

The Real Jesus: The One About Divorce, Mark 10:1-12, 10/16/22

Turn to Mark 10. Now some of you if you are tracking intently with us in our Mark series called the Real Jesus may have noticed that we skipped Mark 10:1-12 last week. And you may have been thinking that we chickened out because it's the uncomfortable subject of divorce. But we don't avoid difficult parts of the Bible here. And this is difficult not only because this teaching today is countercultural in our world, because I know some of you have walked this painful road. I've sat with some of you through the devastation, disillusionment, anger, fear...So I bring this teaching in humility and deep awareness that it may reopen a wound or painful memories in some of us. My prayer is that I would bring this truth in love today, and provide some hope as well, even in bleakest of situations.

10 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.

⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,

⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.

¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

[Blank Slide] We have some polar opposite views of marriage in our culture. On one hand, we live in a modern, secular society of pre-nups, marriages of convenience, open marriages, no-fault divorces. Doesn't work out, you aren't happy anymore, you meet someone else, no problem...move on to the next one. Or why bother with marriage anyway, it's an antiquated, man-made patriarchal system...live together, or just hook up on Tinder, but marriage? No way! On the other hand, some of us come from families or religious cultures where marriage is a necessary item to check off the list in order to live the good life and unless you are married you are less than, in these contexts divorce is often thought of as the unpardonable sin, like the scarlet letter D is now painted over you no matter how many times you try to wash it off. But Jesus' view of marriage and divorce here in Mark 10 challenges both false worldviews.

Jesus' View on Marriage.

Notice that Jesus answers the pharisees question about divorce by going back to first principles, quoting Genesis 1 and 2...the very beginning of creation and marriage. See, an accurate view of divorce is only understood in light of an accurate view of marriage. Jesus teaches us three things about marriage. Quick overview.

#1 The Origin of Marriage

⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

The origin of marriage is God. Marriage is the very first institution God created. No matter how remote of a society on earth, they all have marriage. This is not a social convention dreamed up by patriarchal, misogynistic societies as some modern skeptics would have you believe. And because it's God's institution it means that he is the only one that can regulate marriage. This matters deeply, because if it's our invention we can tinker with it. But if it is God's invention we can't, or at least not without serious consequences. You can't use a microwave however you want. You need to submit to the design intentions and regulations. You shouldn't try to melt butter for 20 minutes instead of 20 seconds... or leave your spoon in your oatmeal bowl...or at least not without unfortunate consequences. We can't get into marriage for whatever reasons we want, behave in marriage and treat our spouse however we want, and get out of marriage however we want and expect that everything is going to work out just fine. The reason marriages breakdown and end in divorce is because of a misuse of how it was designed by God by one, or both spouses.

#2 The Essence of Marriage

⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

That word "united" is a word that literally means to make a covenant, a public vow, a promise. **The essence of Marriage is the Covenant.** This is why at the beginning of every wedding ceremony I officiate I say these words: "The marriage you are about to enter is a covenant. A covenant can be mistaken as a contract but they are vastly different. A contract is built on the potential distrust a party involved. A covenant is built on a mutual trust of each other. A contract is established in order to limit liability while a covenant is based on unlimited responsibility for one another. And finally a contract is easily breakable by one party or the other but a covenant is unconditional and unbreakable. Will you, enter into a holy covenant with each other before God and these witnesses today? If so, answer we will." Commitment to promises of faithfulness and devotion in the future are the essence of marriage, not feelings of love and affection in the present.

Let me just say a word to those who are single and would like to be married one day. How are you doing at making and keeping promises? If you are often breaking promises, if you say you are going to show up to work but then call in because you aren't feeling it, if you say yes to hanging out with some friends but then you back out when something better comes along...or maybe you don't make commitment at all-reply to everything with a "maybe". You never

define the relationships you are in, or you go month to month on leases. You are literally practicing to not be able to make the biggest commitment of marriage. Practice now making and keeping your promises, however small they may be. And look for potential mates who can keep their commitments...or at least when they break them they own it and ask for forgiveness. Keeping promises (covenant) is the essence of marriage.

#3 The Purpose of Marriage

⁶ *“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’”* ⁷ *“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two shall become one flesh,”*

Of all the things God said was good in the creation, the only thing that wasn't good was man being alone and so out of Adam he created Eve. What was God doing? Showing us that the **purpose of marriage is oneness**. Two people to come together on a deep, soul level kind of way. It's the deepest of all human bonds, not that friendship can only be made inside marriage, but it is uniquely purposed in marriage. Oneness-Physically, emotionally, relationally, spiritually. This is what it is intended to be. If you are married, this is what you should be striving to maintain and grow, opening up the deepest parts of yourself to each other. Your fears, your hopes and dreams, your past, your vulnerabilities. This takes hard work and intentionality. You can't work 70+ hours a week and be so tired that you don't feel like talking and expect to experience oneness in marriage. You need to prioritize oneness- get babysitters, schedule dates, deal with conflicts that have gotten in the way of oneness, intentionally communicate on a heart level and risk being misunderstood and vulnerable, pursue physical intimacy often.

So Jesus' view on Marriage is that the Origin of Marriage is God, The Essence of Marriage is a Covenant, The Purpose of Marriage is Oneness. Only with this context can we understand divorce properly.

Jesus' View on Divorce

#1 A Necessary Protection *especially for vulnerable women

² *Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*

Why would this have been a test? In Jesus' day there was debate among the pharisees around what constituted lawful divorce. One Rabbi named Hillel taught that a man could divorce his wife for burning his breakfast. Another said that if he found someone more worthy he could divorce his wife. These views came from a culture of abusing authority, treating their wives as if they are property. So Jesus points them not to their own rabbi's interpretation but God's Word.

