

Marriage, divorce and singleness

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[0 : 00] So, thank you for coming guys and thank you for listening on the world wide web. If you're listening, I know that one of my Swiss students is going to listen to this talk.

! So, marriage, divorce, singleness in the kingdom. Topical subjects. So, a few questions. What are your views on marriage and divorce tonight?

Do you have a high or a low view of marriage? Do you think the marriage should be lifelong or not? Should you be able to get divorced for any and every reason?

What does society think about marriage and divorce? And I've got a question for you. This is not a rhetorical question.

Who is this man on the right? Does anybody know? He was in the media recently. That's right. Someone said Philip.

[1 : 15] It's Peter Phillips and his family. The guy here on the right is Peter Phillips. He doesn't look very happy, does he? So, sadly, he announced his divorce last week.

He was married in 2008, a month after I was married in May. And, sadly, he's getting married. He's got two lovely daughters, as you can see, and a Canadian wife.

And it seems as if they were incompatible. There was no reason. There wasn't any hint of sexual immorality in their relationship. And it's just, I want to exemplify that marriages end, don't they?

And often in divorce. And this guy, Peter Phillips, is the Queen's eldest grandson. And this is the society we live in today.

There is a lot of divorce. So, let's move on. So, just a few trends, just to wake your appetite. So, we can see that, statistically, since 1979, sorry, 1972, here, that there has been a steady decline in marriages of opposite-sex couples.

[2 : 39] You see that. You can't really see the number of 1,000. I think that's, yeah, 400,000 has gone down. And here we can see both marriages and divorces.

So, since 1972, divorces have increased, though they've kind of plateaued. And marriages have decreased. Yeah, that's 200,000.

So, why is this? More and more couples are living together without getting married. We call that cohabiting. Apparently, 88% of couples now cohabit, which is 9 out of 10 couples.

Why is this? Well, there may be many factors. And I think I've got them here. Oops. No. I haven't. I thought I had them.

I haven't. Cost of weddings. The average wedding was about £15,000, I think, when I got... Now it's much higher, I think.

[3 : 47] Yeah, probably 30,000. So, it puts a lot of people off. Marriage is seen as restrictive, isn't it, in our society? Some people want this hedonistic individual freedom.

And want to have as many sexual partners as possible. There's the so-called open marriage. Well, not so-called, it is. I had a French student stay at Olivet School.

And he and his wife had an open marriage. So, he could sleep with anybody he wanted. And his wife also could sleep with anybody they wanted. So, they wanted this sort of liberal open marriage.

And this happens now, doesn't it? I read recently an article on the internet about this. People don't want to be tied down. Commitment. People are scared of that. A lifetime with one person.

People might say it's not necessary. You can be committed without a public ceremony. And it's easier not to get married anyway, isn't it? Just move in together. It's a lot easier.

[4 : 53] And added to the societal ways of thinking, we now have the so-called same-sex marriage enshrined into our law. I don't know if you saw the media recently, but Northern Ireland had its first same-sex wedding the other day.

So, what does the Bible say about these topics? How does Christ define marriage? What does he say about divorce and singleness? And what should a marriage, a Christian marriage, look like? What makes it different? Let's look at our text. So, if you have your Bibles, please have chapter 19 open. So, marriage in the kingdom.

My first point is marriage is permanent. If we look at verses 1 to 6. So, in chapter 19, Matthew's Gospel starts.

The fourth part of the Gospel. We've been through the first three parts. So, now we're heading into the last part of his narrative.

[6 : 02] And we see the shift, don't we, in verse 1. He was in Galilee. And now he goes into the region of Judea. I've put a map here so you can see.

I don't know if you can see that properly. But here's Galilee. And the commentators say that actually he's probably here in Perea, near the Jordan. Transjordan, I think it's called.

And soon he'll be going to Samaria. I can't actually see Jerusalem. But it's somewhere down there, I think. So, as we can see, he's getting nearer to Jerusalem, where the text will focus on his death and resurrection.

And now we see a more heated encounter with the religious party, the Pharisees. And here is one. So, just for you to know, the Pharisees were a strict religious sect that adhered to the Mosaic law and to the teaching of the prophets.

And they pretended to be holier than others. And they ask Jesus a tricky question, don't they, in verse 3. Let's read. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?

