

**First Baptist Church Merritt Island**  
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**October 29, 2023**  
**Marriage From The Beginning**  
**Mark 10:1-12**

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Every Saturday morning at St. Paul's Catholic Church, a group of married men gathered to share their challenges as husbands and to try and encourage each other in their marriages. One week, a man named Giuseppe attended the group for the first time. Though most of the men were middle-aged, Giuseppe was nearly 80 years old. To help him get acclimated to the group, the leader asked him how long he and his wife had been married. Giuseppe answered, "Nearly 50 years." The group politely clapped in response. The leader asked a quick follow-up question. "Giuseppe, since you've been married nearly 50 years, can you share with the group anything that helped you stay married so long?"

"Well," Giuseppe replied, "marriage was pretty difficult for a while. But, for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I took my wife on a trip to Italy and things have been much better ever since." The group shared how glad they were for him and how encouraging it was to hear that marriage can improve over time. One member then asked, "Giuseppe, what do you have planned for your wife for your 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary?" Giuseppe proudly replied: "I'm going back to Italy to pick her up."

Clearly, that's a joke. You don't need me to tell you that. And that's the point. We know it's a joke because we intuitively know the goal of marriage is more than staying married until you die.

But sadly, our culture has distorted marriage to the point that it barely even resembles God's design. And that isn't a recent phenomenon. It's as old as the Garden of Eden. And it's what we find in our text. Jesus is approached by a group of religious leaders who ask Him a question about divorce...a question that is rooted in their corrupt culture's distorted view of marriage. And we learn a lot about marriage from what Jesus has to say in His response.

So, let's read the next passage in our study of the Gospel of Mark.

**Mark 10:1–12 (ESV)**

***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. 2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." 5 And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate." 10 And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."***

As Jesus made His way toward Jerusalem, a group of Pharisees came up to meet Him. Verse 2 says their intention was to test Him. Matthew's account of this provides a detail that Mark leaves out.

*Matthew 19:3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"*

They wanted to know if a man could divorce his wife for any cause. (we'll see in just a second why they said that)

So, how does Jesus respond?

***3 He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4 They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."***

Jesus takes them back to the Law of Moses and they make a reference to Deuteronomy 24.

*Deuteronomy 24:1 - When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,*

This law about divorce was hotly debated among the Jews. The surrounding verses are about how to handle remarriage after a divorce. But the Jews were more concerned with what the word "indecency" meant. It's a word that is sometimes translated as "shame." Some Jews interpreted the Law to be saying that if a woman did anything that brought shame on her husband, he could divorce her. They argued that indecency had to mean something other than infidelity because the Law prescribed the death penalty, not divorce, for infidelity. So, they concluded that a man could justify divorcing his wife for almost anything he considered to be a shame to him. If she wasn't a good cook or wasn't a submissive wife, that could be considered a shame, and they could divorce her. The culture of the Jews had been corrupted by sin in a way that they twisted God's word to accommodate their selfish, sinful desires.

And the Pharisees know that if Jesus answers strongly in favor of divorce for any reason, He will lose support from religious conservatives. But, if He answers strongly against divorce for any reason, He will lose popularity with the majority, including King Herod who just had John the Baptist killed for speaking out against his divorce.

*Mark 10:5 And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."*

Jesus explains that the commands about divorce were given to the nation of Israel because God knew their hearts were hardened by sin. It seems that God anticipated the hard-heartedness of people and wanted to mitigate the impact. You see, if a woman was sent away without a divorce, she wouldn't be able to remarry and she couldn't get a job or go back to her father's house. She would be completely destitute if she was sent out of her husband's home. So, it seems the provision for

divorce was an act of God's grace to protect women from the sinfulness of men. You see, God cares for wives even when their husbands don't.

And that's a great word for many people this morning. God cares for people who have a hard-hearted spouse. He sees you. He loves you. He wants what is good for you. I know that may not answer every question you have about your marriage, but it's something you cannot afford to forget. God cares and has grace for you. God is with you, and He is for you.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. Notice what He does next.

***Mark 10:6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."***

Jesus turned the focus from what was allowed in the Law concerning divorce because of sin to what God desired concerning marriage before sin entered the picture. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's answering a question that the Pharisees and their corrupted culture aren't asking.

The question the Pharisees ask is, "What does God allow?" The question Jesus answers is, "What does God desire?" And there's all the difference in the world between those two questions.

A couple years ago, my son came up with one of the most "teenage-boy ideas" I've ever encountered. He wanted to jump off our roof. Not joking. He wanted to jump off the roof. He'd been watching some videos of brainless people who do something called parkour. To his underdeveloped boy brain, it looked like a lot of fun and led him to believe he could jump off our roof in some fashion that would prevent injury and provide him some sort of thrill.

