

## The Gift of Marriage

One of the lenses through which we can read the Bible is that of 'gift'. So when we come to reading Scripture it is helpful to ask 'What are God's gifts to humanity?' 'What does it mean for men and women to receive and enjoy the gifts of God'?

John 3:16 points to the gift of Jesus as the supreme gift of God to humanity over all time. However, we could also refer to many other 'gifts' that God has graciously given to us. These will include the gifts of the Spirit, of forgiveness and .... of marriage.

Marriage is given to humanity right at the start of the biblical story (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:22–24) as a framework within which the complementary union of the different genders is going to be both physically fruitful and blessed in the overseeing or stewarding of the earth in partnership with God himself.

In Song of Songs there is an extended celebration of the gift of sexual desire and marriage.

In the New Testament letters, Paul portrays this marriage gift as reflecting and indicative of the relationship between Christ and his Church (Ephesians 5:22).

The Book of Revelation uses the metaphor of marriage to describe the eventual union of Jesus and his Church (Revelation 21:2).

Thus marriage has some kind of 'specialness' (some might say it's 'sacred') in Scripture – not just in that it makes possible a unique relationship between a man and a woman, but also because of its spiritual 'overtones' and resonance.

Outside and beyond Scripture we can also note that the gift of marriage has throughout history provided men, women and children with dignity and protection, and society as a whole with a foundational 'unit' on which it has been able to build. (It is also true that marriage has been abused and become for some a 'prison' and a place of darkness/despair. But this is a product of the behaviour of fallen men/women and not inherent to marriage's nature.)

This does not of course mean that we should idolise marriage or consider celibate singleness to be in any way inferior, but it does mean that as evangelicals we should be 'talking up' the significance, role and contribution of God's gift of marriage.