[7 : 12] Crafty. As knowing Jesus, I think they would expect him to say no. And if this is the case, he is apparently going against the Mosaic law in the Torah, which permitted divorce.

That's in Deuteronomy 24, if you want to write that down. One to four. We'll look at that later. And at that time, men could get a divorce for any and every frivolous reason.

Even if your wife burnt your Sabbath kosher roast, you could get a divorce, apparently. In addition, it could have been a trap.

If Jesus answered no, he would be seen to be attacking his contemporaries who were divorcing on a whim. He would attract the ire of the people, especially Herod, who had killed John the Baptist, if you remember some chapters before.

He had been divorced and had married his brother's wife. So popular opinion could turn against Jesus, which the Pharisees would have wanted.

[8 : 24] But Jesus gives an excellent answer, as ever, as he neither negates the Mosaic law, nor does he allow this low standard of divorcing your wife capriciously.

So, my first point is, and my second point, sorry, is marriage is one flesh, not two or more. So, notice the next verses, his reply.

He says in verse four, Haven't you read, he replied, At the beginning, the Creator made them male and female, and said, For this reason, a man will leave his wife 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. Interesting that Jesus reacts, suggesting that the Pharisees haven't understood the Genesis narrative in verse four, and responds by quoting Genesis to enlighten them on the real meaning of marriage.

Marriage is embedded in creation before the fall of man. It is uniquely between male and female, not between the same sexes.

[9 : 48] It is a stronger union than that of a parent and a child. It is a sexual one in which male and female become one flesh.

This passive verb, if you look at verse four, Be united to his wife, has the same meaning of sticking together or gluing together.

The two becoming one. This is the creation mandate in which there is procreation. Children are born. Man and women are made from the same thing, dust.

But they are different in many ways, complementary to each other. Isn't this a beautiful, mystical union? One in which represents Christ and his bride, his people.

This is an exclusive, permanent, till death do us part. A unique, continual, unbreakable bond. Formed in paradise.

[10:52] This was before the fall. For richer, for poorer, for sickness and in health. This was God's plan from the beginning. Did you see that?

That at the beginning, the creator. This is God ordained. And which man should not separate. Divorce wasn't even an idea.

This came because of man's sin. I read in a commentary, it says, Man undoing God's original plan. Listen to that.

Man undoing God's original plan. How shocking. That we have the audacity to break up God's work. That is sad, isn't it? So Jesus has a very high view of marriage. Do you? Oops.

[11:58] There was one more point. It didn't go on. I was preparing this just before I came. Marriage also is covenantal. God is a covenant-keeping God.

And how much more faithful is God to us? I've been reading Hosea recently. And remember how he was married to a harlot. He was told to go and marry Goma.

Who represented the adulterous nation of Israel. And we are just the same, aren't we? We are sinful human beings.

We all fall short. And we have all sinned. We've been looking at that through Ben in the morning. But grace is offered to us. We cannot keep his standard.

And men and women in marriage can only operate in God-centeredness. Marriage is not supposed to be done in a self-centered approach.

[12:58] It's not about trying harder. It says in Ecclesiastes, I think it's a bit out of context. It's not to do with marriage. But it says, three cords can't easily be broken.

Isn't it lovely when a union is formed with God in the center? So marriage is a model of grace. It's covenantal.

It's keeping short accounts. Remember, if you are married, you have not just made a vow to your spouse. But you've done this under God.

Marriage is a covenant. And we are accountable to him. So, can I ask a few questions? Husbands, how is your marriage doing in the kingdom if you're a believer and you're married?

Are you submitting to one another in love? Husbands, are you truly loving your wives like Christ loves us, sacrificially?

[13:56] Understanding your wife's needs, listening to her, supporting her and caring for her. As a wife, are you doing likewise, loving and supporting him?

Are you spending quality time together? How much time do you make for one another? Is there anything that needs to change? And a word for singles.

If you're single and you want to marry, do you see the seriousness and permanence of a lifelong commitment to one person? Make sure you marry a person who has the same high standards as you do in this regard, as we've been thinking about.

There is a maxim, marry in haste and repent in leisure. And this is true, isn't it, for so many couples. Your life partner should be a believer.

My good friend Anthony Smith, some of you know him, gave me some sound advice, though he had never had a girlfriend. And he said, Mark GG, godly and good looking.

[15:07] So I give you that. If you're looking for a spouse, two ingredients that help me. Obviously, the good looking bit is very subjective.

