

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: MARK 10.1-12; | SERMON TITLE: TILL DEATH DO YOU PART****DAVE WAGNER**

Getting the Picture Right

Before Creation, God knew his creatures would fall and he planned to redeem a portion of them by uniting them to His Son. This union was to be a fruitful and faithful union. Christ pledges himself to become the husband of believers, and he promises to remain faithful to the end. The union between Christ and his people results in his people bearing the fruit of holiness and righteousness; it also results in the spiritual births of new believers.

Now this union is a glorious, a powerful, and a gripping reality. It is so precious to God that God desired to picture this union in the most basic, earthly institution we have: Marriage.

Marriage is a drama; it's a play on the stage. It is designed to picture the relationship between God and Creation, between Christ and the Church. And it is possible for any given marriage to either picture that relationship well or poorly. Every marriage can either be a good picture or a bad picture.

Now God likes good pictures. He likes accurate representations. God has good artistic taste. And so he desires that every human marriage be a good picture of the union between God and creation.

And if a marriage is to be such a picture, it has to operate according to certain rules. Here's a basic one: It has to last until death. This is necessary because God's intention is to enjoy a lasting, unbroken union with creation. God desired that from the start but creation fell into the bed of another man. God responded by getting to work on a New Creation, which would ultimately be faithful to God as wife to husband. That New Creation is called The Church.

But what this means is that every human marriage is obligated to get the picture right. Man and wife are commanded to remain married till death in order to tell the truth about God and creation. To put it another way: Divorce is evil, first and foremost, because it tells a lie.

Divorce tells a lie. It says that the ultimate condition between God and creation will be one of unreconciled separation. It says God and creation will not be able to work it out. It says heaven and earth will remain torn apart forever.

But that's not true. Human history is moving toward a future golden age in which heaven and earth are rejoined in permanent marriage. God poured out the blood of Jesus on the earth to water the earth, that the entire earth might finally sprout into a Garden, The Garden, and then the Lord will make His home with Man. Thank God divorce is a lie.

But, being a lie, and being a lie about perhaps the most precious reality there is, divorce is a sacrilegious evil. It is a profanation of the holy; divorce takes a sacred and glorious thing and drags it through the mud. Divorce is a great evil. And that is so whether it is justified or not.

Today we have Christ giving us a very simple direction. Here it is: Divorce and Remarriage is not permitted. It's not permitted and anyone who does it is guilty of adultery. That's the center of today's text. Let's take a closer look.

The Text

Our story begins with Jesus travelling back into Judea, probably into the jurisdiction of Herod. That's important, as we're about to see.

Jesus is teaching when the Pharisees confront him with a question. Now you need to notice that the Pharisees are testing Jesus; their question isn't a sincere request for enlightenment. This is a dangerous question. They plan to take Jesus out. So what is the question designed to test Jesus?

The dangerous question is whether it's lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Why is that a dangerous question? At least two reasons.

First, Jesus is currently in Herod's jurisdiction. And how is Herod doing in the marital department? He's currently married to his brother's wife; and his brother is still alive. And who was the last guy to speak publicly about Herod's marriage? John The Baptist. And how did that work out for him? He lost his head over it. So, you see, prophets talking about divorce and remarriage in Herod's jurisdiction is dangerous business.

And there's another reason this is a dangerous question. As we're about to see, what Jesus has to say about marriage goes against nearly all, if not all, of the Jewish nation. There was no debate over this question among the Jews. Jewish opinion was united in believing that divorce was permissible.

And apparently, the majority of Jewish teaching was extremely liberal on this question. According to the Jewish teachers, divorce and remarriage were allowed for such things as "not accepting her husband's control," whatever that means, behavior in the wife which the husband didn't like, a spoiled meal; one teacher even said a husband could divorce his wife if he found a better looking woman. And these comments are not fringe; these were majority sentiments. One writer says that "divorce was relatively easy in those days and the Pharisees and rabbis intended to keep it so."

I should mention there was another strand of teaching which was much saner than the previous. The famous, conservative rabbi Shammai, and his followers, said divorce and remarriage were only permitted in case of unchastity in the woman. This was much better; the problem is that apparently this was a minority opinion.

But the point is that this question was designed to test, and likely to trap, Jesus. Suppose the Pharisees had heard through the grapevine that Jesus' views on marriage were peculiar. It is likely then that, having heard of his provocative view, they have asked him to explain it publicly so as to hang himself.

So here's how Jesus responds: He asks what Moses *commanded* them on divorce. They respond by citing Deuteronomy 24, and saying that Moses *permitted* men to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.

Notice the contrast between command and permit. Something funny is happening here. Jesus is asking them for more evidence than they can give. They don't have any command to divorce their wives; at best they have the permission of Deuteronomy 24. But do they have even that?

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens ¹that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some ^aindecency in her, and ^bhe writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, ³ and if the latter husband ¹turns against 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 husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ *then* her ^aformer husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance.

All this is saying is that once a man divorces a woman and she remarries someone else, if her second husband dies, her first husband is prohibited from remarrying her. Moses' point is not divorce, per se.

But Moses does mention in passing about the man divorcing the woman. So is this sufficient grounding for the Pharisees' permissive stance on divorce?

