

Matthew 19:1–15

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Date: 05 November 2023

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[0 : 0 0] beginning in verse 1 and reading to verse 15. This is what God's Word says. Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause? He answered, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female?

And said, therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and these two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one flesh.

What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate. And they said to him, why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

And he said to them, because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

[1 : 1 5] The disciples said to him, if such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. Then children were brought to him, that he might lay his hands on them and pray. And the disciples rebuked the people.

But Jesus said, let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belong the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them and went away.

This is the reading of God's word. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning.

[2 : 1 7] It's great to have you here today. And if you're new, we are in the midst of a series, 14 weeks in length, that travel the terrain of Matthew 16 through 20.

In essence, it's a series that moves us as a church family from the moment when Peter confesses, you're the king, to the time when the king enters into the city of Jerusalem.

It's a moment in the ministry of Jesus where he lays down some lessons to be learned along the way.

Today, the lesson is simply this. Family matters. The double meaning is intended.

Matters that pertain to family. But also, for those of us who are following Jesus as king, he would have us know family matters.

[3 : 3 0] I hope you saw the simple division of family in the text today. Verses 1 through 9, Jesus on marriage, an aspect of family.

Verses 10 through 12, eunuchs, and I will move from that to singleness. And then finally, it closes with children. And so here we are, following Jesus along the way, and he would say to you and to me, family matters.

It shouldn't be lost on us that the culture that's created by Jesus is considered in terms of family. I don't know what your family's like. That might be a disquieting thought to you that I am to consider myself as a follower of Jesus or I'm considering becoming a follower of Jesus.

And this dominant image, therefore, is of entering into his family. But Matthew, for those of us who have been following along, opened his gospel, Matthew 1, with this image of Jesus at the head of a family tree.

[4 : 5 0] He was the son of someone. And we read 14 seasons of a father and then a son and a father and a son.

And when you read the opening of Matthew, he's basically constructed for you on a piece of paper a beautifully symmetrical tree of which now Jesus comes as head of the family.

Get used to it in one sense. For Jesus, for Matthew, family matters. It didn't take Jesus long before he said, for those of you who are following me, let me teach you something about communicating with your heavenly father.

Pray like this. You're our father who art in heaven. There's a moment then beyond that when Jesus says, who is my mother and my brothers and my sisters?

Here are my mother and my brothers and my sisters. For whoever does the will of God is my mother and my brother and my sister. Again, family. More recently, chapter 18, he likens those who enter into the kingdom as a child.

[5 : 59] And then the dialogue with Peter on forgiveness is about, how do I handle a brother or a sister? Family matters. What would he have for us this week?

This iconic cultural image then of family is what's presented to us here.

We're going to read about Jesus' views on marriage for those who follow him, on singleness for those who follow him, and on children.

Let me put my hopes as clearly as I can. I want Christ Church to Chicago, Christ Church Chicago to create a culture over time that would please Jesus by following his views on family.

Can we please Jesus by following his views on family? First of all, our church can create a culture that Jesus is pleased by as we uphold his views on marriage.

[7 : 07] Verses 1 to 9. Take a look. I hope you have it in front of you. Jesus will turn the question of a Pharisee on the dissolution of marriage into an opportunity to provide his own definition of marriage.

Their question? Dissolution of. His response? Definition. Jesus on marriage. First, their question.

Do you see it there? Verse 3. The Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

The roots of the question emerge not from a desire to follow him on what he considers family to be and marriage by definition, but rather to test him, literally to tempt him, to catch him, to trip him, to cause him to stumble in ways that he would implicate God's word and would appease their own iniquity.

As one commentator put it, the Pharisees permitted divorce but differed on the terms. Deuteronomy 24.1 speaks of a man divorcing his wife because he finds something indecent about her.

[8 : 24] One school of rabbinic teaching in Jesus' day hammered home the indecency as sexual immorality, adultery, only, singular.

The other school of rabbinic teaching said, well, if he finds something indecent about her. See, the men of Jesus' day were more than willing to divorce for any cause.

If you're something and you want to get out of it, you just determine why you want out and you can move. And so the question to him is there. If he answers yes, you can get divorced for any cause. He's going to be a licentious man. If he answers no, well, would that not put him then in disagreement with Moses who says divorce is permissible.

Notice then what he does. He turns the Pharisee's question on the dissolution of marriage into an opportunity to provide his followers with a definition of marriage.

