovereignty of God”
(Matthew 19:1-12)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

NIV Matthew 19:1-12

¹When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ²Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' ⁵and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? ⁶So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

⁷"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. ⁹I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

*¹⁰**The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."***

*¹¹**Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹²For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."***

In our church over 40% of our congregation is single. If you include the college students that figure goes up to over 66%. 2/3 of our EM congregation are single. And of course single is such a broad term that can mean. Single and happy being single. Single and looking. Single, but dating. Single again (either through divorce or because of the death of a spouse). Single parent. And perhaps single for life. So with this broad range of singles I'll have to paint in broad strokes as I give this message.

Here's what author Albert Hsu writes in his introduction. He says, Sometimes well-intentioned but insensitive married people ask singles, "Are you still single?" Some annoyed singles might feel like responding, "Yes I am. Are you still married?" One single said, "It's so rude when they ask me, 'How's your love life?' Maybe I should ask them, 'How's your sex life?'"

I'm just sharing this so our married people will be a bit more sensitive with our single brothers and sisters.

Here are some undeniable truths about singleness, that even married people should heed.

1. You have absolutely no idea how long you'll be single.
2. Everyone is called to a life of singleness at some point in their lives.

3. You can be single or single again either because of divorce or the death of your spouse.
4. Singleness is a gift from God, as is marriage.

Let's look at today's passage.

The context of this passage is speaking first about marriage and divorce. But Jesus' teaching on divorce leads to the subject of singleness. Jesus finishes his talk on marriage and divorce in verse 8 and 9. This leads the disciples to respond with, "Well, if that's the state of marriage, it's better to stay single." Which leads Jesus to a small excursus on singleness. Let's look again at verses 11-12.

He replies by saying, "Not everyone can accept this word." What 'word' is he speaking about? The 'word' he is referring to is the response of the disciples, "It is better not to marry." So he's saying, marriage has its issues for sure. Sin happens in marriage. Adultery happens and messes up marriages. But singleness is not easy either. So not everyone can be single. Not everyone can accept being single.

And then he gives three examples of singleness. And the word he uses in these three examples is the word eunuch. The first example is eunuchs who were born that way. They might be eunuchs because of a birth defect or were born impotent. The second group are the castrated, those that were made eunuchs by others, referring those who worked in the palace. The only modern example of this would be someone who had an accident that left him or her impotent. And then the final category includes those who have made themselves eunuchs (or renounced marriage) because of the Kingdom of God. So for the purpose of God's ministry they have chosen or have been called to give up being married.

Excursus on clerical celibacy. There is no biblical warrant for mandatory celibacy for clergy as is the case in the Catholic church. It wasn't always the case. It wasn't the case in the early church for the first three centuries, but then more and more pastors in devotion to Christ chose the celibate life, until the Church made it mandatory for clergy to be single. However, once the rule was set in place, from the get-go it was riddled with problems. Everything from priests having concubines, to sleeping with nuns, to scores of children born illegitimately, to abortions, to requesting sexual favors in exchange for spiritual services. And of course we've seen what's been center stage on the world Catholic scene today.

Biblically, Yes Jesus was celibate, Paul was celibate. But that's about it. The Roman Church looks to Peter as the first so-called pope, yet, Peter was married. Jesus went to the house of Peter's mother-in-law it says in the gospels. And Paul, in speaking about apostolic rights, said, "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas ? (1 Cor 9:5).

My hope and prayer is that the Roman Church will get rid of clerical celibacy once and for all.

Back to the text. So Jesus says, "The one who can accept this word should accept this." He says it in verse 11 and then again in verse 12.

¹¹Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹²The one who can accept this should accept it."

Meaning what? I believe he is asking us to place ourselves in a posture of accepting, grasping, and understanding the truth of the Lord about singleness and marriage. It's not an open ended question saying, well, if you want to accept it you can, and if you don't want to, well you don't have

to. He is speaking to Christians and he is asking them to accept his teaching on marriage, divorce, and singleness.

This week, having spent a chunk of my time reading books for singles, reaffirmed many of the things we already know. It seems that there were some common themes that were found in all of these books.

Embrace singleness as you trust in a sovereign God.

All of the books that I read said the same thing. Life doesn't begin at marriage. Life begins today, right now. And for those singles who are putting life on hold until marriage, you are missing out on so much God can do in and through you right now. And you are not living the life God wants you to live. The life God wants all of us to live whether we are single or not is in the now. We don't press the pause button on our lives, go into spiritual hibernation and wait until prince or princess charming arrives. These books and scripture all teach that fulfillment is found in a deep and personal relationship with Jesus, not in marriage, not in parenting, not in dating. How many times have we been hurt by our boyfriends, girlfriends? How many times have we been hurt by our spouses? How many times have we been hurt even by our children? Now, how many times have we been hurt by Jesus?

