

The Question about Divorce

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 October 2024

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Weakness and doubt, comfort and assure us and help us to walk in your light and grow in obedience and love for you and your church.

We ask this all for the sake of your dear son Jesus Christ, our advocate. Amen. Please be seated. Amen.

This is a controversial topic in the church today. We have to admit that. And it is so because it is one of the key areas in which the church has walked away from God's command about marriage. One of the key areas where the church is almost as if one with the world. And it might interest you, though, to know that this was also a controversial topic in Jesus' day.

As well. If you look, we didn't read it in the gospel reading, but if you look in verse 1 of Mark. By the way, it's on page 1005 of your pew Bible.

[1:30] So I welcome you to open your Bibles and follow along. If you look in that verse 1 of Mark chapter 10, you'll see that Mark tells us that Jesus and the disciples are still on their journey.

They're on their journey towards Jerusalem. We've been seeing that in previous weeks. But they're no longer in Galilee now. They're now in Judea, the region of Judea. And that is an important information for this particular passage we've just read.

They're now in Judea, in the Judean plain near the Jordan River, Mark tells us. And it is there that the Pharisees came up to Jesus to test him, we're told by Mark.

They came up in order to test him. The question they put to Jesus, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife, is a test. The motive and the location in which the Pharisees asked this question is very important.

Although the issue of divorce was a real debate in the two leading rabbinical schools of Jesus' day, the Pharisees weren't coming to Jesus from a pure of heart, sincere desire to have him settle the matter.

[2:48] Instead, they want to test him, to get Jesus in trouble. That's why they asked this particular question in this particular location in which they asked him.

So they asked this particular question in Judea, in Erad Antipas' territory. Who's Erad Antipas? If you've read earlier in Mark, if you remember the gospel, it was specifically Mark 16, verse 14 to 29, or the other gospels, you will know that Erad Antipas was the king, the ruler of that region, who married his brother's wife.

It was this marriage that John the Baptist condemned as an abomination against God's law, and for which John the Baptist was beheaded. I think the Pharisees came to Jesus to ask him specifically about divorce, hoping also to get Jesus in trouble with the ruling authority.

That's where the test lies. They thought maybe Jesus will sort of shirk away from telling the truth because he's afraid to be on Herod's back side, knowing what has happened to his cousin.

But Jesus was as fearless as his cousin, and as the Word of God, and being the Word of God incarnate, he had an even greater authority to speak on the matter.

[4:14] It's fascinating to me that the same pressures in Jesus' background, in Jesus' day, those same pressures persist today in our society.

The pressure not to teach God's counsel on the issue of marriage and divorce, that same pressure persists today. But we should follow the example of our Lord, and the example of his cousin, John the Baptist.

We must follow their example in boldly declaring God's truth to a world that needs to hear it, no matter the cost. And so they came, the Pharisees came, and they asked Jesus, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

And Jesus answered them, What did Moses command you? They said, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. And Jesus said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.

So they put this question to Jesus, and Jesus responded by appealing to the Mosaic law. He asked them, What did Moses say concerning this matter?

[5:23] When he says what did Moses say, he's really saying, What does the law say? What does the law command regarding this matter? And you see what the law says in Deuteronomy 24.

And that's the matter of dispute, really. And so they said to Moses, well, they said to Jesus rather, the Pharisees said to Jesus, Well, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.

That is, to divorce his wife. As long as he does the right certificate of divorce. So we see here that divorce was a thing in Jesus' day.

But the matter of debate is on what grounds can one seek a divorce? That's really what's being debated. And that's why the question is put to Jesus. There were two schools of thought on this matter in Jesus' day.

There was the more liberal, ill-el school that taught that a man can divorce his wife for any reason he can concoct, as long as he issues her, a certificate of divorce.

[6:30] And so this particular school relegated the matter of divorce, the matter of the dissolution of a marriage, to a purely legal procedure to read themselves of a contract.

It's as if, you know, you're ending a contract. If we're honest with ourselves, that sort of thinking is not unlike today. Today as well, we have no consideration for the moral weightiness of the marriage bond.

And so the other school, that's the liberal school of thought, the other school of thought is the Shammai school. This particular school, rabbinical school, teaches that taught that the only grounds for divorce is if there is sexual infidelity.

If there's sexual infidelity. That's the only grounds for divorce. Now, I think we will see now that Jesus sides, particularly with the latter school, than those who believed in no-fault divorce.

