

God doesn't have a hard heart

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: 17 January 2016

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] We're back at the Gospel of Mark. We took a break from the Gospel of Mark, you'll remember. You may not remember, but we were going through the Gospel of Mark. We made it all the way up to Mark chapter 9, verse 50, and then we took a break. And it was always my intention to come back to the Gospel of Mark. In fact, I don't even remember why we departed from the Gospel of Mark in the first place. I think there was some reason for doing it. And so we come back into Mark chapter 10. I could read up to verse 32, but I intend not to, even though my initial feeling was to cover all 32 verses. I realized that was going to be impossible.

And so we're just going to read the first 12, which says, Let's now hear God's Word. And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds gathered to him. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

And the Pharisees came up, and in order to test him, that's test Jesus, asked him, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? 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. And Jesus said to them, 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 they 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. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. Well, I can assure you that one of the things you have to do when you go through a book of the Bible is what? Go through the book of the Bible. And I didn't think, you know, this week, we'll go back into the Gospel of Mark, and I know what passage I'll pick, okay? One of the things that you should know about me as a pastor, I don't pick any passages, I really just go through Scripture.

[2 : 3 9] So the reason for focusing on these 12 verses this morning is not because I think they're particularly necessary, but I never know because I can never judge people's hearts.

But nevertheless, they are in the Gospel, and they do need to be heard. And so the reason for not reading more and concentrating on more is because having dealt with these issues before on several occasions, there are always lots and lots and lots of questions that you want to ask that don't seem to naturally be asked here. What about and what if? And so I'm going to try and answer them for you this morning. I also want to say that if you want to come and speak to me afterwards and go, yeah, but what about that, that I'm more than willing for that to happen. But I'm simply going to say what Jesus says. And if you trust me as someone who interprets the Bible fairly and truly and rightly, then you'll know that, you know, you know, I, you know, I, you know, I had a, you know, to put it in a broader context, you know, I had a mum who was divorced and remarried several times, and I hold very differing views from her. You know, it, this is, we're not, we're a product of God's Word, hopefully. So

I want to handle it carefully, and once it's handled, I'm kind of hoping and praying, though I remember most of Mark that it doesn't come up again. But we will get through it, no doubt. We're going to stand and sing, and then prayerfully come to this subject. Let me also say, given the subject, what it is, I wouldn't normally do such a preface to a subject, but I thought I'd hunt around in all my books and archives that I have of what other pastors have done when they've got to this. I found out that having read what Alistair Begg, a fellow Scotsman of yours, I thought I'd appeal to the Scots in this sense. He took two sermons over these 12 verses, morning and evening, and I listened to both of them. I listened to what he had to say, and I thought, well, you're, you're, you're skating around the edges quite a bit, but I agree with everything that you say. I'm only going to take one message to deal with this, and that's because I'm not the sort of person that skates around the edges. Not to say that Alistair Begg did anything wrong. I think if you want to go and listen to him, and says, well, you know, we need another faithful pastor or someone we agree with, well, I'm going to be saying exactly what his says and a number of other faithful ministers from, from Scotland.

We are in Mark 10, and we're here together in Mark 10 to consider the first 12 verses together. Now, given the subject of divorce and not remarrying, I understand that it's the type of subject where people can lift the drawbridge in their own lives ready for a battle. To do that is to stop anything that's going to come in, but what is going to come in isn't any, is not to attack, okay, so there's really no reason to lift the drawbridge here, but I understand that we're humans. With humans, we have emotions, we have feelings, we have all of these other things. So, lower your drawbridge, and lower your drawbridge in such a way that you recognize that Jesus is, in this part of the gospel, is explaining, right, after Mark 8, Mark 9, the first part of Mark, remember, is all about who is Jesus. The second part of Mark is all about why Jesus must die, and why must Jesus die? Well, because we live in a fallen world where things aren't right. It's an absolute mess, and Jesus came not to say, look at what a mess you've made, but he actually came to sort it out, okay? So, lower your drawbridge to the grace of God in this passage, just in case you have lifted it, thinking, you know, I don't know if I can listen to this, for whatever reason, and the reason I say that is because, you know, I've been around long enough now to understand, I've been in enough conversations about these subjects to understand the issues that are involved. Remember, this is in the gospel, and therefore the answer to this is the gospel, right? So, you're learning, you're learning. I feel that we're making progress this morning. Now, Mark 9 finishes off with the fact that temptation of any kind can lead a Christian to lose their saltiness, and if it's a damning warning by Jesus, because how can something which has lost its saltiness be made salty again? It can't, and the point is, there is such a reality in the Christian life that you could be led into temptation at such a distance, at such a length, that it becomes impossible to make your way back again, because the salt has lost its saltiness.

