

Marriage and divorce in the gospels

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[0 : 00] We're going to look a little bit more at the matter of marriage and divorce. Let's pray for God's help, shall we?

Lord, we ask you again to help us as we turn to your word. You've made a promise that if we turn to you, you will draw near to us. And that if we meditate in your word, that we will be strengthened and refreshed and encouraged and enabled.

That your word has that effect. And we pray that as we are gathered together this evening, despite our many failures and shortcomings, nevertheless, that you would be pleased to meet with us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask it all in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. We've been looking at the subject of marriage and divorce.

We've been looking at it quite slowly and carefully to build it up a step at a time. And the reason that we've been looking at it is it's an important subject. It affects our discipleship and it affects the nature of the church.

[1 : 19] And it affects some of us more than others. But perhaps in a very personal way, we want to know in our consciences how we relate to the Lord in this matter.

So I'm going to do a quick revision. The first one was looking at marriage in the Old Testament. And we said there's no separate word for husband in the law and the prophets.

And there's no separate word for wife in the law and the prophets. Instead, we have the word for man, ish. And if it becomes her man, then that is the understanding that this man is not just a man on his own, but he belongs to a woman and he is her husband.

And it would be translated husband. So you get that in Genesis, that the woman gives the fruit to her man, in other words, her husband, for example.

And we have the word isha. It does have a her on the end of it. And this is the word for woman.

[2 : 40] But if you put the possessive his in front of it, it becomes wife. So we looked at that. And I'm not going to repeat all of that.

But that's a summary of what we found. There is another word for man and marry. And I think this would be somewhat unpopular thing to say, but it's the word for lord, baal.

It's the same as the Canaanite god, baal. It can be a noun, the lord. And it can be a verb, to bring under lordship or to be lord to or something like that.

So please look at Deuteronomy 22, 22. Deuteronomy 22, 22 says, If a man is found sleeping with another man's wife, both the man who slept with her and the woman must die.

You must purge the evil from Israel. That shows us the fierceness in which marriage boundaries were safeguarded.

[4 : 09] But the literal translation in this is, If a man is found lying with a woman, lorded to a lord, baal to a baal.

Well, translated, another man's wife, but that's one of the occasions where it uses that other word for lord. We also notice that there is no particular word for marry.

The word that is most often used is the word to take. So a man takes a wife. Excuse me. The counterpart of that is that the woman's father gives the woman to the man who takes her.

And the nearest we could get to it was that this was a literal movement that she geographically moved from the tent, which was her father's tent.

She would be taken from that tent, from the protection and guardianship of her father, to the tent of her new husband, her man, and the tent or the protection or the guardianship of her new husband.

[5 : 18] And it's interesting, I hadn't realized that before. So in the Old Testament, the central ideas of marriage are not around the exchange of words like they are in an English marriage ceremony,

but about a movement from one place in society, one family group, to a new one.

And it was a public thing. Everybody knew what had happened, but it was a taking and a giving, taking, and a new bond is made. And we notice that in the Old Testament, notice many things, but there's this fierce barrier around marriage.

So sex outside of marriage is really, well, it had the adultery there, had the death penalty, didn't it? And there were provisions to celebrate and to demonstrate that a woman, when she got married, had not had sex with anybody else, and that she was a virgin.

And those sorts of things we saw in Old Testament. Curiously enough, even though we have some very fierce boundaries in the Old Testament picture of marriage, polygamy seems to happen, and it's not particularly frowned on.

Abraham had multiple wives. The fathers had multiple wives. David had multiple wives. Solomon had, I can't remember, 700 wives and 300 concubines.

[6 : 58] So polygamy, many wives, occurred within the Old Testament. So that took us ages to go through all that, but that's what we came down to.

Then last week we looked at divorce, and there isn't a particular word for divorce, but there are two words that both mean to drive out or to send away. And in the Old Testament, this is now thinking about the law, divorce was possible.

