

# The Journey to the Cross, Part 5

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Preacher: James Ross

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Mark's Gospel and chapter 10. We're in the second half of Mark's account of the life of Jesus, focusing on Jesus' journey to the cross. He's clearly aware that he is heading towards Jerusalem to be crucified. And here we find him on a journey and he's teaching.

And today we're going to see what does Jesus teach about marriage and divorce. And we'll also hopefully see how this connects with the journey that Jesus is taking to go to the cross.

So let's read together from Mark chapter 10, the first 12 verses. 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. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? What did Moses command you? He replied. They said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law, Jesus replied.

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

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. Amen. This is God's word. And so we find ourselves clearly in a very important subject today, a subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage.

[ 2 : 1 2 ] And the question is, how do we most helpfully tackle it? There's so many different ways that we could approach this. We can have a sermon that simply affirmed God's design for marriage, like Jesus does.

Jesus wants to focus most of his attention on God's creation design for marriage. But we could also very helpfully spend a sermon thinking about the impact of divorce on people's life. A personal experience perhaps for many of us, myself included, either ourselves or family members have gone through the pain and struggle of divorce. And to think, what does Jesus say? How can Jesus bring comfort? What should the church say and help? How can the church help in that situation? We might also speak really usefully about how do we speak on marriage and divorce in our own day in society? We live in what seems widely recognized as an easy divorce culture, where there are new definitions of marriage. What should we think, as a church, as a church, as a church on this subject? And we could spend a lot of time on each of these.

And perhaps somewhat frustratingly, we're just going to try and touch on each of them today. But because of that, it's quite possible that you'll have questions that will be unanswered.

You might have a situation that won't be dealt with exactly. And if that's the case, then please follow up. Please either follow up with me, take some time to talk to me, or speak to a Christian that you trust on this subject. If you want pointers for things to read, books to read, then again, you can speak to me on this, because it's a really important subject. It's really important that we handle it well. And sometimes time makes that a challenge to deal with all the issues.

But having said that, let's get into the subject. But let's begin by thinking, why does Jesus teach about marriage and divorce in the first place? What prompts this?

[ 4 : 28 ] And look with me at verse number two, and we discover why he teaches on it. Because the Pharisees are again coming to test him. Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? So here is an example of a moral issue, which is being used to challenge Jesus, to see if his opponents can undermine him, if they can divide popular opinion on Jesus.

Now this might be a familiar experience for you as a Christian. You might have found people bringing moral issues so that they can seek to undermine or challenge Christianity.

Now, for Jesus, what's the test here? The Pharisees say, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Now, they knew that in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 24 and verse 1, Moses permitted divorce for indecency. But that indecency was not spelled out exactly what that looked like in that particular text. And so in the time of Jesus, two schools of thought had emerged.

There was a conservative school. They basically said that indecency is to do with morality, particularly sexual immorality, unfaithfulness in marriage. That's what indecency looks like.

But then there was a more liberal side. And bearing in mind, this is a culture where men had the keys to power. And they basically said yes for marital unfaithfulness. But also, if your wife embarrasses or annoys and doesn't meet up to standards in some way, you are permitted to divorce. And so there's these two different views in society.

[ 6 : 12 ] And so the Pharisees are wondering, where does Jesus stand? And they're hoping either way he's going to lose favor. But more than that, it's also really important to notice where this conversation is taking place.

Look at verse 1. We're told Jesus left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Now, at the beginning of Mark's gospel, we're introduced to a man called John the Baptist.

John the Baptist had the job of getting the people ready for Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, to come and be engaged in public ministry. And as John was teaching, one of the things that he said to Antipas, the leader, the governor of the time, and his wife Herodias, he said to them, you should not be married.

Because Herodias had been divorced from her husband, Philip, who was also Antipas' brother. So she divorced one brother and married another brother. And John the Baptist had been very public in saying this is wrong.

And so he'd been put in prison, and eventually Herodias had had him executed. All this had been happening in this region. So it seems quite likely that the Pharisees are trying to stir up some political trouble for Jesus.