So our culture, we must be honest with ourselves, our culture, both in the world, and unfortunately, tragically, even sometimes in the church, as often and does follow the LL school with an extensive practice of no-fault divorce.

[7:58] Since 1969, when no-fault divorce was first legalized in California until 2010, when New York State became the last state to allow it.

I find it fascinating that New York State was the last state in the country to allow no-fault divorce. I don't know how that was, that liberal New York was the last state to allow it.

But until 2010, from 1969 to 2010, all the states in our nation, as it under statutes, no-fault divorce. The practice, this practice, of the dissolution of marriage, for whatever reason whatsoever, has caused untold devastation to the institution of marriage as a creational ordinance established by God.

Untold devastation to families, to marriage, to society at large. And perhaps before we continue to talk about the tragedy of divorce, and how prevalent it is, we also ought to first say what marriage, according to God, is.

What true marriage is, according to God's intent. And that's what Jesus did in our Gospel account here, as he's teaching, really, and conversating with the Pharisees.

[9:20] He first then goes to what marriage is. He first stated what marriage is by quoting Genesis 1 and 2. You see there in verse 6, Jesus says, But from the beginning of creation, God made them.

Them being humans, God made them male and female. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. And the two shall become what?

One flesh. So they're no longer two, but one flesh. Well, therefore, God has joined together, letting our man separate. We are made male and female by our Maker.

Jesus affirms the complementarity of our Creator nature. Fundamental to our humanity is a binary nature of male and female. Yes, we are different physically and emotionally.

Yet spiritually, we are the same with equal dignity and worth. And our Creator intends that we are to complement one another in our human flourishing.

[10:30] That is God's creational intent. In the perfection of Eden before the fall, humanity lived in perfect love and in faithful obedience to the one womb we hold a vow of allegiance and loyalty.

In that world, there was no discord of any kind. But when we broke faith and rebelled against that first love, we lost all ability to keep faith with one another.

All other relationships became subject to brokenness after we broke the relationship with God, including marriages.

But we see here, as Jesus is showing us, that marriage was created in God's intent to be a lifelong relationship in which the husband and wife are to leave their father and mother and cleave, leave and cleave to one another.

This means the primary and most important relationship under God is now with your spouse. A husband's first priority is his wife.

[11 : 50] And a wife's first priority is a husband. There's a fundamental commitment to one another that supersedes all other human commitments except God to whom we hold first allegiance.

Becoming one flesh, Jesus says. Sharing one life. a unity of heart and mind expressed in the intimate climax of total self-giving of the sexual union.

This reality is made clear in the marriage ceremony of our book of common prayer. When they're soon to be married, bow to one another. In the name of God, I so and so take you so and so to be my wife or my husband, to have and to hold from this day forward for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until we are parted by death.

This is my solemn vow. Until we are parted by death. This fundamental nature of marriage as a lifelong union is still God's intent, still God's intent for marriage.

And that has not changed. This is fleshed out more in Paul's epistle to the Ephesians in chapter 5 as we see the wonderful mystery that a Christian marriage is.

[13 : 20] That it is an image of Christ, the bridegroom, and his bride, the church. So, if this is God's intent, the dissolution of the marriage bond by divorce, whenever it occurs, is an abnormal and evil breach of God's creational intent for marriage, we must admit that.

Jesus said to them, because of your hardness of heart, as he's saying to the Pharisees, because of your hardness of heart, Moses wrote you this commandment. Hardness of heart.

A result of our rebellion against God. That's what hardness of heart is. It's a result of our rebellion against God. It's what leads to divorce. While our society and those of the Hillel school allow for no-fault divorce under the law, in reality, there is no such thing as no-fault divorce.

The point, I think, is this. Every time divorce happens, it is a result of the sin of at least one or both parties in the relationship.

It's a result of sin. And it is always a cause to grieve and mourn, just as we grieve and mourn over the death of any human life.

[14 : 44] Neither death nor divorce are part of God's creational intent. But they are a reality of life because of sin.

And so Jesus says in verse 9, what death or God has joined together, let not man separate. I prefer the King James English terminology of this better.

Let not man put asunder. Asunder means to rend violently apart. And we hear that so often in marriage ceremonies, don't we?

At the end of the ceremony. What death or God has joined together, let not man put asunder. We hear it. But we lose sight of the enormity of that sentence.

We lose sight of the fact that these are our Lord's words. Jesus himself spoke these words, revealing God's heart for the permanence of marriage unions.