Now, I know that there are other subjects there. What about eternal security and assurance? Well, let's just take the word, what it means, as it means, and that is temptation never leads to anything good. Temptation wants to take hold of you, and wants to wring out of you anything that is good or godly, and wants you to get to do the very thing that God doesn't actually want you to do.

[8 : 08] So, temptation, in that sense, is something that can take that which is salty and make it saltless, and how can that which has no taste of salt be made salty again? And Jesus says, or the implication is, it can't. So, the warning that we come out of Mark 9 50 is, is that the Christian life matters.

Living a particular way before God is really, really important. But we have to remember that we live in a fallen world where we get tempted, and we live in a fallen world where we make bad decisions, and we make good decisions, and things don't always go the way we expected them to, and now look at the mess I've got myself into, or look at the mess you've got me into, and that's perfectly legitimate. Go read Ruth chapter 1, and you'll see how a poor decision by a husband who should have known better actually led to the death of his two sons and his wife, you know, claiming out to God, you know, don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, in her own bitterness. Okay? So, decisions, even the decisions I make and the decisions you make, have massive implications on other people's lives, implications that we never intended to actually happen in the first place. Why? We live in a fallen world. Okay? The world is a mess, and therefore relationships in the world are also messy. And so, given this subject of divorce and remarriage, or not remarrying, and remarrying on any, is there any exceptions there? It's unlikely that I'm going to be able to cover anything else this morning than that, and that's why I just decided to read it. But thankfully, Jesus makes it clear. This isn't a matter of opinion anymore. This is just a matter of what does Jesus say? What does Jesus say? And as you remember, as you listen to what Jesus says here, remember the gospel. Remember the gospel is about grace and forgiveness and relationship with God. Remember the gospel. Don't jump the gun here in any way. Now, the other thing is, is you may think it's strange that such a subject be found in the gospel, teaching on divorce and remarriage. But here it is. And it all begins with the Pharisees wanting to test Jesus. So, chapter 10, verse 1,

Jesus is teaching the crowds like he normally does. He's not doing anything different here. They're gathered around him. He is teaching them. But then in verse 2, the Pharisees come up, and remember, they're always wanting to put Jesus to the test. They don't like Jesus. They don't like his message of grace. They don't like the way that the grace is actually offensive grace. In other words, it really grabs people. They don't like the fact that people can be forgiven in the way that Jesus has forgiven people, and that they've got a hard time with Jesus. And so, their question is literally to put Jesus on the spot. But notice that the answer that Jesus gives is the right answer. We mustn't think that if they're asking the question out of wrong motives, then Jesus is just going to give them any old answer. He doesn't. He gives them the right answer to the question. And the question is, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? You'll notice, what does Jesus do? He answers their question as he does frequently with another question. Okay? Is it lawful for man to divorce his wife? He answered them, verse 3, what did Moses command you? Why do you always do that, Jesus? Why, just give me a straight answer. Why have you always got to ask me a question to my question? Well, you'll get to the point. What did Moses command you? They said,

Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce to send her away. And Jesus said to them, because of your hardness of heart, he wrote you this commandment. Now, what is actually happening here needs to be understood. That these were men who were getting rid of their wives because they burnt the toast. Okay? Let's come up with any old reason that I can have, you know, I want to get rid of my, I don't want to get rid of my wife, but I just, you know. But, but, um, these were like, you know, I've gone off my wife. I don't love her anymore. You know, these type of non-legitimate, non-biblical reasons. And now I, and now I actually want to have a go again. But I can't have a go again if I, if I'm, if I'm still enjoying to this person. I have to be released from this person to then give it a go again somewhere else. And so this certificate of divorce was issued on biblical reasons, not non-biblical reasons. First of all, okay, if your wife burnt the toast and you wanted to divorce her, guess what? You're not going to get a divorce certificate. It's just, it's just not going to happen. Um, but if you want to divorce your wife because of their biblical reasons there, then Moses issues a divorce certificate. But notice the reason that he does it.

He only does it because of the hardness of heart. In other words, that you can't forgive her or you can't forgive him. And now as fallen people, guess what? We can't forgive other people, can we?

[13 : 45] It's really difficult in some circumstances to actually forgive. And even when we do forgive, we've still got that hardness of heart, even though we don't want to admit it, even though we don't want to believe that it's true of us, it's still there. And even though we might be on speaking terms with a person, we just, and it's there. So the divorce certificate was issued for no other reason than the fact that people's hearts were hard. In other words, reconciliation on man's terms is impossible. Right? People can't reconcile on themselves. That's why we need God through Christ to reconcile us to him and to each other. You can't, in other words, you can't do it on your own.

We're in such a mess that when you fall out, you fall out. And if we could achieve that kind of reconciliation, guess what? We wouldn't need. We wouldn't need God. We wouldn't need the gospel.

We wouldn't need Jesus. The fact is we can't. So it's a bit like when, uh, you issue the command an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. It does not mean it does, that command has always been misunderstood. It doesn't mean that if you take my eye out, I can then come along and take your eye out.

What it, what it actually means is, is that if you take my eye out, I can't come along and kill you. In other words, I'm not allowed to go any further. It's a way of restraining the sin.

In other words, we tend to think that an eye for an eye is a reason to retaliate. In fact, it's the very opposite. It's the real, it's the reason to hold restraint. In other words, don't go any further than you need to go. And so the divorce certificate was issued because people can't reconcile. They can't forgive. You can't, a hardness of heart creeps in and it becomes an immovable block. And so how do I deal with a person that's, you know, done this or said this, or I just don't love anymore. And so divorce happens because there is a hardness of heart.

[15 : 54] But God says, but it wasn't always this way. It wasn't like that in creation. There was no divorce certificate in creation. And why does he go all the way back to creation?

Well, because what do you have in creation? Or what do you not have in creation that you have now? You don't have any sin. You don't have any hardness of heart. You don't have any of those problems.

Okay, that's the reason why he takes us all the way back to creation, because the world was different then. It was a different world back then. But now we live in a world where there is sin. So these things like divorce certificates, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, have to be issued, because it has, you have to restrain sin at some point. You have to put the brakes on it, or else everything would just escalate out of control and just become a mess in people's lives and in the country. You understand the problem? So the reason why Jesus takes us all the way back to creation. God made them male and female. Okay, back to creation. Therefore, man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife. That's a creation ordinance. Okay, you leave your mum and dad, or, you know, if you've just got a mum or just got a dad, you leave them, and then you go marry the other person. When you marry them, you become one flesh, no longer two, but one. Now, the disciples want to push this even further and say, okay, verse 10, what does this mean? I want to ask you again about this matter. So Jesus says, whoever divorces his wife, whoever divorces and marries another commits adultery. Okay, whoever divorces and marries another commits adultery. So the point is, is sin always leads to sin. We get back to the temptation, the saltiness of chapter 9. Sin always leads to sin.

You can't help it. Sin always leads to sin. And so to look at it in a slightly different way, you wouldn't have remarriage if you didn't have divorce. In fact, the only reason why you have remarriage is because you have divorce. And if divorce is there because of the hardness of heart, remarriage doesn't solve anything. It doesn't deal with anything. And it certainly can't deal with the hardness of heart. It doesn't take the hardness of heart away and it doesn't forgive the sin.