[ 7 : 22 ] Let's see if we can get him in trouble with the ones who already killed John the Baptist. Let's see if we can get rid of Jesus. It's interesting to see how Jesus approached the text.

Notice when he's asked a question, he responds with a question. And his question is driving them back to the Bible. For Jesus, he wants to deal with this from the foundation of trusting in the authority of the Bible.

That's where his argument is going to come from. What does the Bible say? That's a great place for us as Christians. That's our foundation on moral, ethical issues.

What does the Bible say? And when we do that, that gives us the opportunity to respectfully invite people to recognize that when they disagree with us, they're not disagreeing simply with us.

They're disagreeing with Jesus. They're disagreeing with the Bible. We're not standing on our own authority. If we're speaking truth from God's word, we're speaking on behalf of God and his values.

[ 8 : 27 ] So that's where the test comes from. And that's how Jesus begins to teach about marriage and divorce. But what does he actually say? First of all, what does Jesus say on marriage?

Let's begin with a statement and then we can think about it as we go. Here's the statement. Marriage is a union established by God between a man and a woman intended to last for a lifetime.

Jesus brings all of that to the Pharisees from Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. So the Pharisees are asking what's permitted.

And Jesus is interested in what's God's ideal. Notice now Jesus in verse 6 at the beginning of creation and then he begins to explain. He wants to raise the level of discussion from just what's permitted to what is God's design for marriage?

What's God's desire for marriage? And so he takes them to primarily Genesis 1, 27 and Genesis 2, 24. He takes them to God's design for marriage before sin.

[ 9 : 38 ] Before the sin that began to spoil relationship. When things were perfect, here is how God intended marriage to be.

Here is the ideal in other words. First of all, verse 6. Marriage is between a man and a woman. At the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

Secondly, marriage creates a unity. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one. This is both in the sense of there is a physical unity, a physical oneness. But also there's a new family unit that's being established. So you leave your father and mother's home and you set up a new home that is a new unit being established.

And this marriage union is established by God. Verse 9. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate. We're perhaps used to hearing that at weddings.

[ 10 : 46 ] As a reminder that a man and a woman, when they make vows, are entering into a covenant. A covenant that should not be broken by people since it's made established by God.

So we see as we look at this discussion, this conversation between the Pharisees and Jesus, they're coming at it from different points of view. The Pharisees' interest is, when is it okay to get out and how can I get out?

Whereas Jesus is reminding us from God's design, here's why the ideal is always to stay in. Here's the aim in the ideal. Marriage is God's design.

It's God's gift. And it's not to be taken lightly. In Jesus' day, there were people who were taking it lightly. And so Jesus wants to raise the bar and remind them of God's creation ideal.

Now, at this point, it's maybe helpful to stop and think about a question that maybe many of us have had conversations about. And it's this question.

[ 11 : 46 ] What about permanent, faithful, loving, same-sex relationships? Why not redefine marriage in the 21st century?

Why not get on board with that as a church? Maybe you've had that question. Maybe you've had those discussions. The first thing to say is there's a really helpful website.

There's three ministers all based in England who are all same-sex attracted. And they've got a website called Living Out, which has got really helpful articles and resources on this.

So here I'm drawing from one of those, a guy called Ed Shaw, a pastor down in Bristol, I think it is. The first thing to say is to recognize that we recognize common grace in the lives of others.

And by that, it shouldn't be a surprise to us when we see honesty, when we see faithfulness, when we see love outside of the Christian faith.

[ 12 : 48 ] God has made us all in his image. Therefore, it should not surprise us when we see the imprint of God in the lives of others. But, Ed Shaw says, I'm quoting here, the good in something does not make it right in God's sight.

And that's a distinction that we need to draw. Jesus has spoken clearly, the Bible has spoken clearly, that nothing sexual outside of God's created design is right in God's sight.

Even when there is love there. And one of the most helpful things about that Living Out website is the reminder of how marriage, biblical marriage, is intended to point to the gospel.

