

Jason Upchurch - Mark 10:1-12 - The Good News Hates Divorce

This is an absolutely loaded section this morning. It is loaded in context and it is loaded in content. And I think it's going to be good for us this morning as we look at what the Lord Jesus says about marriage.

This is going to be a 2 part sermon. What began as an introduction ended up being about half the sermon but I think we need to be reminded about these truths because in one way or another marriage affects our lives in some way and so when we come to a passage on marriage we need to slow down and seriously consider what the Bible says.

The big picture is that God designed marriage to be permanent. I think we all probably agree with that statement. No one goes into marriage like they go into buying a car, "You know, if I get a good 5 or 10 years out of this I'm doing pretty well." No one thinks that. Everyone goes into marriage with permanence in mind. Either you're burying him or he's burying you or Jesus is coming back. But we go in with permanence in mind.

Now, oddly, usually when we come to the marriage passages what ends up happening is that people want to discuss exceptions. Are there times where people can divorce and remarry? I think most you know that I hold to the permanence view of marriage. My position - not the official position of our church - just my position is that marriage is permanent. No divorce, no remarriage, no exceptions. I know that sounds radical to many people, but it was the standard Christian teaching for the first 600 years of the church. And it's the position of all people going into marriage. And even the most common view - the 2 clause exception view (adultery and abandonment) - is only 2 exceptions. Out of the thousands of reasons people might get a divorce, most Christians would say there are only 2 allowances: adultery and abandonment. To quote Voddie Baucham, "I just have 2 less reasons."

Now, I know that some of you have been divorced and remarried or know people who have been divorced and remarried. What I would say to you and them is that if they are divorced they should honor their original covenant and remain unmarried. They promised "til death do us part" and they should keep that promise. If they are remarried they should honor their new covenant of marriage by adopting the permanence view. We'll talk more about that next week.

When I do pre-marriage counseling there's an analogy I give the couple to encourage them to fight for their marriage. Not just exist or endure, but thrive especially in the difficulty.

Imagine that just you and your spouse are on a plane thousands of feet in the air. Take off was fine, the first bit of the flight was fine, there's turbulence here and there, but you're flying. But things go from bad to worse and now your engine is dead and the plane is going down. Maybe it's gliding to a crash or screaming downward in free fall but its going down. You will act differently if you know there are parachutes in the back of the plane and you can bail, than if there are no parachutes.

If there are parachutes you'll abandon the plane before you've tried absolutely everything to save it. If there are no parachutes - if there is no divorce - then both will try every means possible to get the plane restarted and land it safely.

If there's a way out of marriage, then you'll find it. If there's a way to bail, you'll do it. Even people who hold to the so-called two clause view of divorce - that you can divorce for adultery and abandonment - end up finding a whole bunch of other reasons they claim fit under those headings.

But what that discussion should remind us is that marriage is hard. Whether you're married or not you need to be reminded that it's tough.

When I do premarital counseling we go over the vows they're going to make with each other. I don't let anyone write their own vows because they are always a step down from the traditional marriage vows.

"I, _____
take you, _____

to be my wedded wife.
To have and to hold,
from this day forward,
for better or for worse,
for richer or poorer,
in sickness or in health,
to love and to cherish
'till death do us part.
And to you I promise my faithfulness.”

The reason I do this is because marriage is a covenant - a contract before God to another person in love. And you should always read your contract before signing it. See, when you're giddy in love and just can't wait to be married you don't need the covenant obligations because what could go wrong? The vows are there because absolutely everything could go wrong.

Better or worse - we like better, but no so much worse. Drug abuse, problems with in-laws, layoffs, moving. He doesn't communicate very well or at all. She doesn't enjoy intimacy. Infertility. Anger issues.

Richer or poorer. What happens when your revenue stream dries up? Your house forecloses? Medical bills drain your account? You make a foolish investment and lose tens of thousands? Or you get an inheritance and he wants to spend it one way and she wants to do something else? Sometimes lots of money is not a blessing. There was a report out this week that 1/3 of Americans making over \$150k per year are living paycheck to paycheck and many have a lot of credit card debt. Can you imagine that? Unless you live in NYC or LA that's a lot of bad financial decisions from people who make a considerable amount of money.

