

Marriage and Divorce

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[0 : 00] Please turn your Bible to the Gospel of Mark, chapter 10.! This morning our attention will be directed to verses 1-12.

! For the words of Jesus are not only sobering, they really are difficult.

But they are God's Word. And therefore, we need to hear and heed them. Mark, chapter 10, beginning in verse 1.

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds gathered to him again.

And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And the Pharisees came up and, in order to test him, asked, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

[1 : 24] He answered them, What did Moses command you? They said, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.

Jesus said to them, Because of the hardness of, Sorry, because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment.

But from the beginning of creation, 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 one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

And in the house, the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her.

[2 : 32] And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you once again for the amazing privilege that we have to gather as your people.

Lord, remembering that when we were strangers, you sought us out, you saved us, and you put us in a family. You put us in this local church.

And Lord, we ask now that as we corporately sit under the preaching of your word, that you would speak to our hearts through your word. Lord, we are all in different places as we hear this word this morning, personally and maritally.

And we ask that you would speak to us in the ways that we need to hear you. I pray, Lord, that you would grant me the grace to be faithful to your word. And then, Lord, grant us all the grace to take heed to your word.

We pray that you would use the preaching of your word and the obedience to your word to glorify your holy name. It's in Christ's name we pray.

[3 : 50] Amen. I'm going to allow some time at the end for questions and answers. So if you have any questions as we go along this morning, make a note of it, and I'll do my best to answer at the end.

In this passage that we just read, we see that the teaching that Jesus gives on marriage and divorce was in response to a question from the Pharisees on divorce.

We see this in verse 2. They asked him a particular question about divorce. Now, Mark also tells us in verse 2 that the Pharisees asked Jesus this question to test him.

But what's interesting is that Jesus answers them in a very surprising way. Instead of answering them about divorce, instead of engaging them directly in the question they asked about divorce, what Jesus does is Jesus answers them by giving them a teaching on marriage.

It's very important to see how Jesus answers this question. He doesn't go directly to the question. He answers it by teaching about marriage.

[5 : 10] And here's what he taught them about marriage and what he is, by extension, teaching us about marriage. Marriage is a binding covenant that is formed and ended on God's terms, not man's.

That is what I pray that we see from this text this morning.

And I want to remind you, and I don't think that you believe this, but I just want to be doubly sure that you don't think for a second that I'm up here giving my own ideas.

I prayed privately, and I prayed just a moment ago that God would help me to be faithful to only say what is in the four corners of his word this morning. This is God's word.

Whatever your view is this morning, I pray that every one of us will leave this place more convinced of this truth, having a very high view of marriage, that it's God's institution, that it's God's covenant, that he forms it, and he ends it on his terms, not ours.

[6 : 29] What Jesus said in response to the Pharisees was corrective in his day, and it is both corrective and instructive for our day.

And in our remaining time, what I want to do is I want to consider what Jesus said to, well, first I want to consider the question the Pharisees asked, and then I want to consider the answer the Lord gives.

So first, the Pharisees question. In verse 2, the Pharisees asked Jesus, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Now again, Mark tells us that they asked this question because they wanted to test Jesus.

And the reason we know that they wanted to test Jesus by this question is the fact that divorce was practiced in the nation of Israel, in the Roman Empire.

Indeed, the Pharisees themselves practiced divorce. But what I want us to see is beyond the testing that is in their question, what we see in this question is the sinfulness and the heartlessness of men.

[7 : 56] Notice that the question was asked from the point of view of men. The question they asked Jesus is not, is divorce lawful? Or not, is it lawful for a person to divorce his or her spouse?

No, the question was asked purely from the husband's point of view because in those days women were treated as property and mistreated really.

Men acquired them and disposed of them at will. And what is sadder is that even the men who were supposed to be representatives of God, the Pharisees who held themselves out as the examples of what it was to follow God, even the Pharisees engaged in this sinful and heartless conduct of acquiring and selfishly and heartlessly dumping their wives in divorce.

And we see the answer that Jesus gives them first in verse 3, which is in the form of a question. He says to them, what did Moses command you? What did Moses say?

The Pharisees in turn answered him in verse 4, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. So here the test is becoming even more obvious because they know exactly what the law says.

[9 : 31] But yet they're asking Jesus, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Now to appreciate the dialogue, let me just give a bit of background into divorce in Scripture.

When the Pharisees said to Jesus that Moses allowed the man to write a certificate of divorce and send his wife away, they would have been referring to Deuteronomy chapter 24.

