

The law, the prophets and Jesus

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- [0 : 0 0] Our reading this morning is taken from Luke chapter 16 and we're reading from verse 1 through to verse 18. Jesus told his disciples, there was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.
- So he called him in and asked him, what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your management because you cannot be manager.
- Any longer? The manager said to himself, what shall I do now? My master is taking away my job. I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg.
- I know what I'll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses. So he called in each one of his master's debtors.
- He asked the first, how much do you owe my master? Three thousand litres of olive oil, he replied. The manager told him, take your bill, sit down quickly and make it fifteen hundred.
- [1 : 1 0] Then he asked the second, and how much do you owe? Thirty tonnes of wheat, he replied. He told him, take your bill and make it twenty-four.
- The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.
- I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings. Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much.
- And whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much. So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?
- And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No one can serve two masters.
- [2 : 1 7] Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. The Pharisees who loved money heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.
- He said to them, You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight.
- The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing their way into it.
- It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the law. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.
- And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Amen. Okay, Luke chapter 16, picking up especially at verse 16.
- [3 : 3 2] We most of us, I think, in many situations, we most of us are inclined to interpret rules and regulations in the manner that we find most advantageous to ourselves.

We justify to ourselves why a regulation doesn't quite apply to us, or at least not in the way one might have at first thought. Most of us, I'm sure, have been tempted to those kinds of interpretations in the variety of assorted restrictions that we've been under over the past 10 months.

Or maybe we're inclined to say, well, modern car safety standards are far better than they were when the speed limits were set. So, of course, well, I don't really need to keep to 70 miles an hour, do I?

And maybe we're tempted to do that with God's laws too. That was certainly the situation in Jesus' day. We've already seen Jesus condemning the Pharisees and the teachers of the law for interpreting God's law in a way that suited them whilst being burdensome to others.

And then he again condemns that attitude here in today's passage. So this morning we're considering just three verses, really, the very end of this morning's reading. Verses 16 to 18, Jesus shows the Pharisees that their problem is more than just the love of money that he called them out for in verses 14 and 15.

[4 : 47] We already thought about those verses and the parable at the start of the chapter last week. You can go back and listen to the recording if you want to. So today, verses 16 through 18.

And Jesus says here, verse 16, he says the Pharisees need to wake up and recognise the truth. They need to see what time they're in. They need to stop living in the past.

There's a decisive difference between the old order and the new age. One era of law and prophecy existed from the dawn of time until the ministry of John the Baptist.

And a new order is now inaugurated. The Pharisees need to see what's happening around them. The kingdom is being proclaimed not as coming but as arrived.

The kingdom is here. If they continue to act as though the old situation applied, they're going to be left behind. Left out. They'll perish. Now, now the good news of the kingdom is being preached.

[5 : 45] Or perhaps even better, the kingdom of God is preached as good news. It is good news that God's kingdom has arrived. It was good news when Jesus first said it and it is good news today.

It's good news that the way of salvation stands open. It's good news that sinners may be forgiven. It's good news that the kingdom of God has arrived. And so the only proper response to its arrival is to enter in.

There's a little bit of debate about exactly what's going on with the phrase at the end of the sentence there. Everyone is forcing their way into the kingdom. We normally talk about forcing as kind of a negative thing, don't we, in most cases.

Maybe it sounds like a bad thing here. But actually there's a good chance that what we're meant to do is take this present tense verb, to take it as an instruction. Not a condemnation of forcing as a negative, but actually to press on, to press in, to make every effort, is in fact the only proper attitude.

Far from being condemned, the attitude here is commendable. The Pharisees, they ought to join the crowds. They ought to join the people of every class and station and tribe and tongue and people and language. They ought to join them in pushing in.

[6 : 56] There's urgency. There's necessity. There was urgency in Jesus' day and there is urgency today. Wake up. Enter the kingdom. The time is now, my friends.

If you are waiting for more. If like the Pharisees, you're still waiting for a new era. Or if you're waiting for God to reveal himself. If that's you, stop waiting. The time is now.

If you're inclined to say, if God's really there, why doesn't he make himself clearer? Why doesn't he make himself more obvious? Folks, if that's you, stop waiting.