Sickness or health. What happens when he can't even clean himself? Or she doesn't remember who you are and hasn't for 10 years? You can't do all the things you once did?

Will you love and cherish til death do you part? Not survive. Not exist. Not put up with their shenanigans. Love and cherish. Cherish means to love on, adore, be devoted to, enjoy, make much of, delight in. And it's actually a biblical command.

The vows came from men of God who knew the realities of life better than the young people excited to be married. And they knew marriage is hard.

And to be clear, just because something is hard doesn't mean it's bad. I go to the gym and when I get home my wife usually asks me how it went. And I usually tell her it was heavy. I'm tired and sore and worn out. But that doesn't mean I stop going. It's good to go to the gym.

Most things that are worthwhile in life are hard. Medical school is hard - it should be. Law school is hard. Apprenticeships are hard. Having kids is hard. Building stuff is hard. That's why they call it **work**. Just know that marriage is hard. And if you're sitting there saying "well my marriage is not hard - then praise God you have won the lottery. But know that most of the people around you who are married are working hard to fulfill their vows.

So know that that whether you are still in your parents' home or desiring to be married or are married, our goal as Christians is to encourage marriages and be a blessing to marriage as much as we can in spite of the difficulty.

So marriage is permanent, marriage is hard. Marriage is also fundamental to the gospel.

Many people think that marriage is an odd thing for the Lord Jesus to even talk about. He died at 33 and had never married anyone. Jesus is often held up as an example of someone who can live their lives in contentment without being married. But can I tell you something? That is fundamentally not true.

Jesus is not an example of singleness. Jesus is the ultimate example of marriage. Who is Jesus married to? The Church. Really, he's betrothed to the Church and will consummate the marriage at his second coming. But we need to understand that Jesus is not single. He's not a model of the bachelor life. He's not a model of those who have the gift of singleness and have no desire to marry at all. Jesus is a model of the married life.

Which is why Paul says "husbands love your wives as Christ" what? Loved the church. And why wives are to submit to their husbands as the church submits to Christ. Earthly marriages are just a small reflection of the greater reality of the marriage between Jesus and the church.

Jesus is not single. Jesus is the greatest example of marriage that we have. All marriages point to the reality of Jesus and the Church and specifically the atoning sacrifice on the cross. Jesus laid down his life for his bride. Gave up every comfort, every glory, every praise in heaven to take on flesh and die for the sins of his bride.

Men, that's the model we are to follow in loving our wife. And the Church submits to Christ. Wives: Do you submit to your husbands joyfully and willingly? Or is it begrudging and argumentative? Are you the helper that God has designed you to be from **Gen 2?**

Because that's what the Lord has designed marriage to be: a living, breathing picture of the gospel. Are we perfect? Absolutely not. It's a funny cycle, really. We need the gospel of grace to remind us how to live out our marriages, so that our marriage can then be a better picture of the gospel of grace.

And listen, it's not like marriage was a bunch easier 20 years ago or 200 years ago or 2 millennia ago. God knew what the world would be like in 2023. He knew what challenges you'd be facing in 2023. He knew the struggles, the sin, the stubbornness, the bitterness and yet he still designed marriage for our good. Not just to endure but to thrive as a picture of Christ and the church.

He doesn't want us merely to endure marriage. He wants us to thrive in our marriage. I mean, if marriage is a reflection of Christ and the church don't we want our marriages to be growing in love? Growing in joy? Growing in grace? Growing in intimacy?

I've known guys who are 80 years old who have been married 60 years and they hate their wives but they're too stubborn to get a divorce. Well that's no credit to the gospel. Does Jesus just endure us until we die? Do we just endure Jesus until we die? I hope not. What Jesus wants is an ever increasing joy and love and patience and kindness in us. And that's what he wants in our marriages.

Listen, you know this, but it's worth repeating: you can't change your spouse. And your spouse can't change you. You can change you. And your spouse can change your spouse. So the only thing you can do to make your marriage better is change you. Again, that sounds so obvious and simple but when I do marriage counseling this is a profound insight to most people who want to change everyone but themselves. They make excuses for their behavior based on the other person. If their spouse would only do this or not do this or be like that then everything would be magically better. Well, maybe, maybe not. But you can't change them. You can only change you.

You need rest in the grace of Jesus, and at the same time you need to strive after godliness, you need to bathe yourself in the Word of God, that fulfill the role to which God has called you and pray for them.

