

Viewing the biggest canvas painting in the world is a breathtaking experience. 100 metres long and 12 metres high located in Broken Hill. I was awe struck by the panoramic outback scene in front of me when I first walked into the display room. A closer exploration revealed the striking detail in the painting. Exploring marriage in the biblical narrative is a similar experience. Last week's message, similar to walking into that display room. The big picture of marriage revealed in the biblical definition. Marriage is the exclusive, life-long union of a man and a woman joined together by God. Today, let's linger awhile and take in the finer detail. When we do the central role marriage plays in the biblical narrative is breathtakingly revealed. Last Monday I walked into Park Beach Plaza. Everything seemed dull and somewhat dark. A little slow to cotton on, I eventually realised I was wearing my sunglasses inside. Once removed everything around me was much clearer and brighter. There is a 'sunglasses inside' impact when we measure our current understanding of marriage against the biblical picture. Dim and unclear in stark contrast to its brilliance. Our marriage sunglasses could well be our flawed self-centred thinking about marriage. That marriage is the ideal relationship for the meeting of our needs and so ought to be a goal in our life plan. I invite you to take off your sunglasses and discover a picture of marriage radiating the amazing grace and purposes of God. The picture is so awesome I'm still coming to grips with it. This world is God's, not ours. The Lord Jesus is the goal of creation. Everything that was made was created for Jesus, for his benefit and to display his glory. Jesus is the ultimate reason the world was made and the whole movement of creation is towards Jesus. Toward that day when the whole of creation acknowledges his glory and Lordship, willingly or unwillingly. This is the unfolding revelation of Scripture from the allusions to Jesus in **Genesis 1-3** to the words, '*Come, Lord Jesus*' at the end of the Bible. In that unfolding revelation marriage has a key teaching and revelation role. It is to be a testimony to God's desire for humanity through the ultimate bridegroom, Jesus Christ. In the pages of Scripture this is apparent in at least four ways. One, the first marriage in the Bible foreshadows the eternal union between God and his people. The exclusive, lifelong union instituted by God between the first man and woman gives us a picture of God's desire for all of humanity. Union with God in Christ. The Bible uses marriage imagery to express this great truth. '*As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over*

you.’ **Isaiah 62:5** Despite the impact of the Fall, marriage remains a testimony to the purposes of God. Paul’s teaching in **Ephesians 5** links the creation ordinance on marriage to the relationship between Christ and the church. Referring to **Genesis 2:24**, Paul says, *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.***v31-32**. Marriage is more profound than a relationship designed to meet the physical and emotional needs of a man and woman and to bring children into the world. It is an image of Christ and the church. Two, the first marriage is an expression of the image of God in the world. The sequence at the end of **Genesis 1** is revealing. God declares mankind will be made in his image. God created male and female. Then we read, *God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* **Genesis 1:28** God’s mandate is to the male and female together. As male and female multiply and rule over creation they express who God is: the ruler and creator of all. The mandate is only possible through the one flesh union of man and woman. More revealing is **Genesis 2:18** *‘The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”* The helper is needed so the man can fulfil God’s mandate and care for creation. The only suitable helper is the woman, not another male to assist with the work. The task fails without the man and woman working together in faithful union. The man without the woman can never be what God intends for his image in the world. Three, unfaithfulness in marriage is a mirror reflecting the story of humanity’s relationship to God. In the Old Testament books, Ezekiel and Hosea, unfaithfulness in marriage is used as a metaphor for Israel’s unfaithfulness to God. Israel is to be joined to the Lord like a wife to her husband. Instead Israel is said to commit adultery with false gods. God’s love and faithfulness is responded to with rebellious rejection. A breach of his covenant relationship with his people. Any breach of the marriage covenant is a stark reminder of the ultimate unfaithfulness; rebellion against God. Four, marriage reflects the nature and impact of God’s redeeming love and humankind’s godly response. Apostolic teaching reveals how the biblical response of husband to wife and wife to husband is a profound portrayal to the world of the gift and impact of salvation. Jesus

sacrificial love in giving his life for the world washes us clean from the stain of sin making us perfect in God's sight. As recipients of this sacrificial love we submit ourselves to Christ the Lord. **Ephesians**

**5:22-27** teaches how marriage is a tangible expression of the gospel. *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.* Brothers and sisters, do you have ears to hear and eyes to see? Marriage is central to the Bible's story. Marriage is linked to the heart of the Bible's message. Marriage matters to God. It is beyond redefinition or reimaging. To cover marriage with a veil of uncertainty is to dull the clarity of the life-giving truths of which marriage is an image. Christians are to honour marriage. Married Christians are to daily display the relationship between Christ and his church in their marriage. Married Christians are to recognise marriage is a gospel partnership where the story of the rescue of Jesus and its impact is on display for all to see. Marriage is worth defending. Defending marriage is the subject of next week's message.