Stop thinking there's more to come. He's made himself abundantly clear. There isn't more to come. The very existence of the universe. The ordered motions of the planets and the stars.

The amazing variety of wildlife. The intricate details in the design of each and every leaf. The birds of the air. The tiniest of insects. All of it cries out of its creator. He has revealed himself in creation.

[7 : 55] He has revealed himself in his word. He has revealed himself by coming to dwell amongst us. The son of God was made man and dwelt amongst us. The new era has dawned.

The kingdom of God is now. Press in. Press on. Do what you must. Against that, verse 17, is then a caution.

There's maybe a danger of misunderstanding. If you say the law was proclaimed until John, well, some might suppose that the law no longer has any relevance post-John. Not so, says Jesus. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the law.

Not even the tiniest detail of God's law is to disappear. It is not made null and void. The law finds its fulfillment in Christ. The Pharisees, according to verse 15, loved to justify themselves in the eyes of others.

But they have it all wrong. They can't afford to justify themselves in the lives of others. They need to live in God's kingdom of true righteousness. They love to look like they're keeping the law, whilst in practice setting it aside.

[9 : 03] Jesus says that is not good enough. They cannot set aside God's law. And not least, they cannot do it in the area of divorce. Jesus says, verse 18, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.

And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Folks, the Pharisees knew God's law back to front, and they knew how to interpret it in a way that suited them. In this case, the key passage, it all hinges on Deuteronomy chapter 24.

God's law, given to his people through Moses, God's law says, if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband who divorced her is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.

That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. Now, folks, don't get tangled up in the marrying and divorcing and marrying and divorcing.

This particular law is a kind of complicated if, if, if, then. And the specific prohibition here that actually is being set down, that's not what we're essentially concerned with here.

[10 : 30] That's concerned primarily with money and property rather than anything else. That's not what we're worried about right now. But people interpreting God's law rightly recognised that in verse 1 here there is this writing of a certificate of divorce.

There is here some permission of divorce. What we need to recognise is here in verse 1, if a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her and he writes for a certificate of divorce and so on.

So God, through Moses, has permitted divorce in the case of something indecent about her. Now, this is a really tricky phrase in the Hebrew text that Moses wrote down.

In a little wooden translation, it's something like an indecency of a thing. It's hard to understand in Hebrew just as that phrase is hard to understand in English.

There's endless debate about the meaning of this phrase. There's debate about it today and crucially, there was endless debate about it in Jesus' day. And that debate in Jesus' day centres around two rabbis.

[11 : 41] A guy by the name of Shammai and the other called Hillel. Shammai, if you like, he focused on the indecency in the phrase here.

And he interpreted that to mean that divorce is permitted in the case of adultery and other sexual indiscretion. Hillel, on the other hand, Hillel basically argued that if God meant that, if God meant what Shammai says, then if God meant that, he'd have just said indecency.

But this says indecency of a thing. And that this is therefore really two grounds. The one, indecency, and the other, any matter, a thing.

Now folks, let's be clear, Hillel's wrong. But not quite as obviously so as maybe it sounds in English. And so by Jesus' day, Hillel's interpretation had come to dominate.

This so-called any matter divorce, this is the order of the day in the society in which Jesus lived. And essentially, this any matter divorce, this is basically the same as what we now call no-fault divorce.

[12 : 57] It requires only the most minimal of court proceedings to enact in the least formal of courts. This is the situation at the time. Now, now I suspect most of you can already see some of how this might be abused.

There's a record, for instance, of one case approved by the Rabbi Hillel where they cited any cause was that the woman burnt her husband's dinner. By the second century AD, having found a younger, prettier woman was accepted grounds for divorce.

So essentially, the interpretation accepted by the Pharisees of Jesus' day had permitted divorce for really anything at all. It had completely trivialised divorce and therefore, of course, trivialised marriage.

What meaning is there in a lifelong vow if it can be set aside for any so-called cause whatsoever? What kind of security is there in a marriage if something as inconsequential as a burned dinner can bring it crashing to an end?

This is the attitude to marriage and divorce that was the order of the day. This is what Jesus condemns here in Luke 16, 18. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery.