[9 : 34] Notice that is both particular and permanent. Those are the words. Particular. He has a particular understanding of marriage.

Verse 4, he answered, have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? This is a quotation from Genesis chapter 1 verses 26 through 28 when God creates man on the sixth day and he does so by creating them male and female.

Jesus begins his definition there. Particularly male and female. These words male and female refer to one's biological sex.

Male and female. They by them we see we're talking about the reproductive equipment of a male and a female.

Two different at creation two different yet equally glorious distinguished persons. Jesus says have you not read?

[10 : 57] You want to talk about marriage and the way one gets out? Let's start with what God created. He created two distinct gloriously different persons biologically equipped to complement one another.

They were male and female. But he goes on doesn't he? Not just the particularity of that but he says therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

He's moved from Genesis 1 into the language of Genesis 2 after God had made Adam he made Eve and then the scriptures say that the man now we're not talking anymore about biological sex we're talking about gender the one who was biological male is now man and the one who was biological female is now woman and Jesus says that what God created at the beginning was this male and female in mature form man and woman and they come together in marriage these terms today are not quite so fixed are they that's the world in which we live and that's why we turn to the Bible to explore for ourselves again a reconsideration of what is marriage or at least according to Jesus not Pastor Helm but Jesus what does Jesus say in our world there's no real corresponding relationship between one's gender and one's biological sex but in the scriptures a man is simply an adult male just as a woman is simply an adult female one's biological sex in the scriptures is a fixed matter of science at birth and it corresponds to one's designated gender in our world though it's all not so simple increasingly gender is a social construct that you can and cannot be fluidly in motion on you all know this it's the world in which we live I'm not telling you anything you don't know but Jesus interestingly goes to creation to talk about a question regarding the dissolution of marriage and says hold on let's define something this is what

God created further this is what God intended and then he'll go on and in summary form say and this should not be broken this this definition he says should be in continual play he says in verse six so they're no longer two but one flesh what therefore God has joined together let no man separate this is where Jesus begins to move in family matters from the particularity of what he thinks marriage is to the implication which is its permanence they're wondering how do I get out and he's saying I don't understand the question there was never supposed to be any way out let me put it to you in terms that we'll all understand in these verses

[14:47] Jesus upholds what today we would call a traditional view of marriage one biological male one biological female one man one woman one flesh one life four life what God created says Jesus he intended what he intended he didn't want broken this is how Jesus defines marriage what God did at creation he intended to serve almost as a law long before the mosaic law ever came why is marriage not to be broken on these terms or redefined well consider it's the first relationship in the Bible and therefore at the forefront of relationships that God put in the world to reflect something he wanted said about his son and the church we know this because Paul will later reference the same verses

Jesus is referencing on creation order to say that from the very beginning in mind of God when he wanted the world he already knew they were going to fall he already knew they were going to sin he already knew he was going to restore them and he actually created in the world this one flesh relationship to be a pointer to Jesus love for the church this union of relationship between two distinctly different persons you and me and our Lord from heaven and Jesus now says this this is to be permanently held to dissolve it then is to untether it from God's design for it see this is this is the actual difficulty that

Jesus would have with same sex marriage it isn't that a man is incapable of loving a man they do every day or a woman being in love with a woman this is true every day but but that union is incapable of actually describing two distinct and different persons that represent what was made out to be Christ and the church in other words it falls short in some ways of the design for which marriage actually existed the Pharisees of course hear his definition and they're nonplussed remember they they were trying to test him they wanted they wanted him to be hung on his own words they wanted him to either say yes you can get divorced for any reason or a host of them whatever suits yourself do you know that some of the rabbinic literature there were schools where a man could divorce his wife because he didn't like the meal she made absurd in fact we're going to see that's why the mosaic exception comes the mosaic exception comes to thwart men and their iniquity to rid themselves of the woman they've married for any and every reason so Moses comes along and says no there's a permissive nature for divorce it's sexual immorality and the law of God therefore in a world undone begins to try to safeguard the women in it who are being abused by the men who come and do as they will they of course don't care about this the Pharisees they want a definition of marriage that goes along with Genesis 1 and 2 and they don't want the undoing of marriage to go along with Deuteronomy 6 24 they don't want it to necessarily have to be

one man one woman for life nor do they want it only to be one reason for sexual immorality they don't want any part of God's word so they say to him why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce to send her away and this is where Jesus is masterful do you see what they're doing they're trying to pit

