

# Discipleship and Divorce

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Preacher: Jared Blankenship

[ 0 : 00 ] Look with me again at 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.

So in the structure of Mark's gospel, Jesus has now officially left Galilee for the final time, and he is on his way to Jerusalem. We noted a few weeks ago, Luke, at this point in his narrative, is using phrases like, his face was set toward Jerusalem, meaning, not that that's directly where he was going from this point, but that his mind was on the cross.

His mind was on the purpose for which he came. And everything that Jesus is doing is moving closer and closer to the cross. But before going to Jerusalem for his crucifixion, Jesus made one final tour through the region of Judea, and then across the Jordan in the area of Perea.

Perea was still a part of Palestine in the day. You'll remember back when John the Baptist was murdered by King Herod. It was actually Herod's palace and prison inside the area of Perea, where John was kept and where he was murdered there.

But though Jesus was getting closer and closer to the cross, notice that his pattern of ministry doesn't change at all. What is it that he does? Everywhere he went, people came to him.

[ 1 : 29 ] And what did he do? Well, he taught them. He preached the gospel to them. What gospel? The same gospel he always preached. The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

Repent and believe the good news. Matthew 19 tells us that at the same time as he was teaching the crowds, he was also healing the people. So even as he got closer and closer to his final days, just before the cross, Jesus is doing what he always did.

He was steady. He was faithful. He was preaching the gospel. And during one of these occasions of preaching, he was confronted with a question about divorce.

And Mark records for us some of the details of Jesus' teaching. But if you're like me, you come to this point in your reading of Mark's gospel, and this passage feels out of place, at least on the surface.

It's like, where is this coming from? Because we know that Mark's goal, his purpose in this gospel, is to do what? Mark 1.1.

[ 2 : 36 ] To declare that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That he is the Messiah. He's proclaiming the gospel through this book. And then we get to a passage like this, and it's like this whole discussion of divorce and remarriage really kind of comes out of nowhere.

Like, why is it here? And why is Mark, and then also Matthew, and then in short order, Luke, all included this particular teaching of Jesus?

We need to remember that in this section of Mark's gospel, it's really kind of a subsection. Jesus is, of course, moving towards the cross, but it's zeroing in on his training of the 12 disciples.

He's teaching them not only the truth about his own messiahship, but he's teaching them the truth of what is real discipleship. What does it really mean to follow Christ?

What is it that the life of a disciple looks like? And then we begin to understand, well, actually, this lesson fits kind of perfectly in this section, doesn't it?

[ 3 : 40 ] Biblical marriage is the foundation on which a healthy family, church, and society are built. Following the disintegration of a marriage comes the collapse of the home.

Following the collapse of the home is the devastation of society as a whole. So God's design for marriage is not a random piece of teaching, but it's actually something that every disciple of Christ must take seriously.

Now, what has Jesus been telling these men? He's been telling them that they're salt. And if we are the salt that God uses to preserve righteousness in the world around us, to purify the wickedness

and depravity that is all around us in this world that rebels against God, if that's our responsibility, then we have to get this right.

We have to get this idea of biblical marriage, of the biblical home. We have to get it right as faithful disciples. So what we're going to do this morning is take just a few minutes, and we won't be able to explore every possible discussion on this.

It would take us weeks to do that. We're going to stick as close to these 12 verses as we can, and we're going to step into a short counseling session with Jesus. Let's say that we really wanted to find out what is really God's mind about marriage, what is really his thoughts on divorce and remarriage, and how can we be obedient to what he wants?

[ 5 : 20 ] Well, Jesus gives us a good look at that here, okay? The first thing I would write down, if you're keeping notes, is write down this from verses 2 through 5. Debating divorce. Debating divorce.

Look at verse 2. The Pharisees came up, and in order to test him, asked, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? And he answered them, what did Moses command you?

And they said, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. So as Jesus was teaching the crowds in Judea, these Pharisees approach him with this question about divorce.

Matthew gives us an extra detail that brings a little more clarity to their question. Matthew chapter 19 and verse 3. The Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife?

And then he adds, for any cause. That brings some clarity to the question. They weren't necessarily asking about divorce as a practice in general.

[ 6 : 22 ] What they're asking the Lord is, can a man divorce his wife for any reason that he wants to divorce his wife? Are there stipulations? What can we do and what shouldn't we do?

And the question was related to an ongoing dispute that was prevalent in this particular day among the Jews. The dispute had to do with what made divorce permissible.

And it's interesting the way Jesus responds. He doesn't automatically go to answer their question.

The first thing Jesus does, as he often did, was he asked them a question.

