



“Marriage and Divorce in the Kingdom of God”

-Matthew 19:1-12

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Matthew 19:1-12 Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea

beyond the Jordan. 2 And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. 3 The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?" 4 And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' 5 "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" 8 He said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." 10 His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: 12 "For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

The old Paul Simon pop tune seems to reflect the greater heart of our culture today. The lyrics go “*Just slip out the back, Jack, make a new plan, Stan. Don't need to be coy, Roy, just listen to me. Hop on the bus, Gus, don't need to discuss much. Just drop off the key, Lee, and get yourself free.*” We are yet today still overwhelmingly drawn to the concept of marriage, often more to the wedding than the marriage, but the traditional ideals of love, marriage, and coupling in general, as well as the roles we play in such, are becoming rarer with each year that passes. This is no surprise in a culture overwhelmingly built upon the ideals of self-fulfillment, personal happiness, and individual freedom.

Within the greater sphere of those whom would declare a religious or Christian position, the rates of divorce are equal to the world if not higher. Polls have said that 2/3rds of these same church folks see divorce as a viable solution to marital unhappiness. However, studies have also shown that amongst those couples and families who are actually *active* in their faith and church...who would declare that “Christ is the center of their relationship”, the rates of successful and fulfilled marriages do indeed go up significantly. It should go without saying, that it all only counts if you are truly living it out!

Our greater Christian world seems to be consistently shocked when a marriage breaks up in a home where the practices of real and genuine faith are not a priority. Where excuses are constantly leveraged and life is spent running from one crisis to another...from one new toy to the next...from one new philosophy to the next: homes where there is no consistency, no discipline, and no backbone to ‘do the hard thing’ if such makes one uncomfortable or unhappy. We continue to expect a payout on a situation where no investment is made. Hunting, fishing and sports are more important than spending time with our wives and we are astonished when she takes a hike for the thrill of a fling or the comfort of a man who simply listens.

Our families therefore are in the same crisis. The losses within church-going families is devastating. The odds of our kids coming to a real faith are daily decreasing right along statistically with the level of Christian practice in the home. We fail to *live it out* in our marriages and family life and are incredulous when our children want no part of whatever their parents have. And why not? We willingly turn them over to a Godless anti-christian environment 6-7 hours a day, 5 days a week and yet still somehow expect them to come home and rally against the tidal-wave of their generation to follow Christ! How can we send them out to operate in hell all day and yet expect them to remain anchored in heaven? And don't think homeschooling is the answer either, for without a living example in their lives, the result will be the same. We SEE it happening to other families and other kids and arrogantly say in our hearts "not my kid." And by the time we realize the contrary, it's simply too late. How long will we reject the words and disciplines of Christ, and then cry foul when the end result only confirms our rejection?

Jesus, in the midst of some very practical ministry instruction here in this section of Matthew, begins now to speak concerning marriage and divorce...topics that remain current and social ills that still plague mankind. The issue of marriage and divorce is as real in this church as in any other, as real as out there "on the street." Young couples continue to march to the marriage altar like moths to the flame, and divorce and remarriage are anything but rare. Even weddings that I have officiated here have already divorced, and I often speak to many of the survivors concerning the condition of *their* marriages.

It is no surprise that the traits and practices so championed by the world today, are the very irritants and poisons to marriage. The world preaches the doctrines of selfishness, of pride, and individualism, and then wonders why relationships fall like flies. Principles like commitment, consistency, faithfulness and other-centeredness have ceased to have application or even meaning, especially in the millennials. They are but archaic principles of a bygone puritan age, times bound up in sexual mores and cultural mandates. Much of the problem lies in the fact that we find it nearly impossible to make real and honest promises for which we will not be moved. Thus if we approach marriage at all, it is with a spirit of a business contract. We see neither Christ, church, or marriage as a Covenant, but rather as consumers: we want to know *what's in it for me?*

The fact is, marriage and divorce are classic subjects that have been "re-written" for the modern pallets of a culture who simply feel that Christ's standard is just too restrictive and frankly just too hard to maintain. But let us make something clear today: ***marriage is God's idea.*** Marriage was invented and designed by God. Mankind did not just dream this thing up, and therefore it has no license to morph it into what is comfortable, convenient, or hip to the ever changing moors of our culture.

Clear back in the beginning...back in Genesis chapter 2 God lays out the purpose and form of the marital union...a "covenant" relationship...a promise and commitment that was not to be broken. Again, such a concept of an enduring promise and covenantal relationship between people, and between people and God, just seems to be beyond our grasp in our day. The introduction, presentation and implementation of such a covenantal relationship here in this church was one of the hardest issues we have had to deal with, because it just flew in the face of humanistic principles that are held so dear to mankind. Freedom of choice, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, spontaneity and rampant individualism all were, in many cases, more important than biblical instruction and heavenly design. In other words, many of us just "didn't want to."

Here's where many of us will cry foul, claiming that such a remark is not fair...that we did indeed give and participate and "join in." I have no argument in that. But that's not the wrench in this, but rather the problem is an unwillingness to promise to do so ***tomorrow*** or even more so, ***the next day, and the day after!*** And now we have come back in full circle to the issue at hand, *marriage*. Because in the same fashion we so often are willing to *enter into* the relationship with zeal and passion...a desire to participate with great warm and fuzzy feelings, yet we just fail to be able to promise to follow through with that act "until death do us part." Hence no covenantal relationship exists in either case.

In one of the scenes of the movie *Penguins of Madagascar*, the penguin leader is marrying that dashboard hula dancer, and the officiant speaks the words to be echoed "...for better or for worse..." in which the penguin answers "...for better, thank you!" For him, it was a choice between the two: *but there is no choice!* Marriage holds innately within it the aspects of better and aspects of worse. Two human beings traveling the same road as one flesh now will double both aspects, thus there will be no avoiding either one.

The root of this issue lies in the battle cry of our generation: *I feel* this or that, or *I don't feel*. Yet I find no scriptural evidence that tells us to follow our feelings or that feelings even play a part of what it is we are doing here in the kingdom of God. Let us just sample the scriptural response to our feelings and emotions:

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"

Proverbs 28:26 "Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom will be delivered."

1 John 3:20 "...God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything."

Proverbs 14:12-13 "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death..."

Proverbs 29:11 "A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back."

Yet let's face it. Much of our decision for marriage is based on just that: *our feelings*. We are swept away by love's emotion, and blinded by warm feelings of connectivity and value. We enter into marriage through such, and ironically we tend to exit it based on the same. We are sexual creatures by design, and its intense drive will cause us to overlook much of the facts and figures.

In our last message, we discussed the concept of Godly "soul mates." Aren't we lucky that Eve was given to Adam in such a way, or perhaps the world would have been abruptly canceled in the opening credits. Because that was exactly what happened...God said "**I** will make a helper..." for him and in verse 22 says "**He** (God) brought her to the man..." Nothing there about trolling for a date, or Adam having warm and fuzzy feelings. Am I saying that we need not concern ourselves with passion and affection when dealing with a potential spouse? Oh, I hope not! But it is not to be the basis or the foundation of our relationship. For there is nothing more fickle and changing than our emotions and feelings!

The religious leaders in this passage wanted to talk about divorce, but Jesus wanted to talk about marriage, and further, He wanted to talk about it in the context of the Word. For these men, and for many of us, the issue was still open for discussion, but for Christ the issue was long since settled. God had specific designs for marriage. This design began with the union of a man and woman before His eyes, and that made two "one flesh." Even if unredeemed people are married and have sexual relations, God has made them one since marriage is a creation ordinance, not a redemptive one. By divorce, humans separate what God has joined together.

The secondary issue was family related. The man was to "leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife." "*Leave*" is the verb "abandon" and "*joined to*" means "to be glued to." Very strong language that even today is often passed by as archaic or impossible, and often one or the other still has one foot firmly planted in their parental relationship and thus the marriage is never right.

The rebellious heart of mankind began to present itself immediately herein, as those present began to argue "*why then...*" Just as with us when Jesus has declared a black and white position, there is the inevitable "*but...*" upon the lips of the listeners. We know what Jesus has said, except in our arrogance we add exceptions to the mandate. Jesus Himself gave an exception, but He gave no room for us to add our own that is determined by the ebb and flow of cultural mores.