[14 : 19] And the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. So, so we can probably say that Jesus is siding with Rabbi Shammai over against Rabbi Hillel.

But in fact, in fact, Jesus goes even further than Shammai. Because Shammai and the courts that followed his interpretation, they were still there in the background, though Hillel was dominant.

The courts that followed Shammai, they wouldn't themselves grant a divorce on this kind of flexible any matter terms. But they did accept divorces granted on those terms as valid.

But Jesus here says no. No, that any matter divorce, it's not valid. You can't divorce like that. And if you think you have, you're wrong.

The marriage still exists and therefore to remarry is adultery. Now, there's more to unpick here.

[15 : 26] Because it might look at first glance here, it might look like Jesus is saying here in Luke that no divorce is valid. Anyone who divorces his wife and so on. Or at least, even if divorce is married, certainly that remarriage is never permitted.

It might look like that's what he's saying, but well, we know that can't be his meaning, don't we? Because that would contradict other scripture, or at least Deuteronomy 24 that we were just looking at.

There might well be debate about the exact meaning of the ground of divorce that's discussed here in Deuteronomy 24. But what's not in doubt in Deuteronomy is that there is such a thing as a legitimate divorce.

So it doesn't make any sense, really, for what Jesus says to be a blanket rejection of divorce. What then is he saying? Well, it helps to look at Matthew's version of this same statement from Jesus.

Matthew 5.31, we read, it has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality makes her the victim of adultery.

[16 : 31] And anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Folks, do you notice the extra clause there in Matthew's version of what was said? Verse 32, anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality makes her the victim of adultery.

Now, even if Luke is recording a different occasion of Jesus' teaching when Jesus didn't specify except for sexual immorality, well, even if Jesus didn't say it at that moment, he still can't mean an absolute prohibition here in Luke, can he?

Because that would contradict his teaching recorded in Matthew. The exception, therefore, has to be implicit, assumed here in Luke, an abbreviated recording of what's said.

So even if what Jesus said was the shorter form of words recorded in Luke, everyone would have understood him to be referring to the consequences of an invalid divorce, not the consequences of all divorce.

Therefore, Jesus, Luke 16, 18, he hasn't said divorce is impossible. He hasn't said it's always sinful. He hasn't said remarriage is never permissible.

[17 : 44] Jesus' point here is that remarriage after an improper divorce is adulterous. Why is it here in Luke? Well, because it's that prevailing interpretation, that permission of divorce for literally any reason at all.

This is an example of verse 17, of ignoring God's law to suit their own convenience. That's where we started, isn't it, a few minutes ago.

Jesus condemns that interpretation. In fact, in fact, rather than permitting God's law to be dismissed, Jesus goes beyond even the more conservative understanding.

He doesn't just agree with Rabbi Shammai, he goes beyond that. He says that these any-matter divorces should not be accepted as valid at all.

Folks, that, I think, is why this verse is here in Luke chapter 16. So far, so good, I hope.

[18 : 46] However, however, I'm concerned, folks, I'm concerned that if I stop at this point, then what I've done is I've raised this messy, uncomfortable question of divorce, and I've only given you half the picture of what the Bible has to say about it.

In fact, far less than half. This is the only time in Luke's Gospel that Jesus talks about divorce, and I haven't got any plans to preach through any of the other books that do talk about it in the immediate future.

And marriage and divorce are important matters for us to think through. These are live issues, aren't they? So I think it's perhaps helpful that we pause and think a little bit more broadly about the question.

So with that acknowledgement that I am branching off from Luke's intention in this specific verse, I thought we'd spend a few minutes thinking a little more about divorce. divorce. Why?

Well, because, because if we think that Jesus here says divorce is only permitted in cases of adultery or other sexual immorality, which is kind of about where we've got to so far, well, if that's what we think Jesus is saying here, then we have problems when it comes to the Apostle Paul, don't we?

[19 : 59] Because 1 Corinthians chapter 7, it clearly adds another permissible scenario, desertion by an unbelieving spouse. And again, again, we don't want to pit Paul and Jesus against one another any more than Jesus according to Luke contradicts Jesus according to Matthew, or for that matter, Jesus contradicts Deuteronomy.