But why? He says, well, what did Moses command you? Is that because he didn't know? Of course not. But Jesus asked these questions to draw things out of people, didn't he?

What's he drawing out of these Pharisees? The true intent of their heart. Because then he got directly to what they were trying to get at. And that was this debate that was so common.

[ 7 : 22 ] It's centered on various interpretations of Deuteronomy chapter 24. In fact, if you're keeping notes, I would write that in the margin. You can look at this later. Deuteronomy chapter 24, verses 1 through 4.

This is what the debate centered on. It's the only passage in the Old Testament law that deals with divorce directly. Let me read these four verses to you. Let me read these four verses.

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 to the Lord.

And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God has given you for an inheritance.

This is the passage that the debate was over. But most of those four verses, they were in agreement on.

It's not hard to figure out what Moses was getting at once the divorce was final, and he was giving instructions there. What the debate focused on in particular was the very first verse, that if a man found some indecency in her and gave her a certificate of divorcement, and then it carries on.

[ 8 : 56 ] What they debated is, well, what does that word indecency actually refer to? And there were two schools of thought in Jesus's day. First, there was a rabbi named Shammai.

So there was the Shammai school. The Shammai school took a stricter approach to this passage, and it defined indecency as an offense that is in the realm of sexual misconduct, but comes just short of adultery.

Now think about this. Adultery in the Mosaic law was punishable by death. Everyone agreed on that. Everyone knew that that would be the end of a marriage if that were to take place, because it would be the end of the life for one of the parties that were involved.

So it's not referring specifically to adultery. It had to be something just short of that. So the Shammai group said, well, it must be something in the realm of sexual impropriety that doesn't quite

reach full-on adultery, but it's at least headed in that direction.

Perhaps exposure in some way or a flirtatious personality with other men or signaling that they are available in some way. The Shammai group said, well, that's really the only way that divorce would be appropriate and that this certificate should be provided.

[10:13] Well, there was a second school of thought. This was from Rabbi Hillel, and it was the liberal approach that actually took the exact opposite approach. They defined indecency in the widest possible manner.

And even an excerpt from the Mishnah in this time says that Rabbi Hillel taught that even if the wife spoiled a dinner for her husband, that was reason enough for him to find indecency in her and to divorce her.

Now, some of you are laughing because it's just kind of funny, isn't it? But that was in their Jewish guidelines. This guy was saying, even if you don't like the way she cooks, that's enough to find indecency, therefore you can divorce her.

And then there was another extreme wing of the Hillel school. It's also recorded in the Mishnah. One man said, actually, indecency can be defined as seeing another woman that is fairer than your wife, and that's enough to find indecency in her, therefore you can divorce her and pursue the other woman.

This was a common debate in Jesus' day. This is what the Pharisees were trying to drag Jesus into in this moment. And as usual, the crowds are coming to Jesus.

[11:36] The Pharisees are coming for Jesus because they're not asking this question to gain any kind of insight. What they're actually trying to do is turn people against the Lord.

Think about it. If he were to automatically jump into the debate and take a side, he automatically excludes a portion of people that are probably in the crowd that day.

He turns people against himself. That's what they were trying to get him to do. Because he's in the region of Judea and Perea, that's the place where John the Baptist was murdered.

Perhaps Herod is still in the area. Maybe what they were trying to do is get him to take the stricter approach in what he was saying in order that they could pull the Herodians into it and could actually have him imprisoned just like John was imprisoned for speaking against Herod's marriage.

So don't take this passage as if the Pharisees are actually trying to learn Jesus' opinion. They don't actually care about that. In fact, Mark tells us. They came in order that they might test him.

[12:40] They're trying to destroy him, not actually gain any kind of insight. And then look at verse five. This is how Jesus initially responds. Jesus said to them, because of the hardness of your heart, he wrote you this commandment.

No, Jesus says. Moses didn't write that so that you could find whatever reason possible to divorce your wife. He wrote that as a protection for the wives because of the hardness and the rebellion of your own heart.

Deuteronomy 24, 1 through 4 isn't meant to condone the practice of divorce. That's not God saying that he gives approval to the ending of marriage. It was given as a means of protection because there were going to be a lot of wives who inevitably were going to be mistreated in this process.

Think about it. Some were saying, just because someone else is prettier, just because someone else cooks better, that's enough for you to abandon this woman, for you to send her away, which would have radically altered her life.

If her parents were dead at that point, she literally has nothing, no place to live, no source of income, all of her security is gone, and there's a huge group of people saying that that's okay.

[14:00] And God, knowing the hardness and the rebellion of the hearts of these men, adds a law in that would provide some type of protection for these women. So Jesus' first step here was to insist that the debate itself was wrong.

