

Sermon Delivered on the Occasion
of
The Marriage Blessing Ceremony
Between
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Title: Marriage, a Miracle of One Flesh in Two Parts

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

The Power of Two

The Biblical dictum – “two are better than one” – does not only express a general truth validated in creation itself but is perhaps best exemplified in marriage. It is common knowledge that most of God’s created beings are in pairs. The pairing connotes companionship, cooperation, team work, intimacy, synergy and the ability to multiply, expand and influence the future.

At creation, almost every creature had a companion creature of like nature it could relate to – except man. Man alone was without another of his kind. The mismatch was glaring. He could talk, reason and even name the animals, exercising a superior level of intelligence and knowledge. Yet none of the creatures that surrounded him could talk or even understand him. They were all dumb asses literally!

Though a perfect world (before sin entered), it must have felt awful for Adam. He must have felt odd and left out – and God felt his loneliness and awkwardness and created a wife, a fellow human being of a distinct personality, for him before sundown on the sixth day of creation! After all, one day is like a thousand years with the Lord and a thousand years like one day. God did not need to monitor man for long to realize his need for a life partner.

And just by looking at Eve (the first woman and wife), Adam realized he had finally found his match:

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

“And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

“And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

“Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Gen 2:21-24).

In reiterating the Genesis narrative relative to the divine institution of marriage which gives it its inviolable sanctity, Christ was careful to emphasize that “they two shall become one flesh” (Matt. 19:4-5) in the marital union. The emphasis is on “two”, not three or four or more. There is something special about the partnership of two. It brings about a harmonious blending of two souls and two personalities. The different personalities are not supposed to clash but to complement each other. One personality is not going to be swallowed up by the other, shedding his or her own individuality but that the partnership should serve to diminish their individual weaknesses and bring out their individual strengths for their mutual benefit.

As God planned it, the two fit like clasped hands. They fit well and tight.

Add more, and there’s needless rivalry, ill-suited attributes and unbridgeable differences, as each tries to assert themselves. It’s a destructive competitive spirit at work, not mutually dependable team mates.

This is why polygamy was never God’s marriage plan for mankind. Neither same-sex marriage nor ‘genderless marriage’ nor any of the fluid and evolving relationship forms of a post-modern world gone haywire!

The world is in the throes of a sweeping cultural and spiritual revolution that threatens the very foundations and touchstones of morality and godliness. This was the frightful future of rank ungodliness David foresaw by the Spirit and exclaimed in alarm: “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps. 11:3).

There’s filth and vileness on every side, yet the earth will never be empty of those who honour the God of Creation by their lives of holiness and by the praises of their lips. The chosen of God remain an oasis of righteousness in this dark and evil age in which we “shine like lights” (Php. 2:15).

And so even in marriage, we will continue to shine as “the children of light” (Eph. 5:8) and wholeheartedly embrace the God-ordained model of marriage which operates by the power of two.

And God made it clear right there in the beginning, saying to the first-ever couple: “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the air and every living creature that crawls on the earth” (*B’resheet* [Genesis] 1:28 CJB).

This is the multiplier effect of two uttered in prophecy by God’s own mouth. And it’s evidently better than singleness – when Adam was alone!

If someone here is already regretting marriage – because it hasn't brought them fulfilment or joy or self-improvement – the problem is not with the prophetic word of blessing, but how you might be relating to your better half.

Do you have a mutually beneficial relationship of mutual assistance and cooperation? Or is your relationship an adversarial one, a 'Tom and Jerry' relationship? Do you see yourselves as team mates building a future together or as merely roommates? Is one a parasite and the other a cheat?

Well, hear the word of God: "Two are better than one". So life should be better for you, and it will get better if you fine-tune your married life and do the necessary corrections in conformity with the rules God has laid down for both partners in the marriage institution: The husband to love, cherish and provide for the woman; and the wife to submit to the man and play the role of a care-giver. It's in the performance of these well-defined marital roles in an atmosphere of mutual respect and love that the power of two comes into its own! Synergy is released resulting in the enrichment of both lives fused into one spiritual entity in the sight of God!

But how will this synergy of two souls knit into one body play out? How useful will this double-barrelled power be in the face of the vicissitudes of life?

The Benefits of a Paired Life over Singleness

The key scripture Eccl. 4:9-12 enumerates for us what we stand to gain when we trade our single life (solitary journey through life) for a partnership of two.

The first benefit is that "they have a good return for their labor" (v. 9 NASB).