That way lies madness. That way lies a rejection of some portion of Scripture. So we have to. We have to ask, well, how does Jesus' statement about divorce here need to be understood in a way that does not contradict Paul?

The two must come together, otherwise we can't trust God's word. So how do the two fit? Jesus' clearest statement is Matthew 19.

So let's turn there and read from verse 3. Sorry, it's a little small on the screen, but I hope you can either see it or just listen. Matthew 19 from verse 3.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? Haven't you read, he replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said, For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

[21 : 19] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate. Why, then, they asked, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?

Jesus replied, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another woman commits adultery.

Now do you notice how we begin here? The Pharisees are trying to test Jesus. They want to trick him and what they ask is, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?

Any and every reason. It's that any matter again, isn't it? That key debate between Shammai and Hillel. The Pharisees ask about Hillel's no-fault divorce and Jesus says, verse 9, No!

Only for sexual immorality. Only according to Shammai's interpretation. Hillel is wrong. It is not any matter but indecency, impropriety, immorality.

[22 : 29] And this key proclamation from Jesus, which has often been held up as him saying there's only one ground for divorce, this statement is made in the context of that question about no-fault divorce.

Jesus knew that that's what he was being asked. His disciples knew that's what was being asked. The crowds knew. That's what was being asked. Is it any matter?

That's the question Jesus answered. He said, Shammai's interpretation, not Hillel's. So what?

Why the history lesson? Well, well because whilst Shammai and Hillel have this big bust-up over this potential ground for divorce, there's another passage in which they were in complete agreement.

And so too, I suggest, were Jesus and Paul. This time we need to look at Exodus 21 at verses 10 and 11. The matter under discussion here in Exodus is about a female slave who's been married to a man.

[23 : 37] Again, bear with me, our concern here is not the propriety or otherwise of slavery generally or the wisdom of marrying a slave. Focus. Verse 10.

If he marries another woman alongside the slave, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is free to go without any payment of money.

So the concern of these verses is with a slave who might be deprived of her rights should her husband marry another woman and it would seem prefer the second over the first.

She's entitled, says Exodus 21, to food, clothing and marital rights. That third point refers not only to what we might call conjugal rights, but also more broadly a degree of emotional engagement and support.

This is not supposed to be loveless for want of a better phrase. We could say, we could say here is enshrined rights to have both physical and emotional needs met.

[24 : 46] That's what a slave wife is entitled to. Well, surely a free wife would not be entitled to less than a slave wife. And for that matter, surely a husband would not be entitled to less than a wife.

That flow from one down to the next. This is the flow of logic. This is an example of what we call good and necessary consequence. God's word says X because it says that, well, Y and Z must also be true.

This is sound, well-established principle. This is laid out in the Westminster Confession. This is how we have a doctrine of the Trinity, a word that is nowhere found in God's word. This is why we say yes, both men and women share the Lord's Supper.

Good and necessary consequence. It applies here. If slaves get it, so too do free wives and free husbands. And this flow of consequences, this was consistently accepted by the rabbis down through the ages.

And this is reflected in marriage vows among the people of God. This is what they promise. The contract of marriage involves these three things being promised. And the rabbis went so far as to codify, to lay down exactly how much of certain commodities were required, how much food, what quantity of cloth for the making of clothes, and yes, even the minimum frequency of said marital rights.

[26 : 11] The point is this. Shammai and Hillel, they debated the legitimacy of other grounds for divorce. They debated that passage in Deuteronomy.

They weren't sure which of these two interpretations. Okay? They debated those grounds for divorce. But neither Hillel and Shammai, nor anybody before them, nor anybody who followed after them, none of them debated, none of them doubted the obligations enshrined in Exodus 21.

But divorces on the basis of failure to provide food, clothes, and marital rights, these divorces were universally accepted as valid.

Women are entitled to these provisions. And the courts would therefore, at the woman's request, require a man who failed in them to write out a divorce certificate, freeing the woman deprived of them to marry any other man of her choosing.

marriage necessarily involves meeting the physical and emotional needs of your spouse. Now, now Jesus, Jesus in Matthew 19, Luke 16, and for that matter every other time Jesus talks about divorce.