[15 : 44] in seeking to break the marriage union, we are acting against God's ideal, and we are acting against God's intent for marriage.

But as we've said earlier, if this is God's intention, and if we accept it as God's intention for marriage, I think it should, it should give us a deep sense of comfort in Christian marriages.

it should. Where does the comfort come from? It gives us the warrant. We see, this is God's intent that marriage should be lifelong. Then it gives us, as married couples, in marriage relationships, as the church of Christ, we are all to support one another in our calling, either in marriage or singleness.

And so it gives us all to support marriages in our congregation. It gives us the warrant to work through our selfishness, because we do know, right? we're all selfish.

When people ask me my first year of marriage, how married life was, the constant refrain I kept saying is, I knew I was selfish, you know, but I didn't realize how selfish I was.

[16:55] I didn't realize the enormity of myself. I have to live with somebody else now, and I didn't realize how selfish I am, and I was. I like to believe I'm less selfish, but you might have to ask my wife about that.

But as we said, if we know that this is God's intent for marriage, it gives us the warrant to walk through our selfishness, it gives us the warrant to walk through our sins, and our impatience with one another, with love.

It gives us a renewed awareness that as we do so, as we walk through all of those things, God, whose heart is for the success of our marriage unions, will help us along the way.

We can forgive one another. We can, with humility, confess our sins to one another, as husband and wife. And we can seek counsel from godly men and women, and ask for the prayers of the church concerning our marriage and our families.

Jesus resets the standard for marriage and God's intent, that it should be a permanent union, in these verses, as he teaches on it.

[18:14] This means that while the world may celebrate divorce, and allow such phrases as irreconcilable differences, to be part of the societal lexicon, to really mean that any reason under the sun can be given to dissolve a marriage reunion, while the world does that, it cannot be so in Christ's church.

As fellow Christians, we can encourage those who are in marriage, in marriage relationships. We can pray for their success. We can counsel them according to God's will.

The church is not the place where people encourage the dissolution of marriages. churches. The church is not a place where it should occur without consequence, as in the world.

Rather, knowing God's will concerning this, we should do everything in our power to help make marriages a success. And one of the ways we do this is to keep listening.

One of the ways we can make marriages in our church, in our society, a success, is to keep listening to God's word about love, God's word about grace, God's word about repentance, and God's word about forgiveness.

[19:34] God's word, brothers and sisters in Christ, is the antidote to the oddness of heart, which leads to human brokenness. So, what am I saying then?

I'm saying, come to church, sit under the word of God preached, let his word of wash over you, and search you, submit yourself to its probing.

Through it, through the preached word, through the reading of God's word, through the meditating on it, the Holy Spirit shapes you into Christlikeness.

The Holy Spirit sanctifies you. The Holy Spirit enables you to die to your old self, and live the new life Christ has given you. I've found that oftentimes, not all, but often, when counseling those going through marital problems, I've found that there is a oddness of heart, often against God, and against his word, in at least one or both parties, in the marriage.

A oddness against God and his word. And there is no prayer or reading of God's word together as husband and wife. Oftentimes, when marriages are broken, they don't read God's word together, they don't pray together.

[21:04] And here's the truth. If Christ is not at the center of our marriages, holding us together, something or someone else will be there, breaking us apart.

If Christ is not at the center of our marriages, holding us together, something or someone else will be there, breaking us apart. And so, so does divorce happen?

Tragically, yes. Under what condition is it permissible? Under what condition is divorce permissible? God's word is clear about this.

Jesus spoke of adultery and the reality of the ways a marriage union can be rent violently asunder in this fallen world. And so, when we talk of the matter of divorce, knowing God's will on the matter, we should approach it reluctantly and with great sadness and grief.

God says this in Malachi 2.16, for I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel. That's God.

[22:20] That's his heart. So, how then are we to navigate a sinful world in which this is a reality? Which brokenness of marriage is a reality?

How are we to navigate such a world? But Jesus shows us in verse 10 to 12, as he further instructs his disciples. So, verse 10, in the house, the disciples came to Jesus and they asked him to further on the matter.

And Jesus said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Now, if the Pharisees thought that Jesus would skirt the issue out of fear of Herod or Herodius, his brother's wife that he took, as they'd hoped, Jesus here in verse 10 and 11 made it clear that adultery from either party in a marriage causes the offending party to be under God's judgment.

Herod, in issuing a certificate of divorce to his first wife, has committed adultery and therefore is under God's judgment. Herodius, in abandoning her first husband and taking up with her brother-in-law, is also under God's judgment because she has committed adultery.