They were debating the wrong thing about Deuteronomy 24. Instead of trying to determine how easy it is to divorce their wives, they should have been thinking about why the law was actually given in the first place.

But they'd gotten distracted. So Jesus reminds them, that's there because of your hardness of heart, because of your sin, that's there. So we see the debate of divorce.

Secondly, look with me at divine design. Divine design. Jesus goes on from there and he begins to explain a biblical approach, a godly approach to marriage.

Verse six, 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.

[15:13] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. So instead of appealing to the popular positions of the other rabbis, Jesus neither fixated on the law, nor did he fixate on the opinions of others.

He appealed to God's intended design for marriage as a creation ordinance. Did you notice that? Jesus doesn't go back to Deuteronomy as he deals with this. He goes back to Genesis as he deals with this. And immediately, he reminds the people gathered there that day that marriage is not man's idea.

Neither is marriage simply a social construct. Marriage is God's idea and it is by God's design. It was instituted by him. It was designed by him. Therefore, our thoughts on marriage and divorce and remarriage must be governed by God's intention in establishing marriage in the first place.

[16:24] So Jesus doesn't go back to Deuteronomy 24. He goes back to Genesis chapter 1 and Genesis chapter 2. And he quotes two verses there. The first one is Genesis 127.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And then he quotes Genesis 2.24.

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh. So much can be said about these verses, including the fact that God's design for marriage is both heterosexual and monogamous.

God set the boundaries of this institution, not man. He determined that marriage must be between a man and a woman and it must be exclusive to that particular man and woman.

So then beginning there and following all throughout the scripture, all notions of homosexuality and polygamy are perversions of God's design and they issue only as a result of our sin.

[17:41] But Jesus' main point in quoting these verses is not just to establish heterosexual monogamous marriage.

His main point in quoting these verses is to show God's intention for permanence in the marital bond. And he says, because two people become one flesh.

One flesh. It's not merely a reference to the sexual relationship within marriage. It relates to the whole human existence.

Marriage, two people unite in every facet of life. It's not two individuals functioning within a social, construct, but marriage is the unique one flesh union that is superior to and unlike every other relationship in life.

Those of you who have children remember the experience of holding your children in your arms for the first time after their birth. And in that moment you feel something unlike you've ever felt before.

[18:54] You sense a love for something that has never even known you, that has done nothing for you and there's a uniqueness to that relationship. But I am not one flesh with Ashlyn and Harper.

As much as I love them, as much as I care about them, as unique as our relationship is as father and daughter, it will never be anything like my relationship to Julie.

Why? Because in marriage God takes two people and makes them one. It's not merely an agreement. It's not a living situation.

It is something supernatural that takes place in those moments as God brings this union together. And this union is never meant to be severed.

that's Jesus' point. In fact, it was only after sin entered the world that divorce was even a possibility. It's never something that pleases the Lord.

[20:02] And he goes on to say it in verse 9. What therefore God has joined together. Now wait a minute, I thought that I thought that Julie and I were married because I pursued her and I wooed her and I did all the things that you're supposed to do and she was convinced in some way and we hurried up and got that taken care of.

We got that contract signed so we could lock her in. Isn't that why we're married? Isn't that what makes us married? Well no, that's not what Jesus says actually. Jesus says it's not Jared and Julie that have brought this union together.

He says what God has joined together. God has done this work in your marriage. God has done this one flesh action and he says therefore what God has joined together let no man separate.

God designed marriage. God sovereignly unites two people together in that bond of marriage and it's not for man to destroy the work that God has done.

That's Jesus' point here. Start arguing over what's permissible when it comes to divorce. Moses only wrote that because of your sin. Start worrying about God's design in marriage Jesus says and what God has brought together no man should separate.

[ 21 : 22 ] James Edwards insightfully writes on this verse Jesus endeavors to recover God's will for marriage not to argue about possible exceptions to it.

His opponents ask what is permissible. he points to what is commanded. Before we move on I want you to notice something in this exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees.

I want you to notice how they both use the phrase amen. Amen. Not amen but a man. Verses 2 and 4 the Pharisees use it.

Look at verse 2. And the Pharisees came up in order to test him and asked is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife. And then again in verse 4.

They said Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. There's a clear sense of superiority even in the way that they think about the issue isn't there?

[ 22 : 25 ] In their minds their wives were lesser people meant only to service their desires. And if they failed to do so these men considered them disposable.

So when they come to the conversation with Jesus all they're concerned about is what they can do as husbands to find an out should they find the indecency that they want to get out of in marriage. But then notice how Jesus uses it in verses 7 and 9. Look first at verse 7. Therefore a man shall what?

Leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. And again in verse 9. What therefore God has joined together let not a man separate.

So then Jesus here puts the responsibility of preserving and protecting the marriage squarely on the shoulders of husbands.

[ 23 : 33 ] Do you see that? They thought I'm superior to my wife therefore whatever displeases me about her I have the power to get rid of her and to pursue something different.

And Jesus says no you've actually got the responsibility to hold this together. This is on you husband. He insisted that it's first man's responsibility to forsake father and mother.

To do what? Hold fast. Not look for the loopholes but to cling to her. The King James as I have it memorized in the book of Genesis says cleave.

To cleave to her. To grab her. To hold tight to her. To never let her go. This is on us men. He insists that that responsibility falls to us and then he declares that no man should endeavor to separate what God has brought together.

Men the responsibility of preserving and protecting our marriages falls on us and shame on us if it's our wives that are the ones fighting to keep things together.

[ 24 : 51 ] What did God say in Malachi chapter 2? For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her says the Lord the God of Israel covers his garment with violence says the Lord of hosts so guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless.

What do we discern from Malachi's writing? God hates divorce and he expects that men would be the ones working to preserve and protect their marriages and this doesn't absolve our wives from their part but I do believe that men will face the greater judgment in this.

Bottom line is God hates divorce and as his disciples so should we. What God has joined together let no man separate.

Thirdly discussing remarriage discussing remarriage we've seen debating divorce we've seen divine design and then finally with the disciples in verses 10 through 12 we see discussing remarriage 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 and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery those are shocking statements who of us would ever think that that would be the accusation brought against us for an unbiblical marriage divorce and remarriage but that's what Jesus tells his disciples we won't go into it now but it's clear that the 12 had largely adopted the view of the culture around them in fact in Matthew's account they're so alarmed and shocked by Jesus' statement here that they say well it's probably better to never get married and Jesus corrects that view as well but in their minds it would be impossible to live that way how could you live in a lifelong monogamous relationship the disciples are thinking so influenced by the culture that they're surrounded by and yet I think this is the reason that the gospel authors include this teaching on divorce because Christians must be faithful to God's design if we

aren't who will be how will God be glorified in his design for marriage and the family and the home and the church and society at large if disciples ignore his command in marriage so the conversation inevitably turns later in the house to the issue of remarriage after divorce has taken place not only did Jesus teach that divorce in general is a sin but that those who remarry are guilty of adultery against their former spouse there's three things I want to note here just to bring some clarification first thing is this

Jesus' references to divorce in verses 10-12 relate to divorce for unbiblical reasons such as the Pharisees had earlier argued he's not saying that every possible divorce is unbiblical despised by the Lord and therefore you are in adultery if you remarry that's not what Jesus is saying he's referring back to what the Pharisees said is it okay for us to divorce our wives for any reason and Jesus says no and if you do and you remarry it's like committing adultery against your wife okay that's the first clarification the second clarification I want to make is that it's worth noting that read marriage I don't believe puts a person in a perpetual state of adultery I don't think Jesus is saying now that you're married you're locked in as an adulterer for the duration of this marriage I think he's referencing a single action in the beginning of the marriage relationship I think that's what Jesus is dealing with here not this perpetual state where if you've been remarried you're just an adulterer forever

[ 29 : 12 ] I don't think that's what Jesus is saying he's talking about a single action therefore it wouldn't be God's desire then for you to absolve yourself of some kind of guilt by divorcing again that wouldn't be what God wants I don't think he abused the adultery in that way and the third thing is this suppose one is divorced for unbiblical reasons but remains single I think according to Jesus and then again according to the apostle Paul to the Corinthian church that individual should not pursue marriage again unless it's with their first spouse who also remains single let me read you this from 1 Corinthians 7 verses 10 and 11 Paul writes to the married I give this charge not I but the Lord in other words this is what the Lord taught Jesus taught while he was on earth the wife should not separate from her husband but if she does she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband and the husband should not divorce his wife what's

Paul getting at well if you do divorce you need to stay single if at least the divorce was for an unbiblical reason you don't need to pursue it again that's what the Lord was teaching his disciples as well where we get to at the end of this divorce and remarriage are serious issues and we don't need to take a casual approach to them we need to treat them the way that Jesus treated them and we need to discern what the Bible has told us now to conclude I want to recognize just three important notes here in relation to the whole topic as we talk about it again we could take weeks to talk about this and there are lots of questions that come up and!