So the reason why remarriage is wrong on this basis is because it's perpetuating a sin. It's a bit like a person who's been forgiven of all his debts, only then thinking, well, now that I don't have any debts, guess what I can do? I can get myself in debt again. No one, whoever thinks of forgiveness like that hasn't understood forgiveness. Jesus forgives me every day. I'm now, right, that means today I can go and do a whole load of new sin. No, you don't think like that. But some people do.

[18 : 49] And does God forgive intentional sin? Will you plan it, you premeditate it, and you go ahead and you do it? The answer is yes. Well, that doesn't give you reason to plan and premeditate sin. God forgives that sin, but it doesn't mean that you can go ahead and plan it. And so, in basic language, remarriage exists because divorce exists. Remarriage would not exist if divorce didn't exist. You understand the connection? So the only reason you have remarriage is because you have divorce. And so here's the question, and this is why I think we need to slow down and pay attention. So if remarriage is wrong, is it wrong in all cases? Is it wrong in all cases? And so I want you to pay very close attention to what I'm saying because it's likely that some of you will agree. It's also likely that some of you won't.

I'm also going to draw information from other parts of the Bible, but I'm going to stick with the verses here to make the case. You'll notice in verse 11 that Jesus states that whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. Commits adultery against who? The person he's marrying or the person that he's still, you know, that he's leaving? Who's he committing adultery against?

And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery. What is the issue here?

Well, the issue that Jesus wants you to get to ask is a very simple one, a really simple one that needs to be asked. Firstly, that both people, if they're divorcing and marrying another, they're divorcing because they've got a hard heart. We've already established that, right? But what about the person they're divorcing? Who might, we could say the innocent party. What about them? Doesn't say anything about them. The whole focus here is on the person doing the divorcing because of the hard heartedness. But what about the other person? What if the other person, the other wife or the other husband doesn't have a hard heart? What if she wants to make a go of it? What if he wants to make a go of it? But the other party's like, no, I don't want you anymore. I'm off. Who's the guilty one there?

Because the temptation is, if you misunderstand it, you make both people guilty when only one is. You draw in the innocent party who's been sinned against or even not sinned against. She's burnt the toast and now she's being divorced for it. And she's done nothing wrong. And now she's been, what about her?

[21 : 49] Is it the case that if she marries again, she commits adultery? And some people would say yes. But I don't see how. I just don't see how that's the case. Because in many ways, she is the innocent party.

And so, if a man or a woman decides that they're fed up with their spouse for non-biblical reasons, okay, just want a divorce, don't love you anymore, never did. You know, the hurtful stuff comes out.

I want a divorce. Give me a certificate of divorce. So that, okay, whether they think this at the time or it happens, so that I can go and marry another, that's the sin. Because how on earth are you going to make a go of it there if you can't make a go of it here? The same problem's going to arise.

Marrying another doesn't get, doesn't deal with the hardness of heart. So you don't actually solve any problem. And what these people were doing here is they were taking the certificate of divorce, which pointed to the fact that they had a hard heart, and turning it into a certificate that says I'm allowed to get remarried. A divorce certificate never says you're allowed to get remarried.

The only thing a divorce certificate actually points to is the fact that you've got a hard heart. But is it the case for both people? Remember the other person, the person who's not doing the divorcing, the person who's been divorced. What if he or she just sits there thinking, I really wanted to make a go of that. I wanted to, and he's just upped and left, or she's just upped and left, and here I am. Where does that leave me? You can understand it's complicated on one sense, but it makes sense on the other. And so the real sin here is committed by the person who is pursuing divorce because of the hardness of his or her heart, and because he will not, or she will not, make a go of it. And so they're turning the certificate of divorce as in the application for remarriage. And the certificate of divorce never pointed to the future. It always pointed to the past.