Jesus says No. Jesus dismisses Deuteronomy 24 on the grounds that it was a concession, not a command. God was not commanding men to divorce their wives; God was permitting divorce, and he was doing it because Israel's hearts were so hard and wicked! So this is hardly a text to use as a basis for one's understanding of marriage and divorce!

One writer puts it this way:

"You do not learn to fly an airplane by following the instructions for making a crash landing; you will not be successful in war if you train by the rules for beating a retreat. The exceptional measures necessary when a marriage fails are of no help in discovering the meaning and intention of marriage. Jesus intends to recover God's will for marriage, not to argue about possible exceptions to it."

So Jesus rejects Deut 24 as a proof text for the Pharisees' position. What's more, Jesus has a better text to shed light on the issue: Genesis 2.

God made male and female; God made marriage; God made the unity which results when a man leaves his parents and cleaves to his wife. God made the two into one flesh. They aren't exactly two anymore; they're one.

And what God joined together, let no man separate, Jesus says. The emphasis in Jesus' response is all on unity. The thing is one now; how dare anyone try to tear it apart?

So that's Jesus' answer to the question. They wanted to hear what he thinks about divorce. And what he thinks is Absolutely Not. This is an unqualified No. No exceptions, no additions; Just No.

Later in private the 12 want to talk more about it. I think we can expect that the 12, having grown up in the kind of rabbinic teaching I mentioned earlier, are rather surprised at Jesus' strictness. So Jesus goes even further in clarifying for them.

All Jesus said above is that divorce is not permitted. Now he says whoever divorces and remarries is just like a person who jumps into another bed without divorcing at all. They are committing adultery. Divorce and remarriage equals adultery.

Exceptions

Now that's all Mark has to say on the matter, but it's not all the Scripture has to say. In fact, Scripture does give some explicit exceptions to Jesus' teaching here.

First, in Matthew 5 and 19, Jesus gives an exception for *porneia*. This word refers to sexual immorality broadly. The point is that no one is permitted to divorce and remarry, except in case their spouse commits some form of *porneia*. In that case, divorce and remarriage is permitted.

Second, many believe that Paul allows for divorce and remarriage if one spouse is abandoned by the other. You can see this in 1Corinthians 7.

I accept both as legitimate grounds for divorce and remarriage, though I have learned to always hope for and seek for restoration first. I think God hates divorce whether it is legitimate or not.

And I would go further. I think there are cases of persistent, unrepentant, marital abuse and neglect which constitute grounds for divorce. This is a grey area, so I don't demand that you follow me here. I will just say that, while marriage is more than an agreement, it isn't less. When you get married you are entering into an agreement with obligations. Persistent, unrepentant refusal to perform those obligations is, at least, a breach of contract. All of this, however, is a bit of a detour. The point of today's text is that, barring legitimate exception, God does not permit divorce and remarriage and anyone who does it is committing adultery.

Application

At the end of the day, all that matters is what God wants from us. What is the will of the Lord? Jesus told us to disciple the nations by teaching them to observe all he commanded; so what does he command?

First, for those who might someday face the possibility of divorce and remarriage. What is God's will for you? God hates divorce. Apart from biblical exceptions, if you do it, you will enter into a state of adultery with your new spouse. God's will is that you remain married to your current or future spouse until death do you part. That is the will of God.

Second, some here may have been divorced and remarried on biblical grounds. Perhaps your former spouse committed adultery, perhaps they abandoned you; if you divorced and remarried on those grounds, you are still within the will of God, though your divorce remains an evil which God hates.

Third, some may have divorced on unbiblical grounds but not yet remarried. What is God's will for you? If possible, God's will is reconciliation with your former spouse. You had no right to desert your marriage. God hates divorce. You tore apart something which God had joined. God had no intention of it being torn apart. If you can make it right, do it. If for some reason you cannot make it right, then you must remain as you are. As far as I can tell, there is no room for you to enter into a second marriage.

Fourth, you may have divorced and remarried on unbiblical grounds. What should you do? You should remain with your current spouse until death do you part. You should not return to your former spouse. Deuteronomy 24 comes in here; God counts it as filthy for all this spouse-trading to occur at all, but then when we return to the former spouse after already having had another, it makes it even worse. It's like teenagers in a high school.

And for all who have divorced or remarried on unbiblical grounds, you have sinned against God. You need to confess your sin, ask forgiveness, and make whatever restitution is possible, if any. You need to repent the thoughts and feelings which led to your sinful divorce and remarriage, so it doesn't happen again. And you need to go on in your present state faithful to God, whether married or unmarried.

Since the Fall, devils and men have conspired to remake the world in their own image. Satan and Adam rejected the Lordship of God; for it they substituted their own lordship. So God sent Jesus to take the Lordship back.

Men have grown used to doing things a certain way. One of those things is marriage. Men have become accustomed to handling marriage in an anti-God, filthy, iniquitous way. All of that is going to change. Christ is taking the world back. When his Lordship comes to full expression, we will never see marriage misused again.

And so, as in every other area, in this area of marriage, the call for us is to repent. Repent of your wrong thoughts and feelings; repent of your wrong actions. Leave your marriage sin forever and don't return to it. There is grace for all who repent.