hypothetical situations for us to reason and we are talking in more blanket statements here but there are three things that might be an encouragement to you in this the first thing is this is it ever okay to get a divorce does the Bible actually provide allowances for divorce or are you locked in no matter what and now that we understand and have looked thoroughly at God's design for marriage and Jesus approach to now I think and only now can we look at the exception clauses that are listed in the scripture there's two of them the first one is this sexual sin in the marriage sexual sin in the marriage Jesus taught that sexual immorality by one spouse makes the pursuit of a divorce by the other spouse justifiable so if you've been divorced because your spouse was unfaithful I don't want you to think that you've sinned against the Lord Jesus made this clear Matthew chapter 5 verse 31 it was also said this is Jesus speaking whoever divorces his wife let him give her a certificate of divorce but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife except on the ground of sexual immorality Jesus says makes her commit adultery adultery and again in Matthew's account of this event that Mark is dealing with in Mark chapter 10 Jesus says the same thing Matthew 19 9 and I say to you whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery the word there is pornea it's the same word we get pornography from and it has a wide range of meaning when it comes to sexual immorality and it will go as far as adultery and on the other end to just an addiction to pornography I think all of those things would be included in what

Jesus is saying here and he's saying look except on the grounds of sexual immorality and adultery you shouldn't divorce your spouse so sexual sin in a marriage would be one exception to this but there's a second one I think that Paul deals with in 1 Corinthians 7 and this is desertion by an unbelieving spouse so 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 12 to the rest I say that if any brother has

a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him he should not divorce her if any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever and he consents to live with her she should not divorce him for the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband but if the unbelieving partner separates let it be so in such cases the brother or sister is not unbelieving spouse leaves you as a result of your faith and commitment to the gospel then you are free biblically you are free from enslavement to those marital laws let it be so

[ 34 : 23 ] Paul says those are the two exceptions that the Bible gives we need to remember those we can't neglect them we need to think about them the second note is this just because you can doesn't mean you should sexual sin permits divorce it does not demand divorce and reconciliation always always needs to be the priority in our marriages what Jesus had in mind here when he gives this exception on the grounds of sexual immorality what he had in mind was a spouse who was a serial adulterer unrepentant careless about his sin desiring to pursue his own sinful appetite no matter what that's what

Jesus has in mind to the point that a biblically healthy marriage is not even a possibility I don't think what Jesus had in mind was a single offense or that he was demanding that a single offense of adultery or sexual impropriety is enough to automatically hit the divorce button and I think there are Christians who are unsatisfied in their marriages in one way or another and it's almost as if they use the sexual appetite of their spouse as a reason to get what they want not because they're really all that bothered about the impropriety but because they want out of the marriage and that's their reason but Jesus I don't think had in mind here a spirit that as soon as you cross the line you're done he's not demanding divorce he's only permitting it and what he has in mind is an unrepentant person and we can begin to apply other biblical principles here

Christians are to be forgiving people they're not to be vindictive people and if a spouse sins but desires to restore the marriage in repentance as hard as it is I think the hurt spouse needs to at least first seek to forgive and reconcile and it's at this point that we really begin to allow the gospel to shape our marriages is this not Christ approach to his church when his bride sins against him does he cast us off and cut us off no he forgives so just because you can doesn't automatically mean that you should thirdly divorce is not an unforgivable!

sin divorce is not an unforgivable sin sin some people view this as if it's the greatest most devastating sin to ever take place in a Christian's life and they disqualify them and force them to carry the burden of this for the rest of their lives but Jesus doesn't require that it's not an unforgivable sin I don't think it disqualifies you from anything it can but it doesn't have to like every other sin Jesus paid for the sin of divorce and if you've been there you can trust his forgiveness he thinks no less of your cause for mercy than anyone else's he does not intend for you to carry that guilt forever so trust his forgiveness and let those around you know of

Christ forgiveness Martin Lloyd Jones said this he thinks it's so helpful he said on the basis of the gospel and in the interest of truth I am compelled to say that even adultery is not unforgivable!

[ 39 : 25 ] sin it's a terrible sin but God forbid that there should be anyone who feels that he or she has sinned himself or herself out of the love of God or outside his kingdom because of adultery no if you truly repent and realize the enormity of your sin and cast yourself upon the boundless love and mercy and grace of God you can be forgiven and I assure you of pardon I hear the words of our blessed Lord go and sin no more so if you've been here you can trust the Lord's forgiveness you don't have to carry this around for the rest of your life forgiveness doesn't preclude!

that come as a natural result of divorce and remarriage many of us know that it complicates things it complicates things for a lot of people but there's no reason for a repentant Christian to carry that guilt that God has forgiven and if that's you I want to encourage you for Christ's sake to joyfully move forward in faithfulness to him and in faithfulness to the spouse that he has now blessed you with go and sin no more