

Summer on the Mount: Adultery and Divorce Redefined, Matthew 5:27-32, 7/21/19

One of the qualities that makes the sermon on the Mount so powerful is that it simultaneously brings comfort and makes you very uncomfortable. I think you will experience that today in our topics of sex, adultery and divorce. Recap: We are in this section where Jesus is redefining what it means to live the blessed life in the Kingdom of God. Not just the external religion of the pharisees, but a relationship where Jesus is reigning on the throne of our hearts. Last week, Pastor Matthew showed us how Jesus redefined murder, Matthew 5:21-26, Murder is not only the act, it finds its breeding ground in the heart manifested in hatred and unforgiveness, bitterness, anger. And unless Christ is reigning on the throne of our hearts, a hard heart will. Similarly, today we are going to see Jesus redefine adultery and divorce not only in the external act, but based on who or what is reigning in the heart.

Outline Today: The Covenant Design of Marriage, The Consuming Desire of Lust, The Concession of Divorce

Matthew 5:27-32

²⁷ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

²⁹ If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

³¹ "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Anyone feel uncomfortable? If it doesn't feel a bit shocking and make you squirm, you aren't really listening, maybe you dozed off for a second thinking about lunch. Does sexual desire send you to hell? Does Jesus want us to cut off arms and pluck out eyes? And what is Jesus saying if I am divorced and remarried? What is this all about?

Jesus' teaching on adultery and divorce only make sense if we understand the The Covenant Design of Marriage.

The Mosaic Law defined Adultery has sex outside of the covenant of marriage. What is a covenant relationship? There are two primary types of relationships that we enter into. Consumer relationships and covenant relationships. Consumer relationship is what you have with your cell phone company or your doctor or your kids' school. You enter into the relationship to have your needs met, but you are always open to an upgrade. A better price, better coverage, better service, better teacher, better school environment. If my needs aren't

being met, I'm out. In a consumer relationship it is- **YOU ADJUST TO ME**. Nothing wrong with this, nice to have options and the freedom in our country to choose.

The other kind of relationship we can enter is radically different- **covenant relationship**. A covenant relationship instead says- **I will adjust to you** because I made a promise, and the relationship is more important than my needs. God designed marriage to be this kind of self-giving, commitment-centered relationship. And why did God design covenant relationships? It is a very reflection of his character. He is a loyal, covenant making and covenant keeping God.

Insecurity vs. Refuge of Safety- In a consumer relationship you are on a constant treadmill of performance. If I don't measure up, if I don't meet their deepest needs (however legitimate or illegitimate) they might leave me or not love me. You can't share your deepest fears and insecurities for fear of abandonment. But in a covenant relationship is a refuge of safety. You know that you are loved no matter what, you can share your deepest insecurities in a relationship because there is a deeper commitment. You can confess when you are wrong and humble yourself knowing you won't be exploited or taken advantage of.

Personal Happiness vs. Lasting and deepening love- In a consumer relationship, your personal happiness and feeling in love is most important. But in a covenant relationship you are in it for far more than your feelings. And if you are in it for more than your feelings, lasting, deeper feelings and loyalty will grow. Think about this with kids, you are in a covenant relationship with your kids, even if you don't have children you know this is true. A lot of the time in raise kids, you are giving of yourself, adjusting to them, pouring out...You get very little back...and never really evens out, you give out way more than you will ever get back. But your love for them deepens and strengthens. Can you imagine if you entered into a consumer relationship with your kids? "You know, Aidan, this is just not working out. You aren't meeting my needs and filling my love tank...I actually have been hanging out with the neighbor's kids, and I'm happier with them, so I'm upgrading. So..." Doesn't work that way. This is God's design of marriage-covenant, not consumer.

What does this have to do with sex and adultery in Matthew 5? Sex was never designed to be a consumer good, it is a covenant good. This is what is meant in **Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife [covenant marriage], and the two will become one flesh [sexual consummation].** Ponder the beautiful, deeply symbolic design of sex. Sex is supposed to be a sign of what you have done with your whole life. This is why adultery and any sex outside of marriage lacks integrity, why it is a twisted version of what God intended when we turn it into a consumer good.