You might not find somebody good looking, but the other one does. And you should see Christian counselling. If you're thinking, if you're engaged, actually, really. I do recommend Phil Wells.

He helped me and Rachel. And that was a real help when we were getting engaged. And there are some very helpful books on the subject of marriage.

And a caveat. Marriage can be tough. Living with another person is not as easy as one might think. Seldom do marriages have no disagreements.

And one has to be humble. Actually, in 1 Corinthians 7, 28, the Apostle Paul says, Those who marry will face many troubles in this life.

[16:11] Now, this links to Steve's sermon last week. Forgiveness is needed. To have solid, long-lasting marriages in Christ.

We need to be forgiving. Not just seven times, but 77 times. Endlessly. And having children. It's a gift from God.

Some, obviously, do not have that gift. In God's providence. But that can be a blessing as well. But they are a real source of joy.

I've got through them myself. And they can be very wearisome. And can get in the way of your marriage. And can cause stress. And this makes marriage even more onerous. And can even cause separation. So, please, if you're single, don't think that marriage is fantastic and wonderful. Because sometimes it's not so great. And I just want to encourage those that have been married a long time.

[17:14] I know that in our congregation, there have been those that have been married a long time. Not just a long time. Even a couple of years. Well done. Keep going.

It's tough. It's hard. And if you are living in a godly marriage, your union will reflect God to others in a dark world.

And it's a strong witness to a broken world, isn't it? When our marriages are united with Christ. So, make sure Christ is in the centre. Three chords are difficult to break.

Guys, let's pray for our marriages. Recently, Ben was saying that one of his friends, remember the passage he was speaking about with church discipline. And because this had been adhered to, many marriages had actually stayed together.

And they hadn't separated. And Satan wants to destroy our marriages. And it's important that we pray for them. God give us grace.

[18:18] So, marriage in the kingdom is permanent and is one flesh. Divorce in the kingdom. Verses 7 to 9. So, it's not planned from the beginning.

In verse 7. Why then, they ask, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?

So, because of Jesus' answer, the disciples say this. Now, this verse refers to the miscellaneous laws from Deuteronomy 24, 1-4.

You can look them up yourself later. I'm not going to go into them right now. But, it was, this was a concession. It wasn't a law. A command, sorry.

And it was due to the hardening of hearts, if you see that in verse 8. Because your hearts were hard. The law was to protect the rights of divorcees.

[19:32] Especially women. That, but, had become more of a norm than a concession. And notice how, in verse 8, Jesus rebuffs the scribes.

As I said, he uses the word permitted. Jesus replied, Moses permitted you. It wasn't a command. It was because of their stubbornness.

One commentator said, perhaps meaning it was their unresponsiveness to God's will and his mind. So, these certificates of divorce were a concession.

Concession. This concession. Which accounted for the fact that God recognises that we are sinful. And that marriage will not always be that ideal. Permanence.

Thing that it should. It doesn't override the divine principle from the beginning that marriage is for life. This concession, in some cases, have been turned in the right for whimsical divorces.

[20:54] The exception. Fornication, infidelity, unfaithfulness. Did you see that? So, secondly, verse 9.

I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery. Jesus states, the only exception divorce is fornication, or marital unfaithfulness.

The Greek is *pornea*, and means any sexual immorality. Thus, whosoever remarries, without this exception, is committing adultery, the seventh commandment.

In Jewish custom, a man and a woman were considered married during their betrothal period, or we would say their engagement before the wedding.

If there was any sexual immorality, during this time, there will be grounds for divorce. As was the case with Joseph when Mary was said to be pregnant.

[22:00] The marriage bond is tied uniquely with sexual union. So any defilement of this is grounds for divorce.

Remarriage. In verse 9, Jesus has remarriage in mind. Now this is a difficult and pastorally sensitive issue.

Notice in the text in verse 9, it only refers to the innocent party in a divorce, and only in the exception clause.

Some allow remarriage based on 1 Corinthians 7, 15. An unbelieving spouse leaves the believer. However, the context does not mention remarriage, but only says a believer is not bound to

continue a marriage if an unbelieving spouse wants to leave.

Others claim that abuse, spousal or child, is a valid reason for divorce, even though it is not listed as such in the Bible. While this may very well be the case, it's never wise to presume upon the word of God.