[27 : 30] Jesus is not talking about these universally accepted grounds. He's talking about the disputed no-fault divorce. He's commenting on the interpretation of Deuteronomy.

If you like, the question Jesus is asked, it boils down to, it boils down to, see when Moses told us in Deuteronomy to divorce for uncleanness of a matter. He meant for anything, right?

The Pharisees are testing him. Either he follows that interpretation or he ends up unpopular with the general public who find that understanding to be quite convenient. And Jesus' answer, well that could then be expressed as, no, not for any matter.

What Moses means there is sexual immorality. Jesus is not commenting on the grounds from Exodus. And given that he says in Luke 16, 17, that nothing will pass away from the law, we should accept anything not otherwise specified.

we assume Jesus agreed that these grounds continue. And if that's the case, then Jesus is not at odds with Paul because he's not commenting on the case that Paul's considering.

[28 : 51] And I don't want to get into exactly what situation Paul does have in mind. We cannot do everything this morning. But again, Paul's addressing a particular case, a particular set of circumstances.

He doesn't comment on these other matters. Both of them assume the grounds of Exodus 21 to be of enduring validity. And they clarify the implications for the situation that they're dealing with without commenting on Exodus.

So these grounds in Exodus 21, these are more than sufficient to show that divorce is a legitimate option not only in cases of adultery and desertion, those cases directly addressed by Jesus and Paul, but also a legitimate option in scenarios of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse.

Because after all, abuse is the extreme case of the withholding of affection that's condemned here in Exodus 21. Again, folks, let me be very clear.

This is not blanket permission for divorce. We are not back to any matter, any, no fault. That's not what we're saying here at all.

[30 : 07] But we are also not limited to two very narrow grounds. The picture is a little broader than that. Dare I say, the picture is a little more compassionate, a little more realistic than that. folks, folks, I'm not convinced that I've got the balance right here.

Working through this argument, this hasn't been straightforward, and in my concern here to show that the church has in many cases been less willing than she ought to accept divorce in, for instance, cases of abuse, in trying to work through that argument, I'm not sure I have done justice to the overall weight of God's word.

The overall weight of God's word concerning divorce is probably summarised by saying, divorce is not part of his good plan for humanity. If I had more time, I'd talk about how divorce is never required, even when it is a legitimate option.

I'd talk about exhausting every possible avenue to revitalise a struggling marriage. I'd talk about the beauty of forgiveness. I wish we could talk about some of those things this morning, because divorce is not part of how we were intended to live.

[31 : 27] It goes against the pattern set down in Genesis. Divorce always involves sin. Nevertheless, the divorce itself is not always the sin.

Rather, a proper, a legitimate divorce is a response to sin. So when the marriage vows have already been broken by one party, that the injured may legitimately seek divorce.

When Jesus says, Matthew 19, that Moses permitted divorce because of your hardness of heart, that's not the hard heart of the one seeking divorce. No, that's the hard heart of the one who is repeatedly breaking their vows.

An improper divorce is itself sin. A legitimate divorce is a response to sin. it doesn't set matters right. It doesn't resolve the sin, but it might be the best available option.

Well, folks, despite a longer-than-average sermon today, this hasn't been an exhaustive treatment, far from it. And I'm very conscious, I'm very conscious that this is an area of life where there are often considerable complexities, where there are messy situations, unintended, unanticipated consequences.

[32 : 46] Folks, please, if you don't like some aspect of what I'm saying, if you think the implications for a particular situation are unfair or unreasonable, well, first please go back to what God says, but then let's talk about it.

Please, please don't be offended or hurt without giving me the opportunity to discuss. If you are in the thick of it yourself, well, it is my job as a pastor to try to help you think through your situation biblically, please talk to me.

And if you have theoretical questions, if you want to dig into the academic ins and outs, well, I can point you to books and papers and so on. I'm very grateful for the scholarship of David in Stone Brewer and for a study report that was accepted by the Free Church General Assembly a few years ago.