So, for what seemed like an entire summer, he would ask, "Dad, can I jump off the roof?" To which I would say, "Ask your mom." To which he would say, "Mom says you're the head of the house and told me to talk to you." So, I'd launch into this sort of reply. "Son, I love you. God knows I love you. So, in His grace He gave me a brain that would work better than your teenage brain. I want you to be able to walk and play with your kids when you are my age. I don't want your story to end in such a ridiculous way. So, no, you can't jump off the roof."

The point is that Logan was only interested in what his father would allow. But I wanted him to understand what His father desired. I'm not out to ruin his fun. I'm committed to helping him actually enjoy his one and only life.

And that's the way Jesus directs our attention toward divorce and marriage. He doesn't just want us to know what the Father will allow. He wants us to understand what our Father desires.

There is absolutely an appropriate place to talk about what God allows for divorce. Jesus says that man should not seek to separate what God has joined together. Divorce isn't God's design for marriage. Jesus even acknowledges the exception for situations involving immorality. But the

emphasis of His teaching on marriage and divorce was almost exclusively on God's good design for marriage, not God's allowance for divorce. And that should significantly influence the way we study this passage. We want to honor the approach of Jesus by focusing on what God desires for marriage rather than fixating on the minutiae of what God might allow in divorce.

And that helps us arrive at our big idea for this morning:

**Big Idea: Jesus is calling us to pursue God's good design for marriage rather than our corrupt culture's distortions.**

God's desire for marriage is that we would pursue His good design for marriage – for our marriage and for the marriages of others. He has formed marriage in a way that brings joy and satisfaction and a lifetime of pleasure. But we will never experience His good design if we are preoccupied with our corrupted cultures' hard-hearted distortions about what marriage is supposed to be.

So, let's take some time to consider God's good design for marriage.

1. Marriage is designed as the creation of God.

***6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'***

Jesus is going back to Genesis 1, to the very beginning...before the Law of Moses and before sin entered the picture. He wants to remind us that marriage is the creation of God. It didn't start as a social convention or a government regulation. It's an institution created by God before the age of human government. That means government doesn't have the authority to define marriage. God defines marriage because God designed marriage. It doesn't matter what our governing authorities say, they don't have the final word on marriage, God does.

That also means we don't have the final say on our marriages, God does. He made it and He knows how it works best. So, if you want to enjoy the blessings that God has embedded into marriage, you have to be committed to doing marriage God's way. That means wives submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord (Colossians 3:18). That means husbands love their wives like Jesus loved the church and laid down His life in sacrificial service, pursuing her good above His rights as Lord (Ephesians 5:25).

What would it look like for you to lay your marriage down before the Lord today and simply acknowledge that your marriage belongs to Him and ask Him to show you any ways He wants to change you and how you live in your marriage?

Marriage belongs to God and we pursue His design for marriage as we commit to doing marriage God's way.

2. Marriage is designed for one man and one woman.

***6 But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'***

It's heartbreaking that we need to teach this, but we definitely need to teach this in our day and age. There are only two biological options and God assigns them at birth. He makes us male or female. And marriage is only for one male and one female. Again, our culture and our government may say otherwise, but the church of Jesus Christ is called to submit to our Creator and His mandate for marriage. And no matter how many mainline denominations reposition themselves on this issue to accommodate the views of our culture, marriage is and always has been and always will be for one man and one woman.

### 3. Marriage is designed for oneness.

***7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, 8 and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9 What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.'***

Notice how verse 7 says that two become one. Then verse 8 says two are now one. Then, verse 9 says this union is something God does. God joins two people together when they enter the covenant of marriage. His design is for oneness. That's why Jesus says we can't just divorce for any reason...we should not separate what God has joined together. Marriage makes two people one.

That certainly includes physical components, like sexuality. That's why sexuality is to be enjoyed only within marriage because it is a physical expression of the union between husband and wife. That physical expression is connected to a spiritual reality. That's why verse 9 says God joins people together. In marriage, God is making two people one. There is something deeply spiritual about human sexuality because it is part of God's design for joining two people together in such a deeply spiritual way that they become one new creation in His eyes.

That's why sexual sin is so damaging to marriage. It destroys the covenant of marriage because it brings another person into the union. This is so serious that Jesus actually says it is the only acceptable ground for pursuing divorce.

Matthew includes a phrase that Mark leaves out in our text.

*Matthew 19:9 - And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*

The word "sexual immorality" translates the Greek word *porneia*. That word is a designation for sexual sin in general. Sometimes in the New Testament, it refers to sex before marriage. Sometimes, it refers to prostitution. It's a broad designation for various types of sexual sin.