So Ed Shaw talks about the union of different sexes pointing us to the gospel. That's why, in one sense, we read from the book of Revelation, because it reminds us of one of the key images of the good news of the Bible, is that God has established this plan of salvation so that God and his people might be together forever.

Now, God is different from us. And marriage is intended to be a picture of here as two different people coming together in covenant for life.

[ 14 : 12 ] It's to be a reminder of the goal of the gospel, Jesus and his church together forever. And because marriage is so important, marriage between a man and a woman is so important to this truth, we must uphold and defend that view of marriage.

Therefore, there are practical implications for us to draw from Jesus' teaching on marriage as a church. We want to affirm the biblical view of marriage.

We want to support marriage in our church and in our community where we can. We want to prepare people who are getting married to understand what the Bible says about it, the importance of it.

We want to pray for marriage and church and family and society because we see that it's God's design that gives stability to family units and in society.

We also want to recognize the authority of the Bible in our life, to allow Jesus and not the prevailing culture to determine our approach to any issue, and particularly here, not to determine our approach to marriage based on culture, but to hear from Jesus.

[ 15 : 30 ] But even as we say that, we need to recognize that our attitude matters when we're talking to people. It's important that we discuss and we disagree with respect and with care, and that we value God's honor above our own reputation, so we're willing to say what we believe, what the Bible teaches, rather than trying to hide it or trying to twist it, trying to give a false view of the Bible because we're more concerned for our reputation than God's honor.

But also, I think it's really important when we're having these kind of conversations to keep a person's biggest need in mind, which is that they would know Jesus as Savior, that they would come to receive God's grace in their own lives, that we don't make this the single issue that we focus on.

So that's what Jesus had to say on marriage to those who were testing him. Now let's think for a few minutes about what Jesus had to say on divorce.

And again, let's begin with a statement and then see how Jesus works this out. Here's the statement. Divorce and remarriage are permissible, but not required on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness.

So let's remind ourselves of that conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees in verses 3 to 5. What did Moses command you? Jesus replied, they said, Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.

[ 17 : 07 ] It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law, Jesus replied, but at the beginning of creation. And so it goes on. So we've seen this, we've seen already that the Bible teaches Deuteronomy 24 verse 1, it is permitted to give a certificate of divorce on account of indecency.

And as you read around the Bible, as we see what that means, that certainly includes sexual immorality and adultery that was recognized in Jesus' day.

We go to an important passage like 1 Corinthians 7, where we find a talk of desertion in marriage also. Sometimes a person just leaves and then divorce is permissible.

We would also consider abuse or neglect of various kinds under that heading of desertion. The Pharisees are saying, and this is important for us to hear this, the Pharisees are saying divorce is permitted.

What does Jesus say in response? Jesus doesn't say, no, I disagree with you. Rather, Jesus agrees that there are times when divorce is permitted.

[ 18 : 28 ] He does remind them divorce isn't the ideal. Marriage for life is the ideal. But divorce is not always wrong. Divorce is not always sinful. Verse 5, Jesus does take issue with hard hearts.

Jesus does take issue with hard hearts that would wreck marriages and families. But he does say divorce is permissible. Not required, but permissible on the grounds of marital unfaithfulness.

That divorce is permissible is clear from the Old Testament because God himself actually uses the same. In Jeremiah chapter 3 and verse 8, this is what God says.

So remember, one of the big pictures in the Bible is it's God and his church, and they're in a covenant together. And God says, Jeremiah 3 verse 8, I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

God's people, the people of Israel, consistently with the illing, walking away, choosing other gods. And so God uses this picture. I've given her a certificate of divorce. So divorce is clearly not always wrong because God uses the synergy of himself.

[ 19 : 42 ] But we also need to remember the whole picture of the gospel. The same God in love pursues unfaithful people.

Jesus is going to go to the cross to pay the price for our spiritual adultery so that reconciliation and peace and unity might be possible.