Those have been very helpful in trying to get my thinking straight as to what God is saying in his word. And I can only hope that I've successfully conveyed some of that to you.

Folks, if you are uncertain or uncomfortable, it might be that what you think I'm saying isn't what I think I'm saying. So let's talk about it, please. That being said, let's not be in the business of rejecting God's word because it's uncomfortable or because we don't like what it says.

[34 : 00] You might well be in a messy situation, but that doesn't mean you just get to do whatever you please. Let me try and summarise. Marriage is intended by God to be a lifelong relationship, terminated only by death.

Jesus said, what God has joined together, let man not separate. Lifelong. However, legitimate divorce is not man separating what God has joined, but God separating what God joined together.

Thirdly, divorce is never compulsory, even when it is legitimate. And then fourthly, we can summarise the permitted grounds for divorce that we have worked our way through this morning.

The permitted grounds for divorce, according to the Bible, could be summarised as A. Adultery, as taught by Deuteronomy 24 and affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19.

B. Emotional and physical neglect, as taught by Exodus 21 and affirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians. And then C. Abandonment and abuse.

[35 : 15] That would be included within the category of neglect, and that is as affirmed in 1 Corinthians 7. That there, that's the brief summary of what I've been trying to explain.

Here's my summary application, if you like. Here's what we do with this. First, first if, if like me, like me, if you've been reminded here of your failings as a husband, as a wife, well, repent.

Ask your spouse for forgiveness, ask God for forgiveness, ask God to help you each day to be a more godly husband or wife. Second, if you are tempted by the greener grass on the other side of divorce, if you are fed up and feel like a change, if you are peeved by something your husband did, if you have seen a younger woman who you fancy, if you're feeling like you've fallen out of love, if you're just not compatible anymore, if that is you, well, repent.

These are not valid reasons for a divorce. Even if you think that divorce might be mutual and amicable, divorce without valid grounds is offensive to God.

It is not part of his plan. You will be sinning if you pursue it in such circumstances. Do not hear me permitting or encouraging that kind of an attitude. Do not be like the Pharisees, thinking you can contort God's word into a shape that suits you.

[36 : 45] You made promises, keep them. Third, if you are in an intolerable situation, if you are enduring abuse from your wife, if your husband is persistently and unrepentantly adulterous, if you are truly a victim, if your spouse has repeatedly broken their vows or egregiously sinned against you, if that is you, then no, it does not have to carry on like this.

Talk to someone and find the way ahead. Repentance and reconciliation may yet be possible. It may not. Talk to me or to one of the elders, please.

Fourth application, if you are not married yourself, and for that matter if you are married, please will you pray for healthy marriages. Pray for your wider family, pray for your friends, pray for people at Covenant Church, pray for society at large, pray for the spouse you want to one day have.

marriages need prayer. Sometimes it's difficult, and we need God's grace. Please pray for marriage.

Fifth, final application, all of us in whatever situation hear this, forgiveness is possible. Whatever wrongs you have done, whatever sins you have committed, forgiveness is possible.

[38 : 16] I say this so many times in so many contexts. I say this so often because we need to hear it so often, don't we? There is grace. There is mercy.

Your sins can be covered by the blood of Jesus, whatever they might be. Your breach of your marriage vows, it can be forgiven by God. The wrongful divorce, it can be forgiven by God.

Come to God in repentance. I promise you, I promise he will not turn you away if you truly come in repentance. Let's pray.

Lord God, we are humbled by your word. We sometimes find it uncomfortable to hear. We sometimes don't like what you are saying.

we sometimes struggle to understand what you are saying. Lord, help us to live in light of what we have considered. Help us to be faithful first and foremost to you.

[39 : 28] Help us to be faithful in our marriages. Help us to be faithful to those we may one day marry. Help us to seek the good of others.

Help us to seek the good of others. Help us not to look in condemnation on those who have suffered terribly in their marriages.

Those who have taken a way out because it was needed. Help us to think through different situations wisely, carefully and well, seeking to honour you and to be faithful to what you have said.

Lord Jesus, help us all. We need your mercy, we need your forgiveness, we need your grace, we need your transforming power in our lives. we ask these things in the precious name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen.