

Marriage and Divorce

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[0:00] Mark chapter 10, you know, Jesus always gathered a crowd.! When he spoke, many came, many healed, many healed, many! many healed, many healed, many healed, many healed, many healed, many like any religious leader they had ever seen.

And he was taking the attention away from the religious establishment. And the Pharisees and the Sadducees, two of the primary sects of religious establishment, they did not like him getting the attention.

They also didn't like his teaching. And, well, at least some did. We know one did. John chapter 3 says Nicodemus did because he went to him at night probably so people couldn't see him.

And the reason why they didn't like what Jesus taught was it wasn't about rules and regulations. It's not what he focused on. He was about freedom and the liberty that only can come through the grace of God.

So they questioned him repeatedly in an attempt to corner him, to somehow try to make him lose credibility to cause conflict with the Romans, which would surely have ended him, and then to establish a case against him.

[1:34] So they did it in many ways. They confronted him about eating with sinners and tax collectors. He shouldn't run with folks like that. They didn't feel like he fasted enough.

He needed to celebrate fasting more than he did. They went after him for not acknowledging the rules that they had set up for the Sabbath day.

And I talk a lot about this because it highly influences the gospel and the stories of the gospel. But not only did they believe you ought to honor the Sabbath, but they made up rules and regulations to tell you how you should honor the Sabbath.

And if you did not follow those rules and regulations about how you ought to honor the Sabbath, then you broke the Sabbath. It wasn't just based on what Scripture said. As a matter of fact, their rabbinical rules weighed out heavily, more heavily in their mind than what Scripture said.

And so they tried to test him. They wanted a sign from heaven that would prove him. And every time they tried to get him, he stumped them in every way.

[2:38] I want you to notice what they go after in Mark chapter 10. And that's exactly why he discussed it because that's what they went after. I want you to see this.

It's in Mark chapter 10, beginning in verse 1. And he says, and he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Now, I have talked about how the gospel of Mark spends a lot of time dealing with his ministry.

And as we get somewhat to a mountaintop, literally to a mountaintop in the top of, excuse me, in chapter 9 with the Mount of Transfiguration, when he comes down off that mount, he'll begin to make his way towards Jerusalem.

We're just centering in on the cross and what's to come. And literally, the first part of Mark chapter 10, verse 1 tells us that directionally, he is headed now toward Jerusalem.

And it's on that way that crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up.

[3:45] And in order to test him, asked, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? And he answered them, what did Moses command you?

And they said, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. And Jesus said to them, because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.

But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife.

And the two shall become one flesh. So they're no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

And in the house, the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

[4:43] And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Now, I want you to understand from the beginning today what the Pharisees were actually trying to do.

They were not so concerned about his thoughts on marriage. Instead, what they wanted was a misstep. They wanted a misstep either in one of two directions, maybe both directions for Christ to make.

The first one is they wanted him to look lax in what it means to have marital commitment. What it really is.

And I want you to remember that in John chapter 8, Jesus is the one that forgave the woman that was caught in adultery.

And as men confronted her with stones in their hand to throw at her until she died, he knelt down and wrote in the sand and stood up and said, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

[6:00] He knelt down again and wrote in the sand again. And you could hear the stones fall into the ground. And the men walked away.

What did he write in the sand? Well, if you want an interesting theological conversation, you make a pot of coffee and have a bunch of theologians sit around and talk about that.

But whatever he wrote, he confronted those men about their own sin. He stood up for that lady. And then he told her, you're forgiven.

Go and sin no more. Change the pattern of your life and don't do it again. And if you don't think that got them talking about him, well, I think you're wrong.

Why in the world would he give a lady a second chance? Is he lax about marital commitment? The second misstep they were looking for is they wanted him to run up against Herod, just like John the Baptist did.

[7:16] Because John got killed because he spoke out about Herod's adultery. And if Jesus is going to say Herod broke the law and was wrong, then he may face the same thing that John the Baptist faced.

That will take care of him. And that was their strategy. But I want you to notice what Jesus did when they asked him these questions. Jesus took them back to Moses.

When they brought up the possibility of divorce, he took them back further to creation. And he focused on three truths that I want to spend the majority of our time on this morning.

However, I want to be clear about something before we get started with this. And I want you to hear me. There will be no going backwards today.

What happened in your yesterday is gone. If you've asked the Lord to forgive you, it's under the blood of Christ.

[8:20] You're forgiven. Don't do it again. Don't do it again. Don't do it again. If you've been unfaithful to your spouse, repent. Stop it. Walk away from it.

If you've not apologized, apologize. Make right whatever you can make right. If you've been divorced, your fault, their fault, as is in most cases, lots of fault to pass around to each other.

That is yesterday. Our effort today is not to lament on what could have been in our ancient past or even in our recent past.

Let's deal faithfully with where we are now and with whatever God has for us in the future. Let me tell you what the evil one loves to do. The evil one loves to drag up whatever God's already forgiven.

And listen, my friend, that's under the blood of Christ. And when I say that, what I mean by that is without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. But because Christ went to the cross and shed his blood, we know now that sin can be forgiven.

[9:31] Your past can teach you, but it does not need to control you. Regret over yesterday can easily become a distraction for today and faithfulness for tomorrow.

So listen, folks, let's learn from our past. Let's live faithful in our present. And let's honor God with whatever he puts before us next.

Amen? Amen. We're backing up today. We're moving forward. Three truths. The first one is this. The marriage covenant is formed by God.

You say, well, preacher, that's obvious. Well, let me explain that to you, okay? The marriage covenant is formed by God. When two Christians get together, it's not a friend that brought them together.

It's not the Internet that brought them together. It's God that brought them together. Dawn and I had a mutual friend. His name is Tim Smith. If you are familiar with Josh Howerton, who pastors a large church in Texas, Lake Point Church, he's hot on the media these days, has a lot of good things to say.

[10:48] His executive pastor at that church is Tim Smith, our dear friend. And Tim was the youth minister in the church where Dawn grew up. And he told me about somebody in his church, played the piano there, and he told me about her.

And apparently he had said something to her. And then he called me one day and he lied to me. He wanted me to come by.

We had taken a common class called Contemporary Religion. He said, somebody's got a question, some religious questions. And if you've still got your notes, will you bring them up? I've already packed it up. He's about to get married. He said, I've already packed all that up.

Will you bring those over so I can share that with somebody? And so I walked into his house not knowing that that person would be there. And that person was Dawn.

And I walked in with a Kyle Petty Exide Battery tank top on. And she has never got over it.

[11:50] Every now and then she wants me to pull it back out and put it back on. Get that out of your head.

That's in the past. Tim didn't get us together. God did. He just played a part in that.

God is the one that made man and woman for each other. And marriage is only between a man and a woman, just as God designed it.

No matter what the law may say, no matter what culture may say, if a union is of God, it's from God. He brought us together.

Now, does that make it perfect? Of course not. The people that God brought together are not perfect. And our lack of perfection and the stupidity that comes forth from it can cause a lot of heartache in marriage.

[13:05] But it's still a union by God. Our failures don't change God's design of the marriage covenant. And Jesus is saying here, yes, divorce is a legal matter, but it's not just paperwork.

It's not just lawyers. It's not just technicalities. Divorce is a heart matter. Now, there are biblical allowances for divorce. But that is also only due to the hardness of people's hearts.

Hardheartedness, not being right with God, not listening to the Spirit of God, being drawn away from a God-ordained marriage by a wandering mind or by wandering feet or by wandering interest will lead to divorce.

But God didn't design it that way. And the question is not, well, when can I get out of my marriage? When is there enough for me to get out of my marriage?

What should be allowable for me in my marriage? That's not the question. The question is, what does God want to do in my heart so that I will honor the covenant that he's made between my spouse and me?

[14:19] Not what does he want to do in my wife's heart, but what does he want to do in your spouse's heart, but what does he want to do in my heart so that I'll honor the covenant that he's made between my spouse and me?

God put us together. The marriage covenant is formed by God. The second truth is this. The marriage covenant is not to be broken.

Now, in that day, there were two conflicting views concerning divorce. And it all came back to an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24, verse 1.

There were two schools that thought about it. Now, I'm going to read Deuteronomy 24, verse 1, but I'm also going to read some following passages just so you'll get the context. Deuteronomy 24, verse 1 says this. When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he's found some indecency.

That's the phrase we're looking at. Some indecency in her. And he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of the house. And if she goes and becomes another

man's wife and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of the house.

[15 : 48] Or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife after she had been defiled.

But that's an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God has given you as an inheritance. Now, let me first say this.

The woman needs to do a better job of picking a husband. Okay? That's the main thing. But one is, verse 1 says, some indecency.

Now, what does that mean? Well, there was a couple of rivaling rabbinical groups about this. Okay? And their interpretation of this. One rabbinical group said this. They were quite liberal with what indecency is.

And they thought it was okay for a man to divorce his wife for nearly any reason, including, and I quote, spoiling a dish. That means burning suppers, what that means.

[16 : 52] Another rabbinical group was much more strict. And they taught that the critical words, some indecency, refers only to premarital sin.

That if a newlywed husband discovered that his new bride was not a virgin, he could divorce her. Of course, if she committed adultery. He could divorce her.

He was only considered to have committed adultery if his mistress was married.

It was believed that if a certificate of divorce was given, a man had the right to marry again.

However, the divorced woman would have to seek permission from her ex-husband in order for her to be married again. Now, ladies, I can tell by the look you're giving me that you're picking up on something that I'll touch on in just a moment.

[17 : 57] But I want to go back to this phrase, some indecency, okay? Which actually speaks of nakedness that is shameful.

I got to thinking about this. Not a whole lot. But I got to thinking about it. And I thought, there's a difference in two words that basically mean the same thing. One of them is nude and the other is naked.

And you got to say it with that twang too, naked, okay? It's one thing to be nude. Adam and Eve were nude before they bit the fruit. And after they bit the fruit, they were naked and they were ashamed.

And what this is talking about is being naked. This is talking about indecent exposure is what it's talking about.

Now, the big question was, what are the legal grounds for divorce? And I've had people ask me this, these kind of questions a lot.

[19 : 02] And I have biblical answers for such as that. I wrote a paper when I was working on my dissertation, my doctorate, on this very matter. But let me just be clear.

When it gets to that point, usually it doesn't matter. If a person settles in his heart what he's going to do, that's what he does.

If she sets it in her mind what she's going to do, it really don't matter what I say. Because it's a heart matter. That's what Jesus said.

Jesus said it's a heart matter. However, Jesus emphasized it's not our bond to break. Mark, verse 9, in Mark chapter 10, verse 9, what therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

That's not just a line in a wedding. It's the truth. It's the words of Christ. When we place our lives into his hands, he guides our lives. He steps our steps.

[20 : 06] He bonds us together. We don't even consider it our right to break it. We didn't do it. He did it. We don't undo it. He does.

Can you imagine how many marriages would be saved if hearts were not hard and bonds were not broken? But because both are true, so many marriages dissolve.

The bond of marriage is not yours. You could not have done it on your own. It's God's. It's not to be broken by us. Third thing is this.

The responsibilities of the covenant are with both spouses. And I really believe that this principle that Jesus taught is stronger than anything else we've looked at today.

Do you remember how I talked a little while ago? I know you women do because I remember how you looked at me. How I talked about how a man's right to divorce and a woman dealing with what was handed to her.

[21:09] I want you to notice how Jesus handled it. Because he lifts the role of women. You see it again and again in his ministry.

But you see it in this passage as well. He says a remarkable statement that we just gloss over. But it was a remarkable statement in that day and time. In that culture.

Verse 11 says this. And he said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Now the common thought was that if a woman committed adultery, she should die after the certificate of divorce was issued. Now although we have a circumstance in John chapter 8 where it looks like that's what they intended to do.

The reality is by the time you get to this point in the first century, that didn't happen a whole lot. That really must have been a scandalous situation. Because the Romans were not big on stoning women because they had been divorced or because they had done something to cause it.

[22:20] But that was the thought. They were good as dead. But culture said very little about if a man was adulterous. And it was only considered adultery if he committed adultery with a woman who was married to an Israelite.