I mean, if you knew that you knew that your spouse was striving with everything she had to follow Jesus and to love you, wouldn't that change your perspective? That you could actually see in her - or in him - actual change, actual desire **and follow through** to grow, holding the tongue, a renewed vigor in serving and leading the family, a new desire to inject the gospel in every area of the family; wouldn't you have a little more desire to do that too? Of course you would. Godliness is contagious in Christians.

When I was doing training for biblical counseling I remember one of the guys talking about husbands and wives studying each other to bless each other. And one husband who really desired to know his wife. He studied her: what she liked and didn't like. And he started collecting all this in a binder.

Places she mentioned she wanted to go, restaurants, her favorite foods, shoe size, shirt size, favorite colors, paintings she liked, movies she'd always wanted to see. And he blessed her with it. He took the time to study her. And she took the time to study him. She even joked that if he died, she'd just give the binder to the next guy, kind of like an instruction manual.

This was intentional, deliberate love. We're not called to languish in marriage. We're called to thrive in marriage. To forsake all others and be fully devoted to our spouses.

And here's the thing: a godly marriage does more than just benefit your marriage. It benefits your family. The most important thing you can give your kids and grandkids is an accurate picture of Jesus and the church in your marriage.

The best thing I can give my kids is not an inheritance or an education or trade skills or guns or family heirlooms or whatever. What you should desire to give your kids and grandkids is crystal clear picture of gospel not just in the words that you tell them, but in how you love your husband or how you love your wife. That is the legacy you want to pass down. That is the treasure they should inherit day in, day out. Week in, week out.

Interestingly, even the unbelieving world realizes that the best thing you can do for kids is to have a thriving marriage. It doesn't matter the color of your skin, the tax bracket you're in, the location where you live - the number one thing that gives children advantage in the world is happily married parents who are involved in their lives.

So although this section is about not getting divorced, the Christian ethic in marriage not just scraping by. It's thriving in godliness.

And I want you to not only live that, but proclaim that. To yourself and to others. And I want you to take encouragement from this section. I want to unpack just one element of this section because I think it's a huge deal in our day. And that is the context. **Where** did Jesus say these things? And why is that a big deal?

Pay close attention to the location. **Read 1-9**

This is where geography and history play a big role. Where is Jesus at? He goes south to Judea - the southern area of Israel. But he goes to the area beyond the Jordan. That means he's on the East side of the Jordan river. He's now in the region governed by Herod Antipas. This is the exact same region where John the Baptist went to preach against Herod Antipas. And do you remember what he was saying? It is not lawful for you to have your brother Phillip's wife.

This is the same exact region where John was preaching against Herodias divorcing Phillip who ruled in the north and marrying Phillip's brother, Antipas. How did that work out for John? Not well. Antipas seized John, put him in prison. And the night of Antipas's birthday when they were all drunk John was put to death because Herodias because she didn't want to hear anymore about how her divorce and remarriage was unlawful.

The Pharisees knew this. And remember from early on they were scheming with the Herodians about how to put Jesus to death. Well, what better way to have him meet his death than getting him in trouble in the exact same way as John? Let's get him to start talking about marriage. **Read 1-2**

They're scheming, they're trying to trap Jesus. And Jesus isn't afraid. The Pharisees weasel out Jesus's question. They focus on exceptions. But Jesus uses Moses against them. Yeah, maybe Moses allowed for divorce because of hard and sinful hearts. But what was God's design from the very beginning? Let not man separate.

He knows what saying that could cost him. He knows what they're trying to do. And he is bold anyway.

Listen very carefully: Like Jesus, we need to be bold and not just live out God's design in marriage but proclaim God's design in marriage no matter the cost.

And let me just be very specific in 2 ways.

1) We need to be bold and tell people to not divorce. Do not get a divorce. God has made the two into one flesh, let not man separate. That's a command. Since God has brought them together, do not rip them apart. It would be to try to undo what only God can do.

And Christians need to hear this. Even if you hold that Christians can get a divorce for adultery or abandonment - I don't think they can - but even if you hold that, your posture should still be that they shouldn't. That they honor the covenant. That they seek to hold fast to each other because God has put them together.