[24 : 14] It always pointed to the fact that you've got a hard heart. Now, are there any other exceptions? Well, I think there are, and there are some that we need to deal with. But to think that you can get out of debt only to get back into debt again is to misunderstand the point entirely. Because getting divorced doesn't release you from the debt or the sin of that divorce. Only the gospel of God and Christ's forgiveness does. So what's the answer? Well, the answer is, let's deal with the other person.

Remember, it takes two to tango. It takes two in a marriage. I've always said that in a marriage, the weight of the marriage always falls on a male rather than the female. That's biblical. But there does seem to be only two cases for permissible remarriage. However, people get remarried on any kind of basis. So what does God have to say about that? Well, let's deal with them in order. Firstly, adultery. If you have a relationship where one party has committed adultery and then divorce follows, that divorce is legitimate. Jesus allows the exception based on adultery. And so the innocent party in that relationship is free to remarry. The person who committed adultery is not free to remarry. But the person who has been sinned against, okay, the one who's just sat there, well, I didn't do anything, is free to remarry. That's the exception that Jesus makes. If you have a marriage where it breaks down and divorce is being pursued by one party for non-biblical reasons, in other words, I want to leave you because I just don't love you anymore, or I don't like the way you dress anymore, or I don't like the way your hair is anymore. No, these kind of reasons that people have, but they're not real reasons. They're just sort of pathetic. And any man who speaks like that is a pathetic man. But let's just say those type of reasons are there. Then again, it seems that the innocent party, the person who's just sat there thinking, well, what's wrong with my hair?

Do you not love me for who I am? That person, it seems, it seems, I want to put a question mark here, but it seems is free also to remarry because they are the innocent party. And so if both parties want a divorce, now both the husband and wife are saying it, do you know what? I don't love you.

And I don't love you either. In fact, I don't think I've loved you for a long time. And do you know what? I don't think I loved you for a long time either. And so the destructive conversation breaks down. And then one of them says, do you know what? I'm going to pursue a divorce. Another one says, do you know what? Great idea. I'm going to do the same. And now both parties are being divorced for non-biblical reasons. They just don't like or love each other anymore. It seems to me that neither, according to scripture, are free to remarry. For if they do, they commit adultery. They commit adultery against the person that they're marrying. And it seems in many ways, because of the one flesh issue, against the person that they're divorcing. They're not free to remarry. Jesus' point here about divorce is that it only happens because of the hard heart. Of two, maybe, but at least of one.

So here's one final question with which I'll finish with. What happens when you have two people who are not free to remarry go ahead and get remarried? What happens when you have two people who biblically are not allowed to be remarried, but nevertheless go ahead and do it anyway?

[28 : 15] What happens then? Well, bearing in mind that divorce should never happen in the first place, but it does happen because we are people that can't seem to reconcile ourselves to others, it would be wrong for the pastor to say to two people, let's just say you've heard this message and go, do you know what? I think I've got remarried. And biblically, I don't think I'm allowed to.

What do I do now? It'd be wrong for the pastor to say, well, you have to go get divorced. Two wrongs don't make a right. You can't sort the issue out by saying, well, you need to undo the marriage. You understand how complicated it is. Who wants to be a pastor?

And so what do you do with two people who've got remarried who then find out biblically they should not have got remarried unless, of course, they got remarried knowing that they shouldn't have got remarried? What do you do bearing in mind that life is incredibly complex and just frustratingly difficult in these situations? Well, the answer is Jesus. The answer could only be Jesus.

But how is Jesus the answer in this situation? Will you have two people who have got remarried who should not have been remarried? Well, in the same way, when I do something and then find out six weeks down the line I should never have done it, what do I do next? I repent and I ask for God's forgiveness. So anytime anybody does anything that they should not have done and they find out later in the day that they should not have done it, okay, they repent and ask for God's forgiveness. But what do you do with two people who are married that have found out now they should never have got remarried?

Well, the answer is you repent and you ask for God's forgiveness. Now here's the question. Can they expect their marriage to be blessed? Can they expect God to bless their marriage? Can they expect to enjoy the marriage that they have even though biblically they should never have had it?