It was regulated. So as we shall see in a moment, in Deuteronomy 24, there is a provision for divorce. Deuteronomy 24.1, let's turn to that.

Deuteronomy 24.1, if a man marries a woman, I'll put it literally on the screen, if a man takes a woman and lords her and finds something displeasing to him, and he finds something, because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and gives it to her and sends her away, and so on and so on.

She gets married again, verse 2, and this particular provision is saying, well, she can't come back to the first husband afterwards. But without going into all the details of it, we notice that there is such a thing in the Old Testament as divorce.

[8 : 35] There is a regulation about it. She has to have a certificate, a written confirmation of it, and she's allowed to marry again. And we looked at a few other references to divorce, and I think it would be true to say, Jeremiah 3, verse 8.

I had another think about this. Jeremiah 3, verse 8. I think it would be true to say that God himself takes this route with his people.

It doesn't always do this. Jeremiah 3, verse 8. Jeremiah 3, verse 8.

So at the time of his writing, there are two kingdoms. There's the northern kingdom, Israel, and there's the southern kingdom, Judah. And in the history of the people of God, they both became unfaithful to God, and they both committed idolatry.

And God sent invaders first to the northern kingdom and carted them off, and they never came back. Assyria invaded the northern kingdom, took them away. And then sometime later, Babylon came and invaded the southern kingdom and took them away into exile, but they did come back.

[10 : 03] Jeremiah 3, verse 8 says, I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.

Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear. She also went out and committed adultery. There's a number of things going on here.

point out that adultery is the picture of spiritual unfaithfulness. So as the people of God worship other gods, give their hearts to other gods, go off with other gods, it's described as adultery.

And here it seems to me, correct me if I'm reading it wrongly, that God says, with the northern kingdom, I did send her away, and I never have her back.

I sent her away. I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries. And it says, I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear.

[11 : 16] Now, there's the word there, treacherous, which is going to crop up again in a moment. Now we're going to look at Malachi 2.1.

2.11 rather. Where this word for treachery crops up again several times. Talk about breaking faith.

So in Malachi, we're further on in Israelite history. And again, things are not good. People are losing devotion to the Lord.

And it seems as though they're marrying women who are worshipping idols. And the temptation then is that the children get taught by mum and they worship idols and the whole identity of Israel,

the whole identity of the Jewish people gets lost.

So it's a really desperate thing. Have we not one father? Verse 10. Did not one God create us?

[12:32] Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another? Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

Judah has desecrated the holiness the Lord loves by marrying the daughter of a foreign God. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty.

And then in verse 14, things are going wrong. Well, why? It is because the Lord is acting as witness between you and the wife of your youth. Because you have broken faith, you have acted treacherously with her even though she is your partner, the wife of your covenant.

The word marriage I don't think is there but the idea is there. Verse 15.

Guard yourself in your spirit. Do not break faith with the wife of your youth. And I wonder whether the context is that the wife of youth is being turfed out in order to make way for this daughter of a foreign God.

[13:50] So the whole thing is a picture of unfaithfulness, treachery, dealing despicably with, particularly with these women.

women. And this is a context in which verse 16 the Lord says I hate divorce says the Lord God and I hate a man covering himself with violence as with his garment says the Lord Almighty.

So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not break faith. So that's the classic text in the Old Testament which is anti-divorce. I reject it. And I think we need to put it into the whole picture.

Divorce there is a provision for divorce in the Old Testament. God himself unless I'm misreading it is brought to that extreme of divorcing his people.

But what's going on in Malachi in that context he says that's totally out of order. I hate this sending away.

[14:58] Now we have to harmonize all those statements together. Well I think the Deuteronomy 24 envisages that if somebody's divorced they can remarry.

I don't think this comes into the Malachi because it's an analogy and no analogies are perfect. So what's being talked about here is the sending away.

that sending away is out of order. But here the Lord sends away his people and they're not inclined to come back and he doesn't have them back.