So while we hear Jesus' positive emphasis on marriage, and he really wanted to get that across in a day when divorce, in many cases, was very easy, he's encouraging people to aim for God's best, to take a positive view of marriage.

But he is aware that we live in a broken world, a sinful world. He is aware, as we are, that breakdowns happen. And therefore, as a church, it's really important for us to follow the pattern of Jesus' life, to be a people and a place of compassion, to recognize the pain and hurt that divorce causes, that we want to be a church that offers a welcome, that seeks to show grace, that wants to be a place of fellowship and family, where perhaps a person has lost them.

That's not all Jesus says about divorce. He finishes his conversation with the Pharisees, and then he goes to speak to his disciples. And again, let me make a statement and then see it in Jesus' words.

[ 21 : 28 ] Divorce and remarriage are not always permissible. So we need to hear verses 10 to 12 again. When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.

He answered, Now, Mark has left unwritten an assumption in the culture.

Matthew 19 verse 9 records that unwritten assumption. If you want to compare Mark 10 and Matthew 19 verse 9, you'll read, Anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery against her.

The point is that biblically, it was well understood that there are proper grounds for divorce. Mark doesn't record them because Jesus has just spoken on it.

But unfaithfulness and divorce and desertion, rather, are the permitted grounds for divorce. But that means that there are also improper grounds.

[ 22 : 46 ] That outside of that, a person shouldn't break a covenant bond that was established by God. And so Jesus says remarriage in those circumstances would be adultery.

So again, to hear Jesus in his day, he's affirming that John the Baptist was right to say to Herodias and Antipas that they were guilty of sin before God because of their divorce and remarriage.

What is the Bible message if we find ourselves today in this situation?

What's the message if we, someone that we know, divorced without proper grounds or remarried after divorcing without proper grounds?

I think in the first instance, we need to understand that this is not the unforgivable sin. That there is grace available through Jesus.

[ 23 : 50 ] I think there are times when the church has got this wrong and has just not extended grace. But we need to remember that all of us are sinners.

That all of us break God's law. And all of us look for hope and for mercy to the cross of Jesus. So as with any sin, if we find ourselves in this place, we're called to run to Jesus and to his cross to find mercy and to find forgiveness.

We'd be encouraged to make amends wherever possible, to say sorry for wrongs done in the past where that is possible. And we are to stay in the condition that we are in.

If divorced, to stay divorced. If remarried, to stay remarried. We don't fix covenant breaking by breaking covenant. But it's important that we frame all this around the gospel to remember.

Here is Jesus teaching as he's on a journey. He's on a journey going to the cross to be the sin bearer of the world, to come to carry sin and guilt and shame.

[ 25 : 03 ] And so for all of us, that journey can be a journey of hope. And just to tie this in with what we read in Revelation, Jesus' journey is vital to Jesus' marriage.

That picture of final salvation that we read of is of Jesus and his bride, the church, together forever. Of Jesus and his church sharing love and joy in a perfectly restored world forever.

And the wedding supper of the Lamb. This is the great hope of the gospel. This is the great love of God extended to us. And the love that we all long for, a love that will last forever, a love that is unconditional, that comes to us by grace.

It's offered to us through Jesus. But here's the tension. How can Jesus ever love people like us, delight in people like us?

So when we examine ourselves, when we're honest about ourselves, we are morally unclean. We are guilty of spiritual adultery. We are not pure and clean and holy.

[ 26 : 19 ] Jesus is God. That's where we find good news in Jesus' journey, in Jesus' journey to the cross. His blood is the price to redeem us, to wash us, to make us holy.

Jesus, in his marriage, is the ultimate servant who pays the highest price, who shows the greatest love to wash us, to buy us, to bring us to himself.

And so for all of us, will we have Jesus as our spiritual husband? Will we be part of the bride of Christ? Will we find our identity in the love and the stability and the covenant that he offers to us in his life and his death and his resurrection?

He says, he claims that he is a threat unto his spirit that the church is under the burden He claims that he has the 4000 and ■■■■■■■■ to create that