C.S. Lewis- The monstrosity of sex outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union.

But it goes deeper, because Jesus tells us that it is not just the act of sex but even what is happening in the heart #2 **The Consuming Desire of Lust.**

²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

The word here translated “looks lustfully” is the word Epithumeo. Carries the connotation of idolatry and greed. Greed- not wrong to have money...but greed is when you want it for you, selfish...you will become a workaholic, you will cut corners, you fantasize about it. You are looking to money to give you that feeling that only God can give you. It is reigning in the heart. You can have this same greedy, idolatrous heart when it comes to sexual desire when you treat it as a consumer good. You want it for you. You treat men or women like an object for your pleasure. You will fantasize and chase it to give you what only God can fulfill. **Jesus is saying that the full-grown sin of adultery comes from what is actually reigning in the heart.** Jesus is forcing his followers to see the gravity and potential long-term danger of a desire unchecked, unconfessed, untamed that breeds idolatry. Sexual sin will bring hell into your life...and I think this is what Jesus is saying, and if can keep people from trusting Christ and missing out on heaven. Few things ruin marriages, bring serious dysfunction and wreck your spiritual life like sexual sin reigning in the heart.

One form of many, Pornography. Sex isn't for consuming, it is for giving. What is more consumer than that? You don't even have someone else, you are treating it like Burger King- you get the version you want, how you want, when you want...it is the exact opposite of the what sex is intended for. Addicting, selfish, dangerous. I know because I have seen it's enslaving and destructive affects in my life...but by the grace of God it would have dragged me to the pit.

So what does Jesus tell us to do? “If your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out.” Amputation. Not literally, this is clearly a metaphor for drastic spiritual surgery. What will it take? Amputate it from your life. Starts with repentance and surrender to Jesus as the reigning king. Being motivated by what he has done for you and a hatred of sin. Giving it over to him as an act of worship. And then doing whatever is necessary. Humbling yourself to confess to your spouse, or pastor or accountability group. Having your wife or friend set passwords, accountability software, or maybe doing back to a dumb-phone for a while. **What does “amputating” sexual sin from your life look like?**

This is uncomfortable! I know, but we aren't done. Jesus also calls out the...**The Concession of Divorce**

³¹ “It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ ³² But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Now this raises a number of questions, maybe elicits an emotional reaction because of your experience. Probably provokes a number of what “if” scenarios in our minds, some of which go well beyond the scope of my sermon today but what we first want to make clear is the basic understanding of divorce in light of the covenant of marriage.

The popular teaching under Rabbi Hillel of Jesus' day is that a man could divorce his wife for just about any reason that they considered, "Indecent." It really wasn't that different from our day today in some ways, although it was far more difficult for a woman to obtain a divorce from a man. We live in a time where 4 out of 10 marriages end in divorce. We live in a world with easy off-ramps to marriage. Of no-fault divorces. Of "Fell out of love" divorces. Of "I want an upgrade" divorces. Jesus speaks into the culture of his day and ours by redefining the concession of divorce in light of the covenant of marriage.

The Mosaic law made a concession for divorce which is what Jesus is referencing here when he says, "You've heard it said." A concession was something God allowed because of man's fallen condition, in order to keep peace in a society filled with people at various levels of spiritual maturity and people groups living among the nation of Israel. This allowance for divorce, Jesus said, was not a command or license; it was a concession due to our fallen state. Jesus said in Matthew 19:8 that allowances for divorce were made in the OT Law only because of the hardness of hearts. But Jesus says here in Matthew 5 and again in chapter 19, that the covenant of marriage is in direct conflict with divorce. Why? The very nature of the covenant is to be self-giving, loyal, permanent, not consumeristic, not based on my needs being met or whether I feel in love at any given moment. And Jesus says in **Matthew 19:6 What God has joined together let no one separate.** In other words, divorce should not be the first option but the very last. Tim Keller says, "Divorce is not like taking off your clothes but rather taking off your arm." Like amputation...we are talking a lot about amputation today. There are times when amputation is necessary, but any doctor would be run out of the practice if he was constantly and quickly saying, "Let's just amputate it." 'Hang nail? Amputation. Sprained ankle. Varicose veins? Cut it off!' Amputation is the last thing that you do after there is nothing else that can be done and it's going to have lasting ramifications.