And, I believe Jesus says that sexual immorality is grounds for divorce because sexuality inherently joins people together. And when you join other people to your marriage, you destroy God's design for oneness in marriage. So, in that case, divorce isn't what breaks the oneness of marriage, immorality does.

Now listen, Jesus isn't commanding people to get divorced if there is some form of sexual immorality. Jesus is able to forgive and restore marriages where there is genuine repentance. His resurrection power is stronger than any sin, including sexual immorality and wrongful divorce and unbiblical remarriage. He is a redeemer and restorer. So, don't misconstrue that Jesus is commanding divorce when He is simply allowing it for sexual immorality.

And I know we could spend weeks just diving into the nuances of this. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul says that someone who is abandoned by their spouse is free to remarry. He isn't contradicting Jesus there because he isn't saying it's permissible to abandon your spouse. That's a text about permissible remarriage not permissible divorce. And there are innumerable details we could focus on surrounding divorce and remarriage, but to do so this morning we would have to neglect the rest of what Jesus says about God's good design for marriage.

So, let me just say this before I move on: I pray the Holy Spirit will do a work in every heart gathered here this morning to declare war against sexual immorality in our lives. It is destroying marriage in this country. It is destroying marriages in this room. May the Holy Spirit strengthen our resolve to trust in Jesus and His liberating power to free us from every form of sexual sin. May we pursue God's design for oneness in marriage by purifying our lives from every form of sin that would destroy our lives.

But there are other things that inhibit oneness in marriage.

Notice how verse 7 alludes to this - **7 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,**

Part of the physical reality of oneness is that a man leaves the care and household of his parents, and the woman does the same so that they can hold fast to one another. The phrase "hold fast" means to cling to something. It literally means to glue something together.

So, at the most basic level, it simply means husbands and wives do life together by clinging to one another. That's why you knew the joke at the beginning of my message was a joke. Successful marriage isn't predicated on doing life apart from your spouse.

- You live together.
- You spend time together.
- You make decisions together.
- You raise a family together.

And it means you become laser-focused on things that would cause you to drift apart.

- You resist letting work come between you.
- You resist letting your parents come between you.
- You resist letting your friends come between you.
- You resist letting your children come between you.
- You resist letting your hobbies come between you.

You go on dates. Husbands, you talk about your emotions and feelings and hopes and fears. And encourage your wife to do the same. You endeavor to meet each other's needs because you are their person, and they are yours. You don't become roommates who raise the same kids but barely know one another anymore.

God's design for marriage is oneness. That means you pursue intimacy with your spouse in a way you don't have intimacy with anyone else in the world.

So, is there anyone or anything that is coming between you and your spouse? If you aren't sure, ask your spouse if there is anything in your life that is making them feel distanced or disconnected from you.

God's design for marriage is oneness.

#### 4. Marriage is designed to reflect Jesus and His Church

This isn't explicit in our text, but it's definitely implied in our text.

*Ephesians 5:31–32 - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

The word mystery in the Bible isn't used the same way we use the word mystery. We think of a mystery as something difficult or impossible to understand. The word mystery in the Bible refers to something that was previously not known but has now been made known. What Paul is saying is that there was something that wasn't known about marriage until God finally made it known, namely that marriage was designed to reflect the relationship between Jesus and His people.

And there's no doubt Jesus knows that while He is teaching people in our passage. He knows that marriage is designed to display the love and commitment He has for His people. When the question comes up about divorce, Jesus is strong in His response because Jesus knows He won't ever leave or forsake His people, so His people should never be flippant about marriage or divorce or the sin that would cause it.

And there are two really important implications of this truth I want to consider as we close.

1. If you are single, you can have the reality of marriage even if you aren't married. You can be united with Jesus if you will trust in Him. You can experience oneness and intimacy with Christ. You can do life with Jesus. So, while you wait for marriage, pursue your relationship with Jesus. Even if you never get married, you can still have the fulfillment and joy that comes from being married to Christ. Single people aren't second-class citizens in the church. Jesus loves you and wants to do life with you as you trust in Him.
2. If you are married, you can only live out the complete picture of marriage by experiencing the reality of marriage with Jesus as the center of your marriage. You need Christ to live in you and

your marriage for your marriage to display the love and commitment of Jesus to His church. So, cultivate your relationship with Jesus and rely on Him to empower you in your marriage. Pursue Jesus with your spouse and encourage your spouse to grow in faith and love toward Jesus. Jesus not only supplies the pattern for marriage, Jesus supplies the power for marriage because marriage is ultimately about Jesus.

Jesus is calling us to pursue God's good design for marriage and that begins with pursuing the One that marriage is all about. And that's Jesus.