And here's what Deuteronomy 24 verses 1 through 4 says. I'm going to have it projected. You don't need to turn there. This is what it says. When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house and she departs out of his house and if she goes and becomes another man's wife and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house or if the latter man dies who took her to be his wife then her former husband who sent her away may not take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled for that is an abomination before the Lord and you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.

Let me summarize three very important lessons we can learn from this instruction on divorce in Deuteronomy 24. First of all the divorce that Moses was permitting was not for the reason of adultery.

Now the reason we know that is that the punishment for adultery at that time was stoning fornication as well it was stoning so when he is permitting divorce here the reason is not adultery.

[11 : 48] The divorces that Moses was permitting here in in this in this passage he describes it he describes the reason as for something indecent some indecency and this is not adultery but it is it is something hinting in the direction of unfaithfulness but it's not adultery it is it is some kind of a rupture in the relationship some kind of a hint towards unfaithfulness to a degree where the husband felt that he is no longer able to keep this woman as his wife it's something that has happened that has just ruptured the relationship to that degree and Moses says if that's the circumstance then when you write her the certificate of divorce here's what you cannot do you cannot take her back after she's gone and been somebody else's wife or the husband dies and so forth and just to explain that a bit more well let me explain it on the third point the second observation is this from

Deuteronomy 24 we see that only men were allowed to divorce their spouses a woman could not divorce outrightly she could perhaps nag her husband she could just beat him down she could perhaps even go and do the indecent thing so that he could send her away because she no longer is favorable to him but she in herself could not initiate that divorce under the law of Moses at that time so you could only imagine the kind of abuse that women would have suffered at the hands of husbands at that time but here's the most important observation from this passage Moses was not initiating the practice of divorce by this law that he gave the language of it is very plain if you look at

Deuteronomy 24 verse 1 again it's going to be projected for you when a man takes a wife and marries her if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her and he writes her a certificate of divorce Moses doesn't say write her a certificate of divorce he says if you marry this woman and she finds no favor in your eyes if you do this if you write her a certificate of divorce here's what you cannot do and so what Moses was doing was Moses was regulating a practice that existed and really before the writing of the certificate we don't have dates on this but before the writing of the certificate they simply just said get on my house they would simply put them away and this woman would be out of the house and it was obviously a given that adultery infidelity would be a ground to end a marriage but what was happening was they would just put the women away for all kinds of reasons and so when you looked you'd see this woman who was in this person's house no longer in the house and you would automatically suspect well maybe she committed adultery but there was no there was no regulation of that and so the practice of giving a certificate started at some point scripture doesn't tell us when that actually started but what

Moses is doing here is he is regulating a part of what they were doing because what they were doing was they would just whimsically get rid of a woman and then maybe well she gets married and maybe the husband dies and they want to take her back or maybe the other husband divorces her puts her away and then they want to take her back again indicating very clearly that it could not have been a good reason why you got rid of her in the first place if you want to take her back again and so Moses was essentially saying to them think long and hard before you put your wife away because if you put her away and she gets married to another man you cannot take her back they were taking them back and it was just a muddled corrupt system of men abusing women like musical chairs back and forth and so Moses was not initiating this practice of divorce and writing certificates of divorce what he was doing was he was regulating it to stop the abuse so the

Pharisees knew that Moses had given this law yet they're asking Jesus is it lawful for a man to put away his wife and why is that well I think one of the possibilities is that the Pharisees themselves were divided in their opinion about under what circumstances a man could divorce his wife and it seems like they may have wanted to draw Jesus into the debate so here's what the Pharisees taught and this is not original with me this is according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia they tell us that there were two well known schools of thought on the issue of divorce among the Jewish rabbis one was called the school of Shammai that's S-H-A-M-M-A-I for those of you taking notes and the other called Hillel both views of divorce prevailed during the time of

[18:01] Jesus those who held to the Shammai school of thought concerning divorce they were the conservative ones and they felt the only reason that you could divorce your wife was this something indecent was some kind of physical unfaithfulness not necessarily adultery but something tangible something that's tangibly indecent in the moral area that was the only ground for divorce that's what they taught they were very conservative very strict but there was also a liberal school the Hillel school was liberal and the Pharisees or the rabbis and those who were liberals they went to the other extreme and they taught that basically she finds no favor in your eyes that meant almost anything and they reasoned that if she finds no favor in his eyes came before something indecent and they taught that a man could divorce his wife for the flimsiest of reasons something like if she were to spoil a dish because she may have seasoned it badly or she may have burnt it carelessly you could divorce her for that some of the