She's married to a foreigner. Didn't really matter. She wasn't married. Didn't really matter. In other words, the problem as they saw it was he had wronged that woman's husband.

That was the thought. Jesus didn't think like that. Jesus spoke differently about it. Jesus says that both adulterous parties are equally guilty.

And both man and woman, when betrayed, have equal rights to end the relationship. Now, does that mean the relationship has to end?

Of course it does not. But the Lord does acknowledge that sometimes sin can so destroy a marital bond that it may not be reconciled.

[23:35] Now, how is that relevant to us? In two ways. One is, we live in a day when people are flippant about living together outside of marriage. If unmarried and living together, that's fornication and it's wrong in the eyes of God.

Nothing about it is good. Nothing about it is promising. Nothing about it is God-honoring. We should not condone it. We should not turn a blind eye to it.

You don't have a right to take a test drive before you buy. Because the reality is, the chances of divorce in such a relationship are stronger than those who never lived together before they married. The second reason this applies to us is this. We live in a day when people are flippant about ending a marriage. And divorce does not honor God.

It is a sin against God. Malachi 2, verse 16 tells us God hates divorce. We should too. A divorce leaves a nasty scar that comes from the hard heart of a person or possibly a couple.

[24:52] Jesus teaches us that the best way to deal with our marriage is to first deal with our own heart. I want you to hear me today.

Not our spouse's heart, but to deal with our heart. Hard-heartedness can cause widespread problems.

And while we're dealing with our own heart, let's pray for the heart of our spouses as well. God is to be at the heart of a marriage.

And it's not our marriage to end. It's not our marriage to be unfaithful to. It is a bond that God made. And that goes for men. And that goes for women. Because Christ leveled the playing field. One person is not more important than the other.

[26:08] One person is not more privileged than the other. One person don't have more rights than the other. Do you know what else is equal ground?

There's equal ground at Calvary. I am thankful today. The reason why I stand and do what I do is because, thank God, all are welcome to come to Him.

He'll take you as you are. And He'll make you what He'd have you to be. But we have to acknowledge the fact that we need Him. Give your life to God.

Give your past to God. Give your present to God. Give your marriage to God. Give all of your life to God.

Because He's at work. He's at work in our lives. He's at work in our marriages. He's at work in our families. He's at work in our church. To God be the glory.

[27:13] May we honor God in the most crucial relationships that God places in our life. Because they wouldn't be there without His hand. And they'll only sustain by His hand.

With every head bowed. And every eye closed this morning. As I told you from the beginning. Let's not lament.

Over things that the evil one wants to bring up about us that we can't do anything about. Instead, let's do something about what we can do something about.

What is it today that needs to be made right with God in your life? What is it today that you need to lay down before Him?

It may not have anything to do with the subject matter that I preached on this morning. Because I realize when the Holy Spirit begins to speak to people about hard-heartedness, that that area can be in so many different directions.

[28:14] It can be so many different relationships. It may not have anything to do with relationships. It may just be hard-heartedness toward God. What is it today that you need to lay down before Him?

It could be somebody here today and you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ. You've never asked Him to forgive you of your sins. You've never even acknowledged your sins to God. And I want you to know today that if you'll ask the Lord Jesus to forgive you. And to come into your life and save you. Not only will He take those sins away. But He will empower you with the Holy Spirit of God to rise above the patterns that you fall into in the past. He'll save you today. If you don't know the Lord, you come down this aisle as soon as we begin to sing and say, Pastor, I need to be saved. Maybe you're here this morning and God's dealing in your life in any matter where there's a hard-hearted matter.

You need to lay that before the Lord today. You can do it at this altar. You can do it where you'll stand in just a moment. You can do it with me praying for you. You just do what God tells you to do.

[29:22] But why in the world would we harbor things in our life today that we can do something about by the power of God? Let's lay them down before Him.

And let Him do what only He can do. Heavenly Father, I love you. And I thank you for the privilege that you give us to look at a passage of Scripture and to learn from you what it means to be hard-hearted.

The damage that it does not only to us, but it does to others, dear God. I pray today that you'll make our hearts right. Help us to leave this place right with you in every way.

In Jesus' precious name, amen. Amen.