That's how I understand it. I mean there are other texts which talk about the Lord's willingness to have people back even though they've broken all sorts of rules and they're well out of order.

together. But I we have to try and understand all these together. I know this is said on Jeremiah what does it mean that the Lord gives them a certificate of divorce?

[16:12] Well I suppose it's speaking in terms of an analogy but I think it's saying that as I indicated that Israel the northern kingdom was sent away and he never brought them back again.

So it was a state of affairs which are not temporary like a separation and then they come back but it was a permanent break which if you want to use it in an analogy the Lord said died you know it's signed and sealed.

You're off and you're not coming back. Well physically and spiritually are much the same thing aren't they?

They're exiled from the land and God never brings them back so they go out as idolaters and they never come back as people of faith and devotion.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. That's right. Yes. Otherwise it doesn't get recorded.

[17:28] It doesn't make sense to the people listening. So could the I hate divorce could that be similar to when God sends the flood and afterwards has remorse and says I'm never going to do that again because it was so in his wrath he destroyed mankind and then in this sense he's angry with Israel so he sends them away but then he's got that kind of remorse in his heart like he hates doing it.

He hates having to break that bond. Could that be?

Well I'm sure that there's something like that is true in the sense that grace we touched on Hosea where the Lord loves unfaithful Israel and keeps bringing her back and Hosea marries takes again an unfaithful wife so you've got that stream of things going on but the Jeremiah text is in one period of history it's saying I'm sending you away that's it and the Malachi is addressed to what people are doing in their own homes and in their own spiritual lives and he's saying what you're doing is out of

order I totally reject the way you are dealing with your wives and the way you are dealing spiritually and it's just completely out of order so it's sort of two different conversations here.

Microphone. God says that I'm not willing that any should perish but all should come to repentance so I don't think God changes his mind in that sense but the only way we can understand the way God works infinitely with our finite minds is that sort of similarity that God doesn't want any to perish he wants all to come to repentance but the state of play is that there are those that don't repent and therefore will be lost.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean the context in Jeremiah is of God warning and begging and entreating and when it comes to it being quite stern and people still not taking any notice so it's all about God's willingness to have them but his patience is great but it is not infinite in the sense that he doesn't keep on giving people extra chances.

[20 : 35] May we look at maybe move on a little step into the New Testament then. So what I thought we would do this evening and I don't think I've got any big surprises this evening is to look at marriage in the time of Jesus.

When we're looking at in the time of Jesus we haven't moved to a completely different state of affairs from the Old Testament because we're still in the land the traditions the Jewish traditions are the ones that Jesus is living with and in the New Testament marriage is not introduced as a new thing it's assumed and it is focused in the New Testament in a Christ sort of way I was going to put Christian way but I decided to put Christ way because it isn't focused on a Christian culture it's focused on Christ and there are a number of changes that subtly take place so for example there's a movement away from biological necessity to reproduce as essential to God's people because that's one of the spiritual pressures in the Old Testament the producing of godly seed certainly there in Malachi so it's all like a spiritual duty of God's people to keep on having children so that the seed can come who is the focus of

God's promises once the seed has come there is a less of a biological necessity to reproduce so as I mentioned I think on the first occasion in the kingdom there are people who are eunuchs that's how Jesus describes them people who have chosen or been called to the root of singleness or chosen or been called to not having children for the sake of the kingdom kingdom and in the old testament that would be difficult to get your head round at all but in the new testament it's an honourable thing and Paul himself you remember commends the single life and says you can serve the Lord better in some ways as a single person than you can as a married person and I also say let's distinguish between what was happening in the time of Jesus in Jewish society so in Cana of Galilee where he goes to the wedding and in Roman society which adds in a whole new set of complications how they did things in

