

Single in Christ a Name Better Than Sons and Daughters

by John Piper

God promises those who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children.

Duration: 37:18

Scripture: Isaiah 56:4

Topics: "Singleness In Christ", "Spiritual Maturity"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the radical biblical truth that God promises those who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children. It explores the unique opportunities for sanctification and rewards presented by both marriage and singleness, highlighting the eternal nature of relationships in Christ over temporary family relationships. The message calls for a radical devotion to Jesus Christ, challenging singles to grow up spiritually and become fathers and mothers in the faith, displaying truths about Christ and His Kingdom through their devoted singleness.

Transcript

Father, I pray that the world view that tries to fit biblical pieces in, but is a world view shaped by unbiblical assumptions would be changed so that marriage and singleness are seen to be what they are in the radical alteration of things that Jesus has brought. Now, this is something that I can't make happen, but you, by your Spirit through your Word, can. And so I ask that you would perform it.

Not that a few little nuggets would be fit in to a defective paradigm, but rather that the whole system would be blown away and replaced by a biblical understanding of all things so that the smaller things like marriage and singleness would fit in the way that you have designed in Christ Jesus in this brief and temporary age in which we live in preparation for eternity. So come and help me to be faithful to your Word now and give ears to hear, I pray through Christ. Amen.

I'm going to start and end with my main point. And in the middle, I'll saturate you with many texts so that we have foundation under the beginning by the time we get to the end and say it again. My main point is that God promises those of you who will remain single blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children.

And, secondly, that He calls you to display by your Christ-exalting devotion in singleness, to display truths about Christ and His Kingdom that shine more clearly through singleness than through marriage. Four of them. Four truths that will shine more clearly through a life of devoted singleness in Christ than through marriage.

Number one, that the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, but by regeneration through faith in Christ. Number two, that relationships in Christ are more permanent and more precious than relationships in families. And of course, it is a wonderful thing if relationships in families can be both relationships in families and relationships in Christ, but we know good and well that is, for many of us, not the case.

Number three, that marriage is temporary and finally gives way to the relationship to which it was pointing all along, namely, Christ and the church, just like a picture is not needed when you're seeing face to face. And fourth, that faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life, and all other relationships get their significance from that. Faithfulness to Christ.

No family relationship is ultimate. Relationship to Christ is ultimate. That's my message.

That's my main point. It has many layers, and we now need to see Bible underneath it and where all of that comes from. And we'll start in the middle of the Bible, then we'll go back to the front of the Bible, and then to the end of the Bible, and we'll be all over the Bible in this message because this message is a biblical theology of singleness.

Isaiah 56, verses 4-5, For thus says the Lord to the eunuchs, that is, those who cannot procreate and thus devote themselves to some unique service. A king or somebody. Thus says the Lord to the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, who choose the things that please Me and hold fast My covenant, I will give in My house and within My walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. So God promises to eunuchs... I'm sorry. Let's try that again.

God promises to obedient eunuchs blessings that are better than that of sons and daughters. In other words, God promises those of you who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than being married and having children. Now, to see that more clearly, we need to go back to the beginning of the Bible and make our way forward.

In the created order, before there was any sin in the world, and in the covenantal order between Abraham and the coming of Christ, God is primarily building His covenant people through the mechanism of procreation. In other words, being married and having offspring was of paramount importance because God was focusing His kingdom-building effort on an ethnic people, Israel, primarily. So, to be married and to have children was the preservation of a name and inheritance and of a covenant.

So, you get in Genesis 1.28, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Genesis 2.18, this is all before the fall. Genesis 2.18, before woman was made, God says to Adam, it is not good that man should be alone.

I will make a helper fit for him. And then when God chose Abraham as the beginning of that covenant people of Israel, He says to him, go out and look at those stars. So shall your offspring be.