Here's the concession and the condition in which divorce is allowed in the Bible. The only concession and condition in which divorce is allowed is sexual immorality.

[24:02] That's the one condition. The Matthew account in Matthew 19.9 tells us this. Jesus says, as he's further in Matthew's account of this same issue, Jesus says in Matthew 19.9, and I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

There, stated explicitly, is the reason for the dissolution of marriage. A second reason is given in 1 Corinthians 7, in verse 15, where Paul states that abandonment or desertion by one's spouse is another ground for divorce.

Now, some, I must say this to you, some interpret these two concessions as reasons to leave a marriage. Some would teach that although you may leave the marriage, you're not free to remarry. I think the plain reading of Matthew 19, and the section given there, and the plain reading of 1 Corinthians 7, is that it is clear that these are two conditions in which there can be remarriage. Yet, the reality is that even under these circumstances, when divorce does happen, even under these circumstances, it is a great tragedy, when it occurs.

[25:27] And there is always room for repentance, and forgiveness, and healing in Christ. So finally, brothers and sisters, a word for those who have gone through the pain of divorce. There is always forgiveness at the cross.

If your sin has led to the dissolution of your marriage, there is always forgiveness at the cross.

Repent. Come to God in humility, and receive His mercy and grace.

If you were the offended party, whose life has been torn asunder because of the unfaithfulness and sin of your spouse, you need to know that there is healing at the cross of Christ as well.

And the pastoral response of the church to such people must be compassion and love, and a commitment together as the church to their restoration, not judgment and further abandonment.

We must do better as the church of Christ in this matter. We must press in to those who are suffering, or who are having marriage problems, or who have experienced the pain of divorce.

[26:40] In the case of sexual immorality and adultery, the church must not be silent. It should seek to restore those who are fallen and call them to repentance.

Whilst it may be the norm in the world, in the church of Christ, there is no such thing as no false divorce. It just isn't. And it's for this reason, in the Anglican Church of North America, if someone seeks to remarry after a divorce, the clergy, seeking to officiate the wedding, must first get permission from the diocesan bishop in order to officiate that marriage ceremony.

And what's the reason for that? The reason is that marriage is sacred. God hates divorce. And knowing this is God's will, and this is God's heart concerning marriage, the church must be careful that remarriages are under the biblical concessions allowed.

Otherwise, he or she is not a, otherwise the church is not a liberty to condone what God has condemned as sin. Beloved in Christ, I know that this has been a hard word.

We either have endured the pain or guilt of divorce, or we know someone dear to us, close to us, who has. I think that's probably true for all of us in this room.

[28:20] Either we personally or someone close, dear to us, have experienced it. So it is a painful matter. It is painful even when it is, it is, it is somebody we know, we hear about.

It is always a tragedy when it occurs. But again, I want to say that it is not beyond the mercy and grace of God when it does happen. And so, so that's the comfort and that's the word to all of us.

I should sit under God's word today. Think of the passage you read in Hebrews. Jesus Christ, our high priest, has been tempted, yet without sin.

And for because he himself has suffered, he has suffered, Jesus Christ, your high priest, has suffered when tempted. He is able to help those who are being tempted. So, whatever you may be

in this matter, whatever your history has been, hear the comforting word of God.

Go to Christ, your great high priest. Receive, repent, receive his forgiveness. If you have been hurt, come to him and receive healing and comfort at his end.

[29 : 43] I've attempted to preach the word faithfully this morning. And if what I've said has caused or drudged up any painful memories, please forgive me. If you are convicted by God, the Holy Spirit, my admonition to you is to surrender to his loving and gentle hands as he brings you to Christ.

Surrender to his loving and gentle hands. To the loving and gentle hands of your great high priest. As he brings you to himself to find forgiveness and healing.

And brothers and sisters, let us harp the heart of God towards the marriage union in our midst, in our marriages and in the Christ church.

Let us pray. Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy upon us. Forgive us for our sins against you that have led to brokenness with you and others in our relationships.

Mend the hurt and brokenness in our lives as we fall at your feet. For our single brothers and sisters, sustain them in their calling as you sustain those of us who are in marriages.

[31 : 12] Lead all of us not into temptation. And deliver us from evil. Amen. Amen. Hell, that's it. Let's do it. No, you're not. You're not. It's it. It's I. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time.

It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. It's the time. lip. It's the time. lip. lip.