Rome and the fact that Jesus is neither saying we'll stick with the way it was understood with the law nor is he saying we'll just capitulate to whatever they do in the society that you're in he says I'm bringing in a kingdom and I've got my own set of values that go along with the kingdom so that will become a little bit clearer perhaps next time so I'm going to try and move on through these New Testament words I found it interesting that there is a considerable amount of modesty and moral conservatism conservatism so it's a very conservative society but there's also a considerable lack of embarrassment about some of the biological details that seem to be just well as you'll see so I don't think there are many surprises as in the Hebrew scriptures the word for man and the word for husband are the same and the word for woman and wife well we've come to terms with that so how do you pronounce this Maria Anir is man or husband and there is translated in the authorised version 156 times man 50 times husband 6 times sir one time is fellow not translated twice and I couldn't find any verses where the English said husband and this word Anir was not used and then the Greek word for woman is the same as the word for wife so Maria how do we pronounce this yini so when Jesus says to his wife not when Jesus says to his mother woman what is this to do with me she says they have no wine and he says woman what is this to do with me he says yini woman and

[25 : 19] I could find no verses where wife was the translation and the word yini was not used apart from where it says wife's mother and a few oddments like that which leads to things like this 1 Timothy 3 2 so in the kingdom in the kingdom we have 1 Timothy 3 2 and racing as the microphone is in front of you could you switch it on and just read us 1 Timothy 3 2 the husband of but one wife temperate self controlled respectable hospitable able to teach and so on etc thank you point there in the kingdom the overseer is not to be like

David and have multiple wives nor less like Solomon who had 700 wives and 300 concubines in the kingdom the elder is to have just one wife I don't think it means that you can't be an elder unless you're married but I think you can't be an elder if you're polygamous so if you've come to being a Christian and you've had several wives then that rules you out of being an elder until you've sorted that out in some shape or form yeah so mias yinikos andra that's the word for man one wifed man in 1 Timothy 3 11 it leads to the question of whether this yini is wife or woman could you read us ray 1 Timothy 3 verse 11 in the same way their wives are to be women worthy of respect not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything thank you so this is under the in the paragraph about deacons and the question is is it mean their does it when it uses yini does it does it mean their wives so the deacons wives too have to be as it says women worthy of respect and not malicious talkers or are they just women the women meaning perhaps the women deacons and because one word is used for both it's you make a judgment on that could you read verse 12 as well for us please Ray a deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well thank you so there again the deacon too is not to have multiple wives but to be the husband of one wife so there's the word for husband and wife and I don't think there are any surprises there now we do have a nice vocabulary of bride and bridegroom bridegroom bridegroom is nymphios that's the bridegroom and we have the bride chamber nymphon so in English I think this comes over so nymphomaniac is supposed to be somebody who's obsessed by sex which doesn't do at all justice to the origin of this so it's an honourable thing the nymphi nymphi is the bride the nymphios is the bridegroom and the nymphon is the bride chamber now Zach and Darlene were very coy about where they'd been for their honeymoon and wouldn't tell us where they'd been however in in these weddings the bride chamber the place where the marriage is consummated is the focus of huge attention it's not secret you can't be coy about it the nymphon is the chamber containing the bridal bed the bridal chamber and you get the sons of or perhaps the children of the bride chamber so these are official people whose duty it was to provide and care for whatever pertained to the bridal chamber whatever was needed for the due celebration of the nuptials this is what the dictionary says the room in which the marriage ceremonies are held so you get these sons of the bride chamber did anybody see it's a wonderful life black and white with what's his name

James Stewart yeah and when they get married they go back to live in this rickety old house and they're serenaded do you remember this bit they're serenaded by the guy who sells pizzas and the taxi driver outside the room that they go into so again Zach and Darlene wouldn't have but so this is this this this is the the idea that we're getting here of the bride the bride groom the bridal chamber and the NIV will translate it something like the wedding guests rather than the sons of the bride chamber let's look at a couple of verses on this John 3 29 so this is

[31 : 57] John 3 this isn't actually the sons of the bride chamber it's the friends of the bride groom or the friend of the bride groom John 3 27 to 30 Ray would you be so kind thank you to this John replied a man can receive only what is given him from heaven you yourselves can testify that I said I am not the Christ but I am sent ahead of him the bride belongs to the bride groom the friend who attends the bride groom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bride groom voice that joy is mine and it is now complete he and all the attendants are waiting for the bride groom to come so in this way it isn't the bride who turns up late it's the bride!

groom who comes when he thinks it's the right time so he comes along and he takes this woman as his bride as his wife and there is the consummation of the marriage and there is a feast and different books tell you that those take place in different orders and you could bring in the provisions of the Old Testament in which there was a cloth which would be stained with blood during that night and it could be brought out as proof that the woman was a virgin and different books say this is more or less prominent as a feature of the wedding arrangements and I have to say in the New Testament I can't see any references to that but certainly they're in the Old Testament and well I can't say any more than that but it's rather something can't think of what word it is but that graphic is the graphic and what I wanted to say about this John text is isn't it surprising because I don't think we have been prepared in the Old Testament for the thought that the Messiah is the bridegroom we have God as betrothed to his people but I can't think of any certainly not any emphasis in the Old Testament that Messiah will marry his people and it seems to be one of the things that bursts out in the

New Testament as a revelation really at the beginning of the Gospels you get a reference like that I think in each case we will see in a moment but here we are in John and John the Gospel writer quotes John the Baptist as saying who am I I am the friend of the bridegroom and I am not the center of attention it's the bridegroom who is the center of attention I am waiting for him to come and take his bride which is his people it doesn't say that does it but that's the implication of it and what a how surprising that this bursts out at the beginning of the Gospel like this and I think we have the same thing in these three references they all say the same thing so we didn't look all of them up but let's look at the Mark one will do this for us

Mark chapter 2 Mark chapter 2 will it do it yes I think it will Mark 2 verses 18 to 20 Ray please could you read that for us Mark 2 18 to 20 now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting some people came and asked Jesus how is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting but yours are not Jesus answered how can the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them they cannot so long as they have him with them but the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and on that day they will fast thank you very much so at least Jesus is saying this you to understand that the current situation regarding my disciples and regarding myself says

[37 : 36] Jesus is they are like the sons of the bride chamber guests of the bridegroom is how it's translated and they have been waiting for the bridegroom to come and they are attending this whole matter of the bridegroom taking his bride and this is what they're looking forward to and this is an occasion of great joy and Jesus is likening himself to the bridegroom isn't he and at the beginning of each of the gospels well Matthew 9 Luke 5 Mark 2 you get this same announcement and I find that quite surprising really when you look at it that way so we have the vocabulary then of the bride bridegroom and bride chamber and I won't dwell any longer on that and lastly there is also vocabulary of wedding and marrying around the word how do

I pronounce that Maria yamio yamio yamio yamio because the accent's on the o at the end so to marry is yamio to lead in marriage to get married to give oneself in marriage to give a daughter in marriage and then there's yamos a marriage or a wedding could be a wedding marriage festival wedding banquet marriage matrimony and then there's e gamisco the e bit at the beginning is out so you can marry or you can be given in marriage so these words all sort of link up together I think in English this would come into poly gammy many marriages I think that's the gammy part of it so we have got a nice vocabulary of that and

I've just got a couple of references and then we'll stop because these are the basics that we can achieve this evening so in Matthew 22 30 using this vocabulary Jesus is asked a trick conundrum about a man who marries and then in accordance with Moses law because he's died and it's important to raise children his brother marries the same woman am I getting this right and then another brother he dies and then another brother because it's important to have children in the old covenant marries her again and so on and then they say to him dada whose wife will she be in the resurrection and Jesus replies Matthew 22 29 to 32 please