And when Abraham found that he couldn't have children because Sarah was barren, he went and got himself a child by Hagar and said to the Lord, oh, that Ishmael might live before You. And God said, no! But Sarah, your wife, will have a son. In other words, physical offspring really mattered.

And it would come God's way in God's time. And then He reaffirmed that to Isaac in Genesis 26.3. I will be with you and I will bless you. For to you and your offspring, I will give all these lands and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father.

And again, physical offspring is seen to be crucial. And the reason these offspring are so crucial is because they're the way the covenant is preserved and extended on into the future. And because a name would be lost.

A name would be lost. You remember how Saul pled with David not to wipe out his offspring so that his name would not be erased. This is what he said in 1 Samuel 24-21.

Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house. And some of you remember the whole institution, the very complex institution of levirate marriage. Remember that where a man is obliged to marry his deceased brother's widow so that the name of the brother would not be lost in the tribes.

And the ordination was that the first son born would get the name of the dead brother. Listen to Deuteronomy 25.6. And the first son whom she bears shall succeed to the name of his dead brother that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. Now that's an amazing provision, is it not? For the perpetuation of the name through the physical seed of this man's wife and his brother.

The most famous illustration of that is Boaz and Ruth. Remember, he marries Ruth in order that Elimelech and Malon, her husband, would not lose their name and their inheritance. Listen to these words.

Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Malon, I have bought to be my wife to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among the brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses to this day. Ruth 4, verse 10.

So you can see how crucial marriage and offspring were to the preservation of name and inheritance and covenant. No wonder Jephthah's daughter asked for two months not to bewail her impending death, but to bewail her virginity. Amazing story.

So she said to her father, let this thing be done for me. Let me alone for two months that I may go up and down on the mountains, weep for my virginity, I and my companions. And so he said, go.

That's the background for Isaiah 56.5. That's the background. To cause your jaw to drop and for you to stand amazed at this. Thus says the Lord, the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me, hold fast to my covenant, these unmarried, these childless ones, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters.

I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Now where in the world did that come from? And where is that pointing? Came from chapter 53. You wanna go there with me? We read chapter 53, this glorious prophecy of the Messiah coming to be wounded for our transgressions, be crushed for our iniquities, but do we ponder verse 10? It was the will of the Lord to crush Him.

This is what God did to Christ on the cross, prophesied 700 years earlier. It was the will of the Lord to crush Him. He has put Him to grief.

When His soul makes an offering for guilt, there's our salvation. When His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring. He shall prolong His days, indeed forever, after the resurrection.

The will of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. What does that mean? He shall see His offspring. Jesus was never married.

Do you believe any crazy movie that says He was? And the whole point is that He wasn't married and that He was a dry tree and a eunuch and a single man faithfully to the day of His death. That's the point. This is another kind of offspring.

When Christ dies for sinners like you and me, who by grace put our faith in Him and are united to Him, we become His children and the children of God and a whole new way of bringing offspring into being takes precedence over the old way, which is why the next chapter, 54, begins like this. Sing, O barren one who did not bear. Break forth into singing and cry aloud, you who have not been in labor, for the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her who is married.

A whole new way of thinking, a whole new way of growing a family is coming into being prophetically at this point and literally at the coming of Jesus. So what does Jesus say when He comes to Nicodemus who cannot change his worldview? He just doesn't get it. Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

I'm here to make children. I'm here to build a family. I'm here to give birth like you never knew.

And the Apostle Paul picks up the strain in Galatians 3. Know then that it is those who are of faith who are the sons of Abraham, not the physical descendants. In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith. In other words, it's not physical descent that makes God's family.

The covenant people are the people who are born of God and who have faith in Jesus. Peter picks up the theme. Chapter 1, verse 3, according to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and to an inheritance.

You want an inheritance? You've got to have the right Father. God. How do you get God as your Father? Be born again.

Unto an inheritance imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you. Jesus, Paul, Peter, all of them saying, children are born into God's family and receive the inheritance not by marriage, not by procreation, but by faith and regeneration. Which means single people in Christ have zero disadvantage in bearing children for God.