God's word Genesis 1 and 2 against God's word Deuteronomy 24 and they think they've got Jesus cornered I'll reference one part of God's word against another part of God's word they're in contradiction to one another Jesus doesn't play the game he said I'm not playing that game you have this because your heart is hard and he begins to reveal that they would have neither it's the hardness of your heart wherein he permitted a certificate of divorce but he says notice again verse eight but from the beginning it was not so his definition holds and then he says and I say to you whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery he's now moving into the mosaic exception and the word sexual immorality here is pornea we're we're going to get pornography it's the it's an individual's decision to bring other people before them pornography virtually virtually an individual plowing through other people but but but the term also refers to adultery the term refers to fornication the term would refer to polygamy the term would refer in the

[21 : 11] Old Testament to bestiality the word has an elasticity of perverseness that is larger than just did you sleep with another man or on the vice versa did you sleep with another woman Jesus says that there's something about that one flesh relationship that gets broken now we don't have time today to go into well what does it mean then to marry and commit adultery I mean you also got to take this passage in light of 1st Corinthians 7 you've got to read your Bible seriously you've got to understand well when is remarriage permissible and if it's permissible when and the New Testament unfolds all of these things whether the one even be alive or dead and what all that means but the definition is here according to Jesus how does this then inform the culture we create I told you family matters

I told you that Christ Church Chicago wants to create a culture where Jesus is pleased by the way we live lives together how does this inform the culture we create well I would say that we whether we are married or single adult or a child we ought to hold marriage in honor and not just by those who are married marriage it says in Hebrews 13 4 should be held in honor by all we should be a church that honors Jesus by joyfully embracing his understanding on marriage that our family follows our king we uphold then a traditional view of marriage secondly I would say in regard to informing the culture we create there ought to be a certain lament in our midst on the loosening of what marriage is and

I'm not speaking primarily of the culture the world is going to do what the world always does the world will define things as they want to define them I'm talking about the household of God within all of humanity I'm talking about we ought to lament when the household of God around the world begins to loosen the tethering understandings I'm not talking about the culture in which we live but it's happening all over the globe we're all wrestling with this are we not churches denominations what is marriage and there ought to be a certain lamentation when the church decides to move off of his definition the other thing is third thing how does this inform the culture we create we ought to celebrate those in our midst who are doing the hard work of providing a picture of Christ in the church you know you don't just despise those people that are married if you're not married you ought to be able to say you know what for should be honored by but it ought to be celebrated here's somebody trying to stay at it the two of us now for almost 40 years trying to hang in there we're doing more than that but you know what

I'm saying it's work it's work it's work and our hope is that you say oh I keep seeing something in the people that have been!

a long! time that he's trying to love his wife as Christ loved church I see the strength and dignity of Christian women who are trying to represent what it is to be the bride of Christ this ought to be celebrated I've often said you know when somebody gets their 50th year and everybody goes congratulations 50 years hey believe me only those who are in that relationship really know what it took to get there all the forgiveness all the graces all the recommitments finally I want to say that in regard to informing our own understanding we need to remember that Jesus embodies this image of marriage in other words our marriages if we have them we're meant to point to his love for the church to begin with it points to him what's that mean about us then can you imagine going to

[26 : 02] Jesus and go you know can you get rid of your church for any cause can you get rid of can you divorce your bride cause she's a mess I'm talking to church here Jesus is like no I can't do that I can't do that I'm fundamentally permanently particularly husband to the church so so from Jesus' perspective see that's the dilemma of divorce is divorce at the end of the day ruptures that view that's the sadness of it for many of you who have actually gone through it right self evident to you before others will ever really understand what you went through you know the sadness of it you know the mental you know the

Jesus will not divorce his bride that's good news for you you may be a mess I may be a mess but if he's my husband in the faith if we are his bride he's going to stay with us second our church not only can create a culture that pleases Jesus by holding his view on marriage our church can create a culture that pleases Jesus by affirming his views on singleness turn to 19 verses 10 to 12 the disciples said to him if such is the case of a man with his wife it's better not to marry but he said to them not everyone can receive the same but only those to whom it is given for there are eunuchs who have been given so from birth there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven let the one who is able to receive it receive it now just as

Jesus turned the Pharisees question on the dissolution of marriage into an opportunity to provide his definition so to here Jesus will turn the disciples statement on the arduous commitment marriage requires to an affirmation of those who are not married and left in singleness let me hit on that for a moment first of all what is a eunuch how is one made a eunuch and does this mean that Jesus is asking all non married followers to become a eunuch what is a eunuch a eunuch is simply one whose sexual organ is incapable of a one flesh relationship that would procreate they can't sustain that either a one flesh relationship with one of the opposite sex or the ability to procreate how does that happen well according to

Jesus one of three ways there it is there are some who have been made so from birth this is true talk to any doctor in our midst rare but real some few fortunately children are born with sexual organ that is incapable of being in a one flesh relationship even a rare sense of not quite sure what we have here but this is not right you could call it a birth defect if you want it's a physiological condition some some are born that way but Jesus goes on some are forced into it do you see that little phrase and there are those who have been made eunuchs by men in the ancient world there were a lot more eunuchs than there are today thankfully then and not now but in the ancient world if you were a servant in a kingly household and you were a male more often than not you were castrated so that you wouldn't be a problem to the kingly line this is why you have the

Ethiopian eunuch the Ethiopian eunuch is a very important person in the arsenal of the imperial court this is why when you read the book of Esther chapter 4 verse 4 you find that there are eunuchs in the court in the ancient world it wasn't uncommon for people in power to to have this happen for those in their broader family and then he says there's a third way this happens not only from birth not only who have been made by force but then there are those who made themselves eunuch I think of Origen Origen is an early church father and he was struggling with his own sexual desires and he actually made himself a eunuch only later to realize that it didn't really solve all the problems it didn't really solve the internal desire

[32 : 09] I wish I hadn't done that he actually eventually says but there are people who determine of their own accord that in order to live in a way that I think will please God in this aesthetically pleasing way back in that day particularly this platonic sense that things in the physical world were at any rate that was there and they would make themselves a eunuch notice the last phrase though for the sake of the kingdom is Jesus then advocating that males who follow him ought to be championing I am a eunuch in the midst of the family I don't think so nobody wants to be championing that you got to remember back even just recently Jesus said in a different verse he talked about plucking out your eye cutting something off it's better to go into the kingdom without a member of your body than not go in at all and we weren't saying then that what he meant was this physical act of you know mutilation of your eye no no he was using language to talk about the degree in which you ought to actually be fighting against sin and here those who were made eunuchs for the kingdom are those

I believe who self consciously self willingly realize I think I think I'm single by design or by default or and so I'm going to stay in this state but I'm going to do something with the kingdom I was thinking about this with our own congregation I'm sure that over half the people listening to me in this room

right now are single well over half I'm not going to ask for a show of hands but the church and particularly churches in cities are comprised majority single adults praise God and just as we ought to see him uphold marriage and we see a plan for marriage we ought to be able! to create a culture that actually has the affirmation of singleness for the kingdom this is what Paul does with this stuff in Corinthians Paul actually goes down not only talk about the affirmation of singleness for those who are following Christ but the advantageous nature of being a single as opposed to being married for those who can receive it see because while Dave Helm was out trying to go to the teacher parent conference for his five little children and while Dave Helm as a married man and a father through procreation began to give the primary sphere of my training and instruction to my own five so that they would come to know God so that Dave Helm when he came to a point where he's like he's actually trying to secure five people for the kingdom at his own dinner table that's massively a limitation of sorts it was beautiful it was mine but see the single person doesn't have that restriction they're not wondering how do

I get to the school by 7 p.m. to meet with the teacher so they can actually devote their singleness to the advance of the kingdom you gotta know this there's more ways to grow the kingdom than through procreation Jesus is saying you can grow the kingdom through being on mission and on discipleship in fact you may bring many more people in see and this is the thing that we ought to do is remember Jesus is the pattern of this singleness as was Paul Jesus himself demonstrates maximum engagement for the kingdom I was thinking of this the other day there was a young man who was a professional in my congregation he was young his name was Barry Danilak and he would have dinner at our house once a week single he's still single today must be about 55 or 57 years old works in a church full time I taught him how to teach the Bible and he began to teach the Bible he began to give his life to the church years later he wrote a book redeeming singleness I've got it in my hand how the storyline of scripture affirms the single life the forwards by a guy by the name of John Piper Barry Danilak has given his life to the kingdom with disproportionate influence for never having gotten married married I think of a dear friend of mine who pastors St.

[37 : 22] Ebb's church Anglican church in Oxford Vaughn Roberts his nephew was a member of our church here when he studied history at the University of Chicago Vaughn lifelong single man Vaughn very much like committed to the gospel Vaughn who struggled at length with his own sexuality and his desires pressing on making maximum in kingdom impact it's a beautiful story really I understand the disciples question if such is the case of a man with his wife it's better not to marry I get it don't you get it if Jesus says marriage is this particular man and a woman and it's this permanent these guys are like who wants any part of that you you may not want any part of that not only because of its difficulty but because of your lack of any desire for that kind of particular relationship and Jesus says to you and to me and to us let me affirm castration is not the answer celibacy can advance the kingdom there's an affirmation of singleness that ought to inform this church over half of us here are single us meaning not me included over half we ought to be doing incredible work for the gospel for the kingdom this church needs to be informed by that which Jesus affirms marriage is not the end all a lot of people in marriages wish they could get out of it but I don't want you to think if you're not married that somehow you're second class

Jesus is here along the way saying I got something to say about family family matters marriage has a purpose as does singleness and both of which proliferate the kingdom of heaven isn't that encouraging I hope you find it encouraging if you are going to be single forced to be in the sense of never being asked to be married in this kind of way or you are going to be single just because you've decided I'm going to give everything I got to the gospel you're going to need friendship see I go home every night to my wife and we can talk and a lot of times you go home and you're on your own and that is a real downside which is why this church family actually needs to be family did you know that in Isaiah 54 Jesus says oh the one who's childless the woman who couldn't have a child she actually she's going to come to a point in prophetic scripture where she has more children than the one who does have children in other words the one who's married and never had a child actually can deliver more for the kingdom at times than the one who got married and had children and then he goes on and talks about eunuchs read it today

Isaiah 56 he says there's going to be a day when in a sense those who are celibate are actually having instrumental role within my family that's the culture this church must have we honor marriage we affirm singleness and together we are family that matters I could go on and on but I

need to move on but just remember in marriage it all pointed to Jesus so work hard at trying to do it if that's your state singleness he's the pattern of it so don't think you're anything less because of it marriage singleness children our church can create a culture that pleases Jesus by emulating the value he places on children it's interesting to me that this little two verses come right there 13 through 15 let me square up the three paragraphs for you in the first

Jesus took a question on the dissolution of marriage and upheld the definition for our church on the second Jesus took a statement by the disciples and actually affirmed singleness in the third he's going to take the disciples rebuke and he's going to tell you what you should respect instead the disciples people were coming with kids you know those kids those little irritants at your feet children a lot of children in this church I've been going to Jesus says well hey let the little children come to me and do not hinder them for to such belong the kingdom of heaven we can create a culture that pleases Jesus by respecting the value he places on children let me put it to you as clearly as I can when I serve communion this morning to those workers downstairs who are missing this so that they can serve the children

I looked them in the eye and before they took communion I said as you minister to the children here this morning never underestimate the spiritual capacity of a child when you read to them when you pray for them when you say something of the Bible to them God can be at work we should be celebrating children that's why when somebody comes in with a new baby I'm like this is the first day ever that child was in the house of the Lord and I know that sometimes that's a painful thing to hear particularly for women in our midst who don't have children and I know it's a hard thing to hear sometimes for those who are single and feel like they will never enter into a marriage relationship but nevertheless we are creating a culture that pleases Jesus as we honor marriage as we affirm singleness and as we celebrate children because we're his family now we're his family now you are my family family matters let me give you two opportunities to demonstrate the culture

[44 : 16] I want us to create first is this table right here men women and some children who have been admitted to the table through their personal faith as you see this Lord's table go this is family at table you're not going to see this anywhere else in the world you're not going to see anywhere else this week you're not going to see the different disparate persons sitting at one meal like you will here so as you stand in line or as if you're not a Christian and you sit and watch just watch this is family coming to table and secondly tonight I'll give you this opportunity to begin creating a culture that actually understands family matters we're having dinner at five you might say

I can't cook anything great go to Subway buy the one foot cut it in half you'll have someone this year you'll have something to share with someone else we're actually going to be at a table tonight there'll be at least 60 there there ought to be a couple hundred there if over time and over years we actually begin to understand I'm in a family you can't be in a family and not be at the dinner table two opportunities to begin creating a culture that pleases Jesus because we understand what he says on marriage and singleness and children our heavenly father as we come to this table may we really do so as brothers and sisters in Christ as we stand in line may we come to understand that the one in front of us or behind us or the one we can peer at across from us is a recipient of your grace and therefore unfolded into your kingdom

Lord we give ourselves to you and we give ourselves to the privilege of doing life with one another in Jesus name amen