Ray Jesus replied you are in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage they will be like the angels in heaven but about the resurrection of the dead have you not read what God said to you I am the God of Abraham the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob he is not the God of the dead but of the living thank you very much so Jesus says it's not a problem it's not a it doesn't make the resurrection unthinkable you don't understand the power but he does say at the resurrection people will neither they won't marry or be given in marriage they'll be like the angels in heaven so he's pointing out

I think the fact that when you're in heaven you won't get married nobody will give you to be married to somebody else it's not like that in the resurrection if this is something for this world I think that's what he's saying and let's finish with this extended parable of marriage Matthew 25 verses 1 to 13 which is all about the bridegroom coming and perhaps Ray could read us Matthew 25 1 to 13 at that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom five of them were foolish and five were wise the foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them the wise however took oil in their jars along with their lamps the bridegroom!

[42 : 55] was a long time in coming and they all became drowsy and fell asleep at midnight the cry rang out here's the bridegroom come out to meet him then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their

lamps the foolish one said to the wise give us some of your oil our lamps are going out no they replied there may not be enough for both of us both us and you instead go to those who sell oil and buy some the oil the bridegroom arrived the virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet and the door was shut later the others also came sir sir they said open the door for us but he replied I tell you the truth I don't know you therefore keep watch because you do not know the day or the hour thank you very much that only makes sense against the background of how a wedding worked in those days not sure that

I understand all the details completely but we notice that it's the bridegroom who comes when he's good and ready as opposed to the bride they're all waiting it's at night because you need oil lamps and he's late coming and at midnight they say here's the bridegroom so the wedding's about to take place and some people these ten foolish young women who are I suppose in a sense children of the bride chamber they're there to look after the bride I guess and they're not equipped for the feast and everything that will go on into the early hours and into the days beyond presumably because they haven't got any oil and they have to go and buy some and it's too late they miss out on it all but the bridegroom arrives and they go into the yamos the wedding banquet and it's too late the door was shut and

Jesus says that's what the kingdom of heaven is like and that's why I say that in the new testament marriage becomes a very Christ thing I don't think I'm distorting the evidence but the examples we've looked at all focus on Christ and Christian marriages are meant to fall into the pattern of Christ Christ who comes for his bride the Christ who we need to be ready for he might come early in the evening or not until midnight and we're the point being here that we're to be ready for the coming of Christ so I think my summary point is that marriage theology in the New Testament is very much Christ theology at which point I'll stop so does anybody want to ask anything or observe anything make any observations you mentioned this graphic illustration of the consummation of the wedding bed and and and then you've got

Jesus shedding blood on the cross and you know that never occurred to me that there could be some kind of parallel there between the consummation of Christ and the church via the cross it's just another parallel there's so many between you know from the old testament and what happened throughout Jesus life that could be could not be another one but it rang a bell in my mind it's certainly an interesting link isn't it I suppose we would say that the the consummation of Christ and his church is yet to come and the cross blood was shed in order for the the wedding to take place later so the timing aspect of it doesn't quite fit but yeah yeah just thinking of the relationship of the disciples as the sons of the bride chamber or whatever it's quite interesting that in the gospel accounts that seems to be the role of the people you need to wait to the epistles to get a sense of the church being the bride yeah and then you get at the very end in the book of revelation blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the lamb which seems to do both doesn't it because there's a blessing in being invited and also we're the bride as well aren't we because the church descends like a bride decked out for her husband so it's a mixed metaphor at the end does that link with what you're saying no it's because there is only one bride yes there is only one bride which is the church yes plural you know made of lots of people yeah but there isn't a call to anybody to become the bride of

Christ individually yeah interesting isn't it yes yes yes yeah well sorry can't you just going going back to to Ross's point actually it's the other way around isn't it as Christ actually gave his blood that we became we become perfect if you like virgins without sin we haven't prostituted ourselves we have to sin but God puts that right yes so the analogy is there but it's in reverse in a sense yeah that we become prepared to be the bride of Christ thank you yeah that's right well I thought we could sing a Christ centred song to close with night