And in many ways, significant advantages. Paul was single all his life. Or at least, lest we overstate it, single all of the life we knew him.

Because he says he has no wife in 1 Corinthians 9. But whether he's a widower, we don't know. So he has no wife in all of the New Testament documents. And he is a father if there ever was one.

He says, 1 Corinthians 4.15, though you have countless... He's talking to his church. Though you have countless guides in Christ, you have not many fathers. I became your Father in Christ Jesus through the

Gospel.

That's a single man talking. Men. Single men.

I became your Father. I'm your Father. Single and unmarried as I am.

Or let him speak for the women. 1 Thessalonians 2.7, but we were gentle among you like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. And so it will be said of many single women in Christ.

She was a great mother in the church and never married. Now, take heed and be careful lest you trivialize what I'm saying. As though you think that Pastor John is sentimentalizing singleness to make the single folks feel good in this series on marriage.

I could care less about making anybody feel good. I am declaring the temporary and secondary nature of marriage and family over against the eternal and primary nature of the church. That's what I'm declaring.

I'm declaring the temporary and secondary nature of marriage and family over against the primary and eternal nature of the family of God. Hear that. This is not trivial.

This is huge. And I fear that we have settled into our land and our culture and idolized the family. Idolized marriage.

We're here for a vapor's breath and then we're gone. What happens here is relatively minor compared to what we'll be after the resurrection. This is no small thing I'm saying.

In the resurrection, Matthew 22.30, Jesus says, in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. I am declaring the radical biblical truth that being in a human family is no sign of eternal blessing. Being in God's family means being eternally blessed.

Relationships based on family are temporary. Relationships based on union with Christ are eternal. Marriage is a temporary institution and stands for something that lasts forever, namely, our relationship to Jesus Christ, church and bridegroom.

And when His mother and His brothers came to Him, Jesus, and asked to see Him, He said, Who is My mother? Who are My brothers? And stretching out His hand toward His disciples, He said, Here are My mother and My brothers. There's not a much more radical statement in the Bible than that. You want to be the mother of Jesus? Follow Him.

The mother of God is an obedient Christian. Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you nursed, a woman cried. He turned and said to her, Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it.

Does this mean anything to you? Does talking like that change your worldview? Oh, how blessed were the breasts that gave you suck! Oh, how blessed is the womb that bore you! And he looks at that woman and says, You keep the Word of God and you'll be my mother. Do not elevate natural processes like procreation and childbearing and marriage to anything bigger than what they are. Temporal, physical means of keeping the world going and illustrations of Christ in the church, which when He comes, fade away.

Truly, truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake in the Gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come, eternal life. Single person, married person. Do you want many mothers? Do you want many children? Brothers, sisters, lands? A place to stay at night? Be a part of the church.

Join the family of God. Huge calling upon the church. I'm not saying we do it very well.

But hear church, what we're called to be. Hear this. You leave them and you get a hundred to replace in the church if we're doing our job.

So what shall we say in view of this amazing biblical vision of the secondary and temporary nature of marriage and procreation? What should we say? We should say what Jesus said and what Paul said following Jesus. And here's what Jesus said. Matthew 19, 12.

There are eunuchs who have been so from birth. There are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men. And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. There is no reason that we should take the phrase, made themselves eunuchs, to refer to any form of physical sterilization. There's no reason to take it that way.

Any more than we take the words, if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. But we take both of them very seriously. If you can receive it, receive it.

Some people choose, by God's calling, a life of devoted singleness in Christ. And to them is promised a name and a memorial better than the name of marriage and children. Paul picked it up and put it most starkly in chapter 7. Most of you single folks have read this and pondered what this means for you.

I'll read verses 8, 32 to 33, 35, 1 Corinthians 7. To the unmarried and the widows, I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord.

The married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife. I say this to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. Paul speaks about each having his own gift.