But what about what Moses said? Moses did not ordain divorce, nor did he command it. He simply allowed it because their hearts were hardened against God on this matter. Of course we might take the high road here and condemn Moses for such action if those same actions were not so prevalent today among a vast segment of those leading the church.

That being said, such does in no way justify Moses' actions, but it does show a man's tendency to water down the narrow path in order to allow for the flesh. Religious compromise never works out in the end. Invariably we will end up debating the issue corporately, hundreds of years after the fact. Many see the actions of Moses as an attempt to protect women from the common practice of "verbal divorce," not to mention physical and emotional abuse. I want to believe he had good intentions. But make no mistake, this was not what God wanted. It was not what He designed for marriage to be.

The only exception listed here is sexual immorality. Specifically this means "illicit sexual intercourse," so let's not write more into this verse than is actually here. Sexual intercourse is the physical act of spiritual bonding, as is the act of communion. So the breaking of such...either issue, has dire consequences according to scripture. One might accuse the church of being callous and unfeeling on this issue. But I am not suggesting that there are not other realistic reasons for separation. Such is the reality of today's world. But it is to be separation with the hope and intent to repair what is broken and reestablish God's ordained plan. Sometimes that will be done, and sometimes it will not, but that changes nothing. No doubt this takes a lot of concerted effort and assistance. Sometimes this can mean months or even years apart; sometimes forever. And it is in that possibility, that people will knee-jerk and obedience falls to the sidelines.

Suddenly and inevitably, the situation that has presented itself becomes the fault of God or His callous legalism (or mine) that will not allow relief when it seems relief is so easily within one's reach. But no one ever said following Christ was the easy road...in fact I have said many times that it absolutely is not. Nothing more can be said, except be very, very, careful whom you marry.

The disciples had an idea: "Hey, better not get married at all if that's the way things are!" Well, no doubt many of us would think that a bit extreme. Pile on the rest of the daunting scriptural directives concerning marriage, and one would certainly wonder. We would at least want to receive all of this scriptural counsel with trepidation and a serious heart, and perhaps follow the road map to a tee so that we will not find ourselves lost in the future and seek to blame someone else.

To some, the issue of marriage with all of its blessings and its seemingly insurmountable responsibilities, is something that is never moved upon. This, of course, it usually thought of as odd, even within the greater church and its man ordained "family first" program. The fact is, so many of us seem never to find wholeness in Jesus...*supposedly our 'first love'*, and seek a human affirmation to render us complete. Such is a fallacy, to say the least. Some choose to refrain from marriage and/or children in order to provide for *more*, ...or at least *other*, ministry opportunities in their lives. Sadly, most often we reject the possibility that some have been called to a single life by God Himself, and that some do not marry because they have given themselves, ***all of themselves***, to the furthering of the Kingdom of God.

Let us note that this passage is in no way an attempt to guilt folks into staying single in some sort of legalistic protestant plan for the priesthood. Rather it is to define a path of life that some folks need to realize is OK to pursue if your heart, if the Holy Spirit, calls you to it. Despite what the world is saying to you, it's OK to not marry. Nor is this passage meant to bring shame and guilt upon those who have been divorced, separated, or have remarried. There is none here that is without sin, so no stones should be thrown. God is so very forgiving. But seldom does divorce resolve the issues that precipitated it. If we seek to live in Christ, sooner or later we must "face the music."

Being that I have chosen to have no children, this might be taken as a defensive move. But the text is clear! There are those who choose not to marry in order to serve God and further the Kingdom, and there are those who do not have children for the same reasons. They have the blessings of Jesus Christ behind them.

Marriage is an ordinance and design of God. And few matters of this life hold such a power to change the trajectory of your destiny. Are you willing to hear God on this matter? Are you willing to hear your brothers and sisters around you on this matter? The right mate will open the road before you. The wrong one can bring a world of hurt. Jesus loves you. He is not trying to keep the sweet gifts from you. He is trying in fact to fill you with HIS joy and purpose. In *that* lays the fullness of life...