Hillel rabbis actually taught that it was perfectly fine for a man to dismiss his wife if he found another woman whom he liked better or who was more beautiful here's some other reasons that they gave for divorce taken directly from one of their teaching books she who violates the law of Moses for example causes her husband to eat food which has not been tithed you can divorce her for that she who vows but does not keep her vows divorce her for that she who goes out on the street with her hair loose I was thinking about this if this were today there'd be reason for a lot of women to be divorced or spends in the street or converses or meaning flirts with a man or I thought about this one as well is a noisy woman and what noisy means what noisy meant for them was that she spoke so loud in her house that her neighbors could hear her

I think a lot of Bohemian wives if this were today would be divorced on that ground I'm going to ask you who do you think had the most followers the Shammai school of thought or Hillel Hillel had the most because you could divorce for any reason and what's sad is they were basing it on the law of Moses which they were abusing and what they did was the Pharisees broadened what Moses was seeking to narrow and they expanded what Moses was seeking to restrict!

Moses was not trying to give them all kinds of reasons to put away their wives he was trying to prohibit them from doing that but the Pharisees were not prepared for the answer that Jesus would give them they weren't prepared because instead of answering them concerning divorce Jesus answered them concerning marriage and his answer is found in verses 5 through 9 that brings me to my second and final point in the sermon a Lord's answer in verse 5 Jesus tells the Pharisees that Moses allowed them to write a certificate of divorce and send away their wives because of the hardness of their hearts notice that Jesus is saying the issue in divorce the reason for divorce was not something found in the wives but something found in the hearts of the husband who are putting them away the hardness of their hearts the heartlessness of their hearts and then in verses 6 through 9

Jesus lays out God's plan for marriage and what he does is he takes the Pharisees back to the beginning to show them that divorce was never God's plan it was never God's intent God made them male and female complementary he created them and listen this is the all knowing all wise God of the universe creating male and female female for male to make them complementary and we see this picture of oneness we see this picture of unity that God had in mind it's a visual God could have created marriage and brought it about any number of different ways he could have let marriage be you shake hands or you hug but no that's not the picture that he gives us of marriage the picture that he gives us of marriage is that he creates a man and creates a woman complementary and they are joined in sexual intimacy in the most intimate act that is possible between two human beings to communicate his picture his vision for what marriage is supposed to be like and he tells us that the man is to leave his father and his mother leave the authority of his parents home and he is to start his own family with his wife and he is to do it by holding fast to her and what we see in this is a picture that

[24 : 25] God has ordained it that a man is to lead in his marriage and he is to be the thermostat the one who sets the temperature he is the one who is to be holding fast to his wife doesn't mean that a wife doesn't hold fast to a husband but she is not commanded to do that the husband is to hold fast to his wife and the two of them will become one flesh in verse six Jesus is quoting from Genesis chapter one verse twenty seven and in verse seven he is quoting from Genesis two and twenty four notice in verse eight that two times Jesus mentions that the two will become one flesh and here he's pointing not just to sexual intimacy he is pointing to the joining of two lives he is pointing to the oneness of these two lives they are two but they are one you look at a married couple and you see two persons but no what

Jesus says is in marriage they become one there's a joining that takes place you know what I think is the most startling thing that Jesus says in his response to the Pharisees I think it's found in verse nine look at verse nine what therefore God has joined together let not man separate I think this was startling because I think as far as the Pharisees were concerned a man marries a woman he could divorce a woman I choose to marry you I could choose to divorce you and there are many people today who share that view I voluntarily marry you I will voluntarily divorce you verse nine Jesus says it doesn't work like that looking back at the first marriage which was the marriage between

Adam and Eve in the garden recorded in Genesis 2 Jesus says God is the one who joins! a male and female together in marriage notice again what therefore God has joined together let not man separate and since God is the one who joins them together no man can rightly take the authority upon himself to separate them it's not our place we didn't put them together we have no authority to put them apart I want you to think about this for a moment because we play games with things we play games with many different things but if the sovereign all powerful God of the universe joins a man and a woman together who is more powerful to separate them who is stronger than the Lord to truly separate them now we play games with papers we write all kinds of things on papers and make them say what we want them to say but if

God joins together no paper brings them apart anyone who can truly separate what God has truly joined is stronger than God that person should be God this joining is not just a physical joining it's not just a physical joining of sexual intimacy we do that but there's a joining that God himself does there's a divine joining of male and female in marriage and in verse 9 Jesus tells us that God is the one who joins them together and see this is why so called homosexual marriage is not true marriage it cannot be true marriage because it is not what God has created it is not what God has joined together and no amount of legislation can change that if you've ever been to a wedding one of the things you would hear the person who is officiating say he would say something like we have gathered together in the sight of

God on the presence of God and the company of these witnesses! See God will be present at the institution he has created of a male and a female being joined together he will not be present of two women being joined together or two men being joined together or a group of people being joined together!