As well, all the books agreed that to be single does not mean you are a second-class citizen. One author has a chapter titled, You are not half a cookie. Imagine an Oreo cookie. A complete Oreo has two sides and a creamy center, right? So in the world of cookies, single people are only half a cookie. And of course the author is saying that that just isn't true. Nowhere in scripture do you find singleness as a defect or as a second-class Christian.

Friends, all of our lives as Christians, no matter what stage you are at, is a journey of faith. It's a journey of learning to trust in God. When we were seeking out our majors and careers, we were trusting in a sovereign God who loves us. And we do the same with our singleness. We trust that God has the perfect plan for our lives, for our future spouse. And so we actively wait upon God for the right timing. I don't know why it comes earlier for some and later for others, but please don't commit the sin of complaining and not trusting and taking matters into your own hands, and lowering your standards.

Leslie Ludy in Sacred Singleness writes this to single women.
p.82-83

Trust in the loving sovereignty of God.

And if you are single and are hoping some day to become married, my advice to you would be to dedicate this season to grow into spiritually mature and emotionally healthy Christians. I say this in our premarital classes. The greatest gift that you can give to your husband or wife is a spiritually and emotionally healthy you. Develop a life of prayer and devotion to Christ. As Chuck Swindoll says, Improve your Serve. This way you are doing two things. 1. You are developing a deeper relationship with God right now. 2. You are making yourself into a better future spouse.

Take advantage of this current season of singleness.

This is another common theme found in these books. The single life, because it's free from marital and family obligations, can be used to be significantly involved in God's work.

1) **Time.** Do you know what the life of a spouse or parent looks like? Do you realize how many hours in a given week is given to family? One recent study stated that a typical stay at home mom works 80-90 hours a week and should be getting a 6 figure salary based on the skills they use. That's cooking, cleaning, changing diapers, taking junior to soccer and hockey and piano and dance and kumon and everything else under the sun. That's why the church doesn't lean on moms to pull their weight. That's why we have things like New Moms bible study. Because their lives are that much more demanding. Singles generally have more time on their hands.

2) **Money.** Single people have more disposable income to do the Lord's work. Kids aren't cheap. All of those lessons and sports, clothes, kid's cell phones, food, bigger homes, bigger cars, gas, RRSP and RESPs. And families still have to tithe too. Singles have far fewer expenses and more disposable income. And so with the extra available time and the extra available money, God can do tremendous things through you. Maybe you can recalibrate your finances to reflect a life of serious devotion to Christ.

One of the warnings that these books gave was this. Singles can have a tendency to be more selfish. Why? Because for all of their lives whatever they do, they do for themselves. They cook for themselves. The clean up for themselves. Much of the decisions they make they may only need to consider how it affects them. So the authors encourage singles to get into community. Develop a heart of generosity, volunteering, and so on.

3) There's one more think though. And that's **risk**. For a married and family person, there is more at risk when you make important life decisions, such as a career change, moving to another part of town, let alone another city or country. You have to always be asking, how will these decisions affect my spouse and children. As a single person, it can still be quite complicated, but the risks don't involve as many people. If God calls you to live among the urban poor in our city or to quit your private sector job and go non-profit, you don't have to think about how it might affect your spouse or children. Take a risk and step out it faith.

For example let me share with you an incredible ministry that's begun in Toronto. It's called Move In. Move In was started by the son of a missionary named Nigel Barham. I met him last month at a SJT ministry meeting, connected with him through FB and here's what it says on FB's MoveIn page.

MoveIn is an effort to see praying teams of Christians moving into some of the most broken neighbourhood patches in Toronto and beyond. With a cup of cold water in one hand and the good news in the other, we are praying that these communities will discover Christ's love and pass him on. In some cases, churches will be planted. In others, missionaries will be raised up. In every case, we are praying for Christ's "Kingdom come" to lives and communities from "[Toronto] ... to the ends of the earth."

So all across Toronto this is happening, even in SJT there have been a few singles and young couples that have done this.

I've asked him to come to our church to share with us about his ministry.

That's again probably something a married person in their 40s with 3 kids would not do. They can do that, but would find it quite difficult. But if you're 27, have no baggage, no luggage, what a great ministry to consider.

MoveIn conference June 4-5

So here are three great resources you have as single folks: Time, Money, and Risk. Use them for God, his church and his Kingdom.

John Stott, one of the greatest Christians of our day, who is now 89 years old was a lifelong single pastor. And he shares that there were a couple of relationships with women that he had that were semi-serious but he didn't sense God was leading him to marry them and once he was in his 30's and his most recent relationship didn't work out, he sensed God calling him to a life of singleness. Looking in retrospect, here's how he views his life of singleness. "I could never have traveled or written as extensively as I have done if I had the responsibilities of a wife and family." His singleness has allowed him to write over 50 books. Serve as a pastor All Souls Anglican Church in England for his whole life. He served as a chaplain to the Queen. And has traveled all over the globe even up to the late 90s. I heard him once at People's church and once at Yorkminster Baptist. One journalist said of Stott, "if evangelicals could elect a [pope](#), Stott is the person they would likely choose." All this was possible because he was single.