Verse 7, one of one kind, one of another kind. In other words, let him who is able to receive it, receive it. So here we are at the end where we began with all this Scripture underneath us now.

And I will give my main point again. The main point of this message is God promises those who remain single in Christ blessings that are better than the blessings of marriage and children. Now, someone should ask, as I did, how about both? Wouldn't it be better to have both, the blessings of marriage and children and the eternal blessings? There are two answers to that question.

Number one, you will learn sooner or later, and you may as well learn now, that the blessings of being with Christ in heaven are so far superior to the blessings of being married and raising children that to ask this question, wouldn't it be better to have both, is like asking, if you're going to give me the ocean, can't I have a thimble as well? It does lose some of its force. You just need to see heaven. You need to see Christ better than we see Him to keep things in proper perspective.

That's the first answer. Can't I have a thimble with the Pacific Ocean? The second answer to the question is that both marriage and singleness present us with unique trials and unique opportunities for sanctification. Unique.

Not the same. Different. Both important.

And there will be unique rewards for each. And which is better will depend not on whether you were married or single, but on how you responded to each. So I say it again, to all singles in Christ who will be that way long term, God promises you blessings in the age to come that are better, far better than the blessings of marriage and children.

And that brings some responsibility and calling with it. I can imagine somebody who would rather me not make this emphasis, saying, what this bunch of singles really needs to hear is that they should stop abdicating their responsibility in postponing the end of adolescence for about 30 years. Well, I've said that, if you have ears to hear.

If you think what I'm saying here is a license to extend adolescence to 25 and 30 and 35 while you play computer games and don't take up your cause for Christ and lay your life down for Him with all this time you have, you don't understand anything I've said. I am summoning singles to a radical devotion to Jesus Christ, which means grow up and become a dad at 25 and single the rest of your life, if God wills. And a mother at 25 of a spiritual family that you disciple who are born not of going to bed with a girl or a guy.

The strongest, most Christ-like single is the one who is virgin till death. And may it be so for many. What a glory! What a reward! And the world will tell you, that's a waste.

That's a waste. They don't know anything. How's your world view? You bind into it and you're gone.

There are four truths that singles can display in this world better than married people. I've spent nine weeks telling married people how to display Christ in the church. And I'm taking one week to say to single people, what's the counterpart drama in your life? What are you supposed to display? If me and Noel, if we are supposed to display Christ in the church in our relationship, what's singleness about? It's about these four truths.

Number one, displaying that the family of God grows not by propagation through sexual intercourse, which you avoid and abstain from because you believe in Christ, but rather it grows by regeneration and faith in Christ and you give your life to begetting such children. Second, the relationships in Christ are more permanent and more precious than the relationships in families and therefore, we'll give our lives to cultivating relationships that last forever. Noel and I won't be married in the Kingdom.

It's huge in the way singles and marrieds think about relationships and friendships and covenant bonding with people. Number three, the marriage is temporary. Finally gives way to the relationship to which it's been pointing all along, Christ in the church and forth.

Faithfulness to Christ defines the value of life. And all other relationships get their significance from this. Faithfulness to Christ.

No family relationship is ultimate. Relationship to Christ is ultimate. So, to Him be glory in the Christ-exalting drama of marriage and to Him be glory in the Christ-exalting drama of the single life.

Amen. Father, I am very aware that that's an orientation message on the way to look at things biblically. And many questions for individuals now remain to be answered, which I cannot answer for them.

One has one gift, one has another. Let him who can receive it, receive it. But You can answer, Lord.

You can answer. Is it marriage or is it singleness? And Your answer doesn't arrive always when we want to hear it. And so, I pray that all the singles will be patient with You and with life.

And they will be devoted utterly to You, now and if they marry. Devoted utterly to You in marriage. So, make Yourself supreme in the life of singleness and supreme in the life of marriage, I pray.

In Jesus' name, Amen. you

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