[30 : 00] their mouths their mouths were stopped it seems like they just could not respond to what Jesus said to them when he said to them you want to know the reasons and the grounds you can put away your spouses he said the issue is your hard hearts God has joined them together you cannot just whimsically set them apart and believe that you have set them apart and they had no response for Jesus their mouths were stopped Matthew same thing you look at the account in Matthew Matthew doesn't record the Pharisees saying anything and I pray that that is the case with us as well I pray that we let the Lord have the last word on marriage as well the Pharisees had no answer because Jesus answered their question about divorce by reminding them about

God's unchanging plan for marriage now Mark tells us in verse 10 that the disciples when they got privately with Jesus in a house they again asked them about the matter they had some questions we don't have the benefit of the exact question or questions that they asked Jesus but from the answer that Jesus gives them perhaps they said to Jesus well I'm puzzled here you are saying when God joins together let no man put asunder or apart and they're divorcing the Pharisees are divorcing the Shammai they divorce the Hillels they divorce divorce is happening and here you're saying that whatever God has joined together no one is separate we don't understand that what's interesting about what Jesus says in verse 12 is and this is the only account we have of it in scripture referencing a woman divorcing her husband and obviously what we see is things were changing times were changing by the time of the ministry of

Jesus because they didn't outrightly stone for adultery and one example of that was a woman caught in adultery when they brought her to Jesus rather than stoning her right away and in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about divorce and he says that one ground for divorce was if there was adultery and obviously it means that it was no longer stoning since you could divorce but here he includes a woman as well so he says if a man divorces or if a woman divorces he includes both of them and so the disciples were puzzled how could you say let no one put them as under no one separate them and then this practice is happening and I'm just trying to fill in what they could have possibly been saying to cause

Jesus to answer the way that he answered I want you to follow me on this if you can let's read verses 10 through 12 and in the house the disciples asked them again about this matter that's all the now on the face of what Mark records here in this account it would appear that Jesus taught that there was no ground or reason for divorce and for remarriage because he says anyone who divorces his spouse and marries another commits adultery and if a woman divorces her spouse and marries another she commits adultery and the idea is the reason that adultery is committed is the marriage is still standing the marriage hasn't ended the only way you can have adultery is if a marriage exists and something is done against that marriage so on the face of these words of

Jesus what he seems to be saying is if you divorce your spouse and marry somebody else you commit adultery because what God joins together no one puts apart he's basically saying in very plain words I'm not obeying your fraudulent!

[35 : 27] certificate because you have gone and written that it doesn't change anything you still have a marriage you're committing adultery you think that's a marriage you think that that certificate that you've given to your wife and put her away has ended your marriage but it has not ended your marriage your marriage exists and what you're doing is you are in adultery but that's not what Jesus is teaching that's not that's not what Jesus taught and that's not what Mark is seeking to teach and here's how we know that we know that first of all in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 verse 32 Jesus gives sexual immorality as a ground for divorce he said anyone who divorces his wife except for sexual immorality commits adultery and one thing we know about scripture is scripture is consistent scripture doesn't contradict itself now how do we know that what

I'm saying about what Mark was attempting to teach here is true well we can look at the parallel account there's a parallel account in Matthew's gospel you can read it it's in verses it's in chapter 19 verses 1 through 12 the exact account from Matthew's perspective and the relevant verses I want to read which will be projected for you are verses 8 and 9 this is what Matthew records Matthew 19 verses 8 and 9 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 now here is a very reasonable reason why Mark did not mention the exception he didn't mention it because it was a given it was understood that adultery was a ground or basis for divorce and so

Mark is writing in such a way that he obviously is referring to everything else anything other than that but clearly from the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew's account in Matthew chapter 19 we can say without fear of contradiction that when we reconcile these verses the Lord did not teach that there was absolutely no ground to end a marriage but here again remember that this is not a command that if there is adultery then you're commanded to divorce your spouse it's not that at all it is a permission it is an allowance but here's what we need to bear in mind we need to bear in mind that God's original plan for marriage is that it was to be a permanent union for life and divorce is not commanded based on sexual morality it is only permitted