[30 : 29] Should they for the rest of their lives feel guilty for the marriage that they're now enjoying even though they should never have been remarried in the first place? You understand the issue? Are you with me here? Right, good. I'm glad you understand.

So I'm going to answer it with a story and I want you to pay careful attention to the story because it says more about the people who think that they shouldn't enjoy their marriage than it does about the people who should enjoy their marriage. And what I'm about to say isn't for you to say, you know what, I'm going to go ahead and do it because it's easier to ask for forgiveness than it is for permission, especially when I know the permission is going to be no.

Okay, so I'm not saying that, hey, because everything can be forgiven, everything can be done. Okay, it's not that way around. It's not that way around. So here's the story. Can two people who should not have been married now enjoy blessing in their marriage after repenting and receiving God's forgiveness? That's the question.

Okay. Several years ago, I mean several, several years ago, I had a box of Ferrero Rochers and I'd never had a box before. They were gold. They were just, and I opened them and I just didn't realize how good they taste.

I think it was 12 in a box or something. And I went through about 10 in 10 seconds. I was just scoffing them. They're just amazing. And there was one left in the box. Everyone in the house knew it was mine.

[32 : 07] My mum knew it was mine. My brothers knew that it was mine. And everybody knew where it was. It was in the kitchen just beside the kettle. It was mine. One day I came into the kitchen and my brother, one of my brothers, had managed to unwrap this Ferrero Rocher and put it into his mouth as a whole. He hadn't quite crunched down on it yet, so I could still see it. Everything was in slow motion.

And I said, you can't do that. It's mine. I said, what you've taken is wrong. You're not allowed to have it. It's not yours. You're not permitted to have it. You can't have it. But it was at the stage where his sliver and that, it surrounded it. And there was just no way I was going to go and retrieve it. I just, I just, and if, even if I did, I, you know, I wasn't going to eat it. So, and before I could say the next word, he just went, so to say. And as he sat there eating it, I said to him, I hope it's gone off. And I wanted it to taste absolutely disgusting for him. I even said to him, I hope you choke on it. You're not allowed it and you took what was mine and now I can't get it back. And you just ruined it. And you've ate it. And I hope you choke on it and I hope it tastes disgusting. But the moment I said that, I understood that it said more about me than it did about him.

Because when I asked him what it tasted like at the end, he says, just as good as it's always meant to taste. And so God, in the same way, for people who've got remarried, who should never have got remarried, the marriage will taste as good as it's always meant to taste. Because God's forgiveness keeps no record of wrongs. God's forgiveness doesn't make things taste bitter. It makes things taste nice. You see, God isn't like us. And we can look at people who enjoy things that we don't think that they should enjoy because of the life that they had. And yet God isn't like that. We're like that.

And so when you're dealing with people, you've got to admit that when it's wrong, it's wrong. Right? When things are right, they're right. But forgiveness is real. Forgiveness is there because we live in a world that's messed up and we're messed up along with it. And so when God forgives, he forgives with blessing. It's not fine, you can have it, but you're not going to, I'm going to withhold the blessing. No, you get all of it. That's the type of God we have.

And so when Jesus gives the answer that he gives to these hard-hearted people, his message is effectively this. The underlying message to Mark 10 is, you're asking me this question when all along, you're unfaithful to God and you've gone off with another.

[35 : 49] And yet God hasn't divorced you. He hasn't left you alone. He hasn't wandered off and kept you not enjoying the things that you can enjoy with God. No, Jesus is the reconciler.

Jesus is the one who brings us back into the right relationship with God, even though we've wandered off and joined other people and other things. Jesus brings us back so that we can be forgiven, so that we can be blessed, because we've all committed adultery against God. And he brings us back to bless us and to forgive us for this very reason. God doesn't have a hard heart.

God doesn't have a hard heart. He has a heart that forgives and a heart that blesses. And that's the gospel.

That's the gospel in marriage. Amen. Amen. Anything next time I facebook something cool. Amen.

Amen. Thank you.

[37 : 50] Thank you.

Thank you.