Can we see why God hates divorce? Why it contradicts God's covenant love and design for marriage? OK in light of that, let me address a few scenarios and questions that this brings up. Because, the reality is that while it is not God's design and it breaks his heart, divorce happens, and sometimes is even necessary.

1) When is it Permissible to Seek Divorce?

The two clear allowances for divorce in Scripture: **Sexual Infidelity (Matthew 5:32, 19:9) and Desertion (1 Corinthians 7:15).** And the biblical logic behind this is these are two situations where the covenant has been killed.

-Repentance vs. Unrepentance

-Isolated vs. Ongoing

-Last option vs. first option. Leave room for God's mercy, grace, forgiveness and restoration.

2) What about Abuse?

There are many women, sadly even in the church, quietly sit under the abusive reign of a husband. I am not talking about your husband occasionally saying something mean to you or being tighter with the finances than you would like. Primarily, I am referring to physical abuse although there are also forms of psychological abuse and threats. If you think you may be in an

abusive relationship, talk to us. **Get out and Get help.** If you are in an abusive relationship, you should definitely work to get yourself and your children out of the house. We have helped resource several women to do just that here. You need to do this under close advisement of a Christian counselor and pastor. A space of separation may be in order, even a long one, to give the one spouse space to repent, get help, see real change and get accountability. If they refuse to, after a long period of time, they may have, in effect, “left the marriage” and so, 1 Cor 7:15, you are no longer bound.

3) Is it biblical to get remarried if I have been divorced?

There are godly pastors, theologians and individual Christians on both sides of this question. **My belief is that where God allows a concession for divorce, he allows for remarriage.** This does not mean that you necessarily should get remarried. Paul says in 1 Cor 7 Paul that singleness can be a gift... you don't need marriage to be happy... it may be better for you and your kids for you to stay single or God may have purposes for you in a time of singleness. Have I given God time to restore my previous marriage? Have I worked through the pain and ramifications? Have I appropriately and thoroughly owned my part (however small it may have been)?

4) If I participated in an unbiblical divorce or unbiblical remarriage, how does God see me?

Let me just say, about all divorce, whether biblical or unbiblical a few things. Divorce has affected a lot of people in our church. Some of you have gone through it yourself; some of you are going through it right now. The mere mention of the word may carry a huge weight of sorrow and loss and tragedy and disappointment and anger and regret and guilt. The upheaval of life is immeasurable and it can often come with the loss of personhood and profound loneliness. For many of you, you watched your parents go through it. You know that while your friends thought two Christmases sounded really cool, you know how painful it was and the hole it ripped in your heart. I want you to know I don't come judgmentally on this. I know that for many of you it was one of the most painful times in your life and something that if you could have avoided, you would have. Some Christians talk about it like it is the unforgivable sin. As if it is the one thing you can't ever really come back from, the scarlet D you carry with you for the rest of your life.

Maybe you made terrible mistakes; even committed terrible sins. You can't change that now, and those mistakes don't mean God is done with you.

J.D. Greear, “In the cross and resurrection, Jesus puts away the sin done by you and he overturns the sin done to you.” When we believe he died for us, God transfers our sin to Jesus and imputes to us Jesus' righteousness. The resurrection is God overturning the curse of death and destruction brought on by our sin, whether our sin or somebody else's, and infusing the power of new life into the dead tomb of a broken relationship. The empty tomb is the answer for a soul broken by divorce.

And God can restore even the most messed up of divorce and remarriage situations if you are repentant and allow him to reign in your heart. You can experience the blessed life.