Just because someone commits adultery or abandons doesn't obligate anyone to divorce. And, what Jesus says, is that even when Moses allowed it it was only a concession by Moses - not God - by Moses because the party who was offended has a hard heart. **Because of your hardness of hearts he wrote that.** That's not a compliment. That's not a virtue. That's not "because of your godliness he wrote that." Even here Jesus says Moses made a back door because of sinfully hard hearts on both sides.

You guys, we preach against divorce.

Mal. 2:16 I hate divorce and the one who is guilty of violence. Just as much as God hates violence he also hates divorce. It's sin. It's grievous to God.

1 Cor. 7:10-11: Paul says the wife should not separate [divorce] from her husband; and the husband should not divorce his wife.

He even says in there that if they do get a divorce then they should remain unmarried or else reconcile. You know someone who got a divorce? That doesn't mean they get to go remarry whoever. Paul says they stay unmarried or reconcile.

And listen, the world is 100% opposed to this. The world has is doing us no favors at all. There was a law passed in CA in 1969 that made the divorce rate in America double almost overnight. Do you what it was? No fault divorce. Basically you could decide to divorce your spouse for any reason - or no reason. In the past you actually had to show some kind of fault, some kind of massive failure on the part of the spouse to justify ending the marriage union. If you couldn't do that the court said no. Go work it out.

But CA decided that no-fault divorce was a good way to go and eventually the rest of the country adopted similar lenient laws. What this does, to go back to the analogy I gave earlier, is to provide a parachute out of marriage at almost any opportunity.

Things are tough? Just get a divorce. In fact many people said divorce was good. It's better to be happy than stuck in a bad marriage. It's better for the kids, they said, to have divorced parents who are happy than married parents who are miserable. Of course there was no data to support that claim. And now we have all kinds of studies showing that that is fundamentally not true.

But the dam is breached and now it's rampant. And the lone voice against the rampant divorce situation in America should be the church because we recognize what marriage truly looks to: Jesus and his bride.

And listen, that's not just something we believe in our hearts it's also something we need to say. We need to tell people "Don't separate; don't get a divorce."

We need to tell Christians this, unbelievers, everyone. Just like we would tell them "Hey you shouldn't rob that bank or commit insurance fraud or get an abortion" we should also tell them they should do the hard work of keeping their marriage together.

This has to be our standard position. Do not divorce.

2) Since we're talking about marriage we need to be clear that marriage is only between one man and one woman. Homosexual marriage is not marriage. It can't be, any more than I can be married to a tree or a dog or a car.

Because God designed marriage and instituted marriage he is the one who defines what it is and is not. Even here God is clear that God made them male and female and the two shall become one flesh. Women can't become one flesh with one another. Men can't become one flesh with one another.

There is a physical and therefore spiritual union that happens only between man and woman within the covenant of marriage. And just like divorce that's not something we get to keep to ourselves. That has to be something we make clear to people and it will probably cost us.

I was listening to The Briefing this week - that's Al Mohler's news podcast and he was talking about how in England there is a group of people that have secretly gone around to all the churches in the Oxford University area. They've attended services and looked up info on the churches and given them a grade between 1 and 5 to help people decide how gay-affirming they are. This is called the "Safe Church Project" - as in, how safe is your church to the homosexual community? If you get a 1 from them, your church is abysmal because it uses clobber passages about homosexuality being sin. Supposedly if you get a 5 that's the best because you're basically celebrating their sexual sin every week.

Now, as Christians we have the option of saying nothing, don't we? Jesus could have said nothing about divorce and marriage. He could have had some snappy comeback or ignored them altogether because he knew it was a trap. But he didn't. He actually answered the question.

Listen, we're going to get asked the question. Are we ready for that? Are we ready to lose jobs, lose funding, lose friends, lose family members, lose credibility?

There's people who say "I don't care what you do in the bedroom, just don't tell me about it." As though what goes on in the bedroom has no effect anywhere else. We know that's not true. We know what goes on in the bedroom affects every other aspect of the home and society.

Listen, here's be bold about what the Bible says. You don't have to be rude or offensive. But be bold and gracious. We can't tell people they're in sin while still offering them the hope of the gospel. But we have to hold fast and tell them.

And for us: we hold fast to this teaching. And don't just settle for not divorcing, but strive to have a marriage that thrives to the glory of God.

Pray