We are born to grow and be fruitful. It's a fundamental law of life contained in the edict of the Almighty in Eden: 'Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth as you harness its resources for your sustenance and wealth creation. God hates vacuum and negative growth. Christ spoke to this truth when He said in John 15:16:

"Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My Name, He may give it you".

So then, the moment we are static and unproductive, we are as good as dead. We will have failed to live a life of impact and purpose as God ordained for us.

So "two are better than one" in so far as they are, first and foremost, able to achieve more together as a team than if each were on their own.

However, things will not happen in a great way just because you two are together. You must both exercise your divine right to be enterprising and productive – more so as a married couple to whom God specifically gave charge. You must both work. Not necessarily engaged in formal employment, but you must contribute to the family economy.

These days many women are in formal employment (as professionals, career, women, etc.) which is good. Still, a diligent 'housewife' also contributes significantly to the family economy. She provides for her husband nourishing food (unlike a working wife who may sometimes out of necessity fail in this regard and buy 'wayside' food or eat out) as well as the emotional stability he needs to concentrate on his job for higher productivity. In addition, she creates a congenial domestic atmosphere for her husband's relaxation after a hard day's work – not to mention the man-hours she saves him in terms of the housework. All these 'sacrifices' result in increased productivity for the husband. And the monetary value can't simply be quantified.

The husband and wife are teammates in the journey of life, and they have a good return for their labour!

And it's made all the more better by the interdependent, symbiotic relationship between them. That, in fact, is the essence of the whole partnership of two: To be there for each other through the good and the bad times, even as they work jointly to accomplish more.

It's even truer when it comes to being better able to cope with life's challenges:

“For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up” (v. 10).

Life is a roller-coaster ride (or for better appreciation as Africans, a road network of asphalted and bumpy stretches) full of ups and downs.

While we have highs, we also have lows; while we have successes, we also have setbacks; and while we have falls, we also have victories. The going can't always be good; there will be bad times. Although we wished it never happened, we will certainly experience a fall on an occasion. It may come in the form of financial difficulties, a sudden attack of illness, or a temptation or some other stressful situation. Whatever the trouble may be, you will not face the full brunt and fury of it all alone if you have a special close one by your side who especially understands and empathizes with you. She will share the burden with you and provide a shoulder to cry on; she will give you emotional support to lift you up from the doldrums. When in your dejection and despondency you see darkness all around, he will point out to you there's light at the end of the tunnel. Unlike Job's wife, who in his hour of trouble and anxiety added to the pain by asking him to curse God, he/she will assure you that your world has not crashed, for there's God and there's a lifting up for you (Job 22:29).

What if there's a wife in the mould of Job's wife rattling off hope-draining, faith-sapping messages?

Keep your mouth shut, as the Prophet Micah (7:5) advises. A treacherous wife is a threat to your peace and wellbeing.

Otherwise, you have a formidable emotional support in your spouse in the hour of crisis.

However, don't lean on your own understanding and resources as a couple. Acknowledge and seek the invisible but very present help of God. He is the witness between you and the wife of your youth (Mal. 2:14). He will see you through every storm. With Him in the boat of life, you will never sink. You will scale every mountain, and He will give you victory over every challenge.

Two are better than one in this sense too – they exert mutually beneficial influence on each other:

“Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?” (v. 11).

The text is not just about intimacy in the marital bed – which is also important – but should be understood in the context of the fact that “iron sharpens iron” (Prov. 27:17). You derive stimuli (heat/warmth) from each other; you bring out the best in each other – you both do all within your power to help each other excel and succeed. You don't kill talent or good initiative but provide inspiration; you challenge each other to greater heights. You both encourage each other to excellence! You want the best for each other, and you demonstrate it by mutual support and encouragement.

Finally, a partnership of two means better defence in the face of attack:

“And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart” (v. 12).

In marriage, more than in any other relationship, destinies are intertwined, that of the husband and wife. Whatever happens to one has an effect on the other, and so challenges are better dealt with by the husband and wife team than would have been handled by either of them on their own.

The emotional support and practical advice and help are all in there, but also a praying couple releases greater spiritual power! They are able to mount greater resistance to the devil who then flees with his tail between his legs. As the saying goes, “a family that prays together sticks together”. And, indeed, when in unity and faith you pray together as a couple, the home is never torn apart but promises are secured and victories won in the spirit and in the realm of physical life.

Two are better than one in many quantifiable and unquantifiable ways – all of which redound to the infinite wisdom of God who instituted marriage to be a one-man one-woman union in the first place.

May the Lord bless this union – the marriage blessing ceremony we are all witnessing today – and make the newly-weds live the truism that two are better than one in Jesus' name! Amen!