³ *“What did Moses command you?” he replied.* ⁴ *They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”*

This was the Pharisees' summary of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Although they conveniently left out a critical part. Divorce was permitted but this text says only if he **“finds an indecency in her”**, a Hebrew phrase that meant **sexual infidelity**. A husband could not just divorce his wife for whatever reason and however way he wanted. He was required to provide a written legal certificate, which would have required witnesses.

[#1 Slide] Now this was a critical protection for women because in ancient times women did not have the same equalities afforded to them today. A divorced woman would have had a very difficult time surviving in many ancient cultures. The Mosaic law stood out from all other

ancient philosophies or religions in providing legal protections for women so that they would not be discarded, and their husbands would be required by law to financially provide for them and not mistreat them. Here in Mark 10 and more directly in Matthew 19's account of this conversation, Jesus goes back to the equality and unity of men and women, he affirms this protection of women against the no-fault divorce views of some of the pharisees in his day.

#2 As a Regulated Divine Concession

⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. The pharisees are looking at the letter of the law, but you can always count on Jesus looking at the spirit of the law. Jesus says that the only reason there are any allowances for divorce at all was due to the spiritual condition called "sklerocardia" aka hardheartedness. [#2 Slide] Children of divorce- You need to know that divorce was not your fault. Did you hear Jesus? Divorce is from hardheartedness, not from having children. One commentary, "Moses' permission to divorce was an accommodation to human weakness. It was an attempt to bring some sort of order in a society that disregarded God's standards."¹ Moses wasn't recommending divorce, it was a concession, even when infidelity is involved- divorce should be our heart posture, but rather working through it, trying to forgive, restore even if it takes months or years.

This is why Jesus, when he is alone with his disciples says in verses 11-12[slide], that divorce should never be viewed as a go to option for a disciple of Jesus because we should never harden our hearts. But you say, "But wait a second, didn't you just say there were permissible reasons for divorce?" Yes...

What are the Regulated "Divine Concessions" for Divorce?

Scripture gives us at least two scenarios, both of which constitute the breaking of the covenant.

Sexual unfaithfulness- Matthew 19

Abandonment: 1 Corinthians 7

Now, I'm not going to go into the nuances of these, into "what if" scenarios like abuse, chronic addiction, complex mental illness situations... the reason is because those are conversations not points in a sermon...they require much prayer, time and discernment in community. However, let me say this- if there is physical abuse, if your house has become dangerous because of addiction- either to you or your children, or both- you need to make a plan for safety to separate yourself and your children. We have financial resources and access to anonymous safe places to stay. Do not stay, thinking you are suffering for Jesus or that you deserve it somehow or that you can fix them. No. And abusing husbands- do not think this is a place you can hide and be encouraged in your misuse of Scripture to emotionally or physically abuse your wife or family. This will not be tolerated. God sees, and your sins will find you out. Now is a great time to repent and seek help if that is you.

#3 As a Last Resort "surgical procedure".

¹ Walter W. Wessel, "Mark," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 711.

Jesus, in reflecting on the covenant of marriage, concludes: ⁹ *Therefore what God (divinely) has joined together, let no one (humanly) separate.* Two observations here- The implication is not that marriages can never end, but they can only end if God divinely separates them- meaning for reasons that God permits. It is not for us to take into our own hands.

But the second observation- is from this word translated "Separate"...not a great translation. The word means "tear apart" which is a good description of divorce. See, our culture acts like divorce is like getting a new wardrobe, a fresh start to a new you...Divorce isn't like tearing off your clothes, it's more like tearing off your arm. [#3 Slide] It's like amputation. It can be done and can be survived. But no doctor would ever keep their medical license if they too hastily moved to amputation. It's the last resort when the infection is going to destroy the rest of the body. You are joined together Jesus says... relationally, spiritually, physically, financially, as a family unit- to separate all of this is going to be painful, serious surgery, with a very long recovery and serious life-long consequences. Fools rush in and fools rush out of relationships.

So a few pastoral comments as we close.

1. Sometimes Divorce is not only permissible but necessary as an act of God's discipline. After repeated, unrepentant covenant breaking in a marriage- you may need to pursue divorce as a righteous response to hardheartedness. There are occasions, although rare, I have encouraged divorce. Remember, God himself in Jeremiah 3:8 divorced Israel- ⁸ *I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.* Which is a good reminder that if you don't associate with divorced people, then I guess you don't associate with God.

2. God can redeem unbiblical divorces and remarriages. There are always consequences for our sin. However if we have repented and confessed our own contributions to the failure of the marriage or our hastiness...God forgives. God took a marriage as messed up a beginning like David and Bathsheba and redeemed it. Solomon- Line of Jesus. God loves to bless the hardest cases. Life isn't over after divorce. You can recover, find joy and peace. Remember who our God is- after God divorced Israel and disciplined her, he also promised to restore her and he says in Joel 2:25 *I will redeem the years the locust have eaten.*

3. While your spouse may break his or her marriage covenant, Jesus never will. Why is Jesus so adamant with his disciples in verse 11-12 that divorce isn't an option? Because the ultimate meaning of marriage is the representation of the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his church. Despite how often we break our vows to Jesus. How often we neglect spending time with him, mistreat him, rebel and sin against him, chase after other lovers...Jesus never abandons his bride. You want to hear his marriage vows to us? Romans 8:³⁸ *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,*

³⁹ *neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*