[23 : 24] And throughout the Bible there's reconciliation, isn't there? The non-guilty spouse can still forgive and allow his or her partner to return.

And some of us know a minister locally who did commit adultery and his wife allowed him back. But in many instances a spouse is unrepentant and continues in sexual immorality.

That is where this passage, Matthew 19, 9, can possibly be applied. And many also look to quickly remarry after a divorce when God might desire them to remain single.

Remarriage after a divorce may be an option in some circumstances. But that does not mean it is the only option. So there we go.

Divorce in the kingdom is not planned from the beginning. The exception is fornication and there is room for remarriage With the clause.

[24 : 32] And lastly, singleness in the kingdom. Verses 10 to 12. The disciples said to him, If this is the situation between a husband and a wife it is better not to marry.

Jesus replied, Not everyone can accept this word but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way.

Others were made that way by men and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it. So here in verse 10 we see that the apostles have a surprisingly low view of marriage and suggest that one shouldn't get married because of the high standard which is set.

Unhelpfully some people have said to singles you haven't met the right person yet just trust God and he'll give you Mr. Right or Mrs. Right. And we must be careful that the world's way of thinking doesn't come into the church.

Society sometimes says your true security comes through a relationship with a person. This is a lie. Our identity and security are in Christ.

[25 : 57] Singleness has its merits more than merits advantages. Have I got that there? Oops. Oh this is the message version by the way which I which I've just put on there for you to read which I think reads in a different way.

Okay. brothers and sisters singleness has great advantages in the kingdom of God and I don't want you to feel if you're a single person here that you are inferior.

Definitely not. You're the opposite really. We're all the same actually. We're all the same whether we're married or single and 1 Corinthians 7 is a great place to go so let's turn to it.

1 Corinthians 7 32 to 35 So this is Paul speaking about marriage and singleness.

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs, how he can please the Lord.

[27 : 41] But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world, how he can please his wife and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs.

Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. but a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world, how she can please her husband.

I'm saying this for you, your own good, not to restrict you but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. God. So, if you're single, be encouraged this evening that it's a calling.

Is that one of my points? Yeah, singleness is a calling and it's fantastic, it's great when single people are in the church, they're using their gifts for the glory of God and I see that in our church and it's beautiful to see that and keep going.

If you're single, you've got the advantage, you don't have to be concerned for your wife, your husband, you're single minded, your priority is the kingdom and that's lovely, that's beautiful and we need to encourage that in our fellowship.

[29 : 01] Obedience is what counts, whether you're single or married and don't spend all your life trying to find fulfilment in a man or woman.

And you get to 70 and realise actually God wanted you to find satisfaction in him alone. He is the provider of all that you need, far better than that of a single person.

And people straight away realise that you cannot have all your security and hope and dreams in one person. That's why there are so many people that break up their relationships. It's healthy if our true identity is in Christ. And it's liberating, isn't it, to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these other things will fit into place.

God's kingdom or do we allow society to influence our church?

[30 : 07] A friend of mine has felt let down by the church because the church environment favours families and couples. that's not what Jesus wants his kingdom to be like.

We need to be looking out for single people and including them. Okay, I had some conclusions but it's not on the slide.

I think this is the old version I had. So, to sum up, what does marriage reflect? Well, it reflects that relationship that God has with his people, doesn't he?

Doesn't it? The Christ and his church. Don't take marriage lightly. Work at your marriage with God's strength. The hard way is the best way to live in lifelong commitment with your spouse.

It's easier, isn't it, to just go and have another relationship. But actually, the hard way is the best way. Divorce does happen and even in the Christian community, sadly, because the result of sin.

[31 : 16] And if you're a divorcee here this evening, I don't want you to feel that you are under sin. You can live in freedom, that Christ loves you.

You are not second rate and that God has a plan and purpose for you. And you're not on the rubber sheet.

you can lift your head up high knowing that Christ has died for you. And singleness is a calling and one that has many advantages. And if you're a non-believer tonight, doesn't this model of marriage and singleness attract you to the kingdom?

Wholesome living under God, with God and in God. This is true security and love, living in a relationship with him. So the gospel call is for you.

Will you come and give your life to faithful Jesus who promised to never divorce you, to keep you in his loving arms through sorrow and joy? Who else can offer this true satisfaction but in Christ alone?

[32 : 23] Come to him. Amen.