God's best is even when sexual immorality takes place in a marriage that there is forgiveness and there's reconciliation but in our fallen world they're not always possible that's the ideal but it's not always possible sometimes reconciliation doesn't happen because a spouse is unrepentant and that's sad that even after violating a marriage there's not repentance but that shows us our fallen condition that shows us the hardness of our hearts but after that betrayal and brothers and sisters hear me this morning there is no greater betrayal in life than the betrayal of love in a marriage no greater betrayal because it is the it is God's greatest gift that he's given to us in all of creation the joining of two hearts in a relationship that is intended for life where we say those vows we say until death we say through sickness and health for richer and for poorer and we make this commitment this lifelong commitment to one another and then when that is betrayed no greater betrayal no greater betrayal and what is sad is when that betrayal takes place and there's a lack of repentance but again it shows the hardness of our hearts and then one other reality is that sometimes even when the guilty party has repented and desires to continue the marriage the other party sometimes uses that act of violation that act of betrayal and they use it as a license to get out of a marriage that they always want to get out of but God knows the heart and though we can play games with one another because we don't know the heart

God knows the heart what I find interesting about what Jesus says about divorce and remarriage in this encounter is that he leaves many questions unanswered and we can run the risk of trying to answer these questions that Jesus didn't answer and we do so at the expense of ignoring what he does address and see we can't do that we ought not do that we ought not be preoccupied with what about this situation what about that situation Jesus doesn't give advice beyond where he says if you divorce your spouse and you remarry somebody else you've committed adultery doesn't give advice beyond that in terms of well what should I do and I encourage us to fully digest what the Lord is saying here you notice the biggest issue concerning divorce biggest issue

[42 : 29] Jesus tells us it's our hearts it's our hard hearts it is our heartless hearts that our hearts are so hard and so callous that we are able to mistreat and abuse a person who we swore before God that we will take as a mate for life to love and to cherish and because the reason for divorce is a heart issue divorce does not solve the issue it just perpetuates it only Jesus can solve that issue because only Jesus can transform the human heart and the way he does it is by the new birth by the new birth where he takes our hearts of stone and he gives us a heart of flesh and only he could do that no amount of willing no amount of turning over a new leaf no amount of adopting new practices can change our hearts only God can change our hearts through Jesus

Christ through the new birth that comes through the Holy Spirit he is able to turn hearts of stone into hearts of flesh and this is why Jesus had to come this is why Jesus came because without his coming our hearts could never be changed the best we could be as Pharisees the best we could be would be those who learn to navigate through the law to try to appear righteous even as we commit sin again our sinfulness is seen in how we as Adam's race we have taken God's best gift the best gift God has given to us the gift of marriage where we can have lifelong companionship and we have taken that and we have created it and made it in some cases to be a living hell a living hell for us and a living hell for others and it all points to our need for a savior points to our need for

Jesus Christ and this morning if you're here listening to this sermon or you're listening to it on the recording if you're contemplating divorce for a reason other than adultery I encourage you to ask the Lord for a new heart or for a renewed heart that you may honor his intent in marriage and that it would be a permanent union between you and your spouse until the day one or both of you die now the purpose of this sermon was not to even attempt to answer all the questions that I imagine a sermon like this would raise instead it was simply to call us to hear fresh the words of Jesus about the enduring nature of marriage and how we are called to honor the covenant of marriage and to be faithful to our spouses perhaps some of you are wondering whether there's a contradiction between the words of Jesus who says he allows divorce for sexual immorality and the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 where he says when there's a spouse who departs against the will of the other spouse that that spouse who was abandoned or who was deserted is no longer bound in the marriage and they're not contradicting each other they were just dealing with two very different situations

Jesus was dealing with Pharisees who were using trivial reasons to write fraudulent divorce certificates for their spouses and Paul was dealing with a situation where there was a practice of unbelieving spouses who were deserting believing spouses but I think the witness of scripture is sufficiently clear that there are only two biblical grounds for divorce and they are adultery and desertion and although we live in a fallen world although we are fallen people with God's help we can embrace his original plan for the permanence of marriage and there's nothing short of amazing that God has given us this institution and allowed sinners like you and me to be in it to represent his relationship with his church and that is amazing we should all be amazed by that and we should all do our very best to honor the Lord's original intent that marriage is for life that marriage is to be permanent

Lord I'm going to take some questions but let me pray and then we'll take some questions Father we thank you this morning for the gift of marriage and Lord we acknowledge that we are sinners greatly in need of your grace would you help us to embrace the original plan that you have laid out in scripture for the joining of a male and a female in marriage Lord help us to be faithful and to honor that original intent I especially pray for those this morning who are married and their own experience has fallen far short of the bliss and the joy that was held out as awaiting them in marriage

[49 : 09] Lord would you speak to their hearts where they have need for direction would you give them direction and Lord most of all would you give them a full resolve to seek to obey your word we pray in Jesus name amen and any questions can