

1When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; 2and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

3Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” 4And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, 5and 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 they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” 7They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?” 8He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9“And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

10The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.” 11But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12“For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

While I was thinking about these things this week and wondering how to begin this morning's study, I came across a partial quote by Al Mohler that was part of a message he was giving to the graduating class of Southern Seminary. Mr. Mohler says;

... in Mark 8:34-38 we read our Lord’s warning that those who would save their life will lose it. Those who look for full satisfaction in this life will never gain it. Those who demand their best life now will forfeit life with Christ. Mohler end quote.

In our society whether we've ever given it a second thought or studied it deeply, most Americans have mindlessly bought into Kierkegaard's theory that; . . . each individual—not society or religion—is solely responsible for giving meaning to life and living it passionately and sincerely ("authentically").

This, we believe, especially in our "American experience" is our birthright. Life. Liberty. Pursuit of happiness. At any cost. Even if it goes against what this old book very clearly says.

So then, we have a possible conflict that is so deeply rooted in our natural existence that we need to look again at Jesus words in Mark 8:34 - 38

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

We might not know the word, existentialism, but without thinking at all, that is who we are. Most of us are going to live each day pursuing our own short term, and sometimes long term happiness. That's what life is about. Or is it?

Well, yes, it is, and Jesus recognizes that we humans have built into us this desire to be happy. Pascal said that every decision a man makes, even up to and including suicide is based in happiness. Every crossroads we chose the path that we believe will render us the most happiness.

Where that breaks down is this. We are fallen broken beings and we go down a thousand roads with a giant sign that says "happiness - this way" and it turns out to be treachery. Shipwreck.

On all of my internet signatures where a quotation space is allowed to say something defining, I have this quote;

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep..to gain that which he cannot lose. Jim Elliot, 1949

This life is 5 minutes long. I'm realizing that, at 63, daily. Instead of living every day for tangible gratification and ease, somehow I need to teach you that it isn't about this life. Well, it is! but it isn't. It's about the next one. And if you give up this life for that one, you get this one too, in the bargain. Does that make sense?

I believed all of these things when I was 20. But I didn't act on them. I wasted almost exactly 40 years. Just like the Israelites. Now I'm 63 and hoping God will perhaps replace some of the locust years.

Let's think for a minute about an example we have in the Bible. Most of us have read the story of Job. A man who had everything. Blameless in all his ways. And God acted sovereignly to allow Satan to make everything he held near to his heart vanish in one day. Family, possessions, everything but his wife. Gone in a day.

Job is a living example of Jesus words. *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.*

Job loses everything. He doesn't understand at all! He is left in mystery. And yet he doesn't sin. *The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

Job is our example. This life is 5 minutes long. When you've got plenty, enjoy it. But don't hold onto this life. It can vanish in a day. Our citizenship is in heaven.

We'll pick the story up in chapter 2 of Job.

3The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For

*there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he **still holds fast his integrity**, although you incited Me against him to ruin him without cause." 4Satan answered the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5"However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse You to Your face." ...*

Satan's argument is that this world and holding on to it, is all there is. We just didn't get to the bottom of Job yet. Touch his health. Still dealing with the here and now. And poor old Job doesn't cave in.

This is important groundwork for our passage this morning. Divorce is real among christian people. Almost every family seated here has been touched by it in some way.

Jesus words are clear. But they have to somehow transcend the here and now, live for today, this is all we get so it's gotta be good, mentality.

When it comes to divorce, Jesus words are true. *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.*

Two weeks ago, I thought we made a very good start on these verses.

We said that this passage is so much more than just talking about divorce. Jesus here gives a robust manifesto for marriage.

In spite of the LGBTQIP2SAA acronym, the creator of the universe only recognizes male and female. Make up all the acronyms you like. 2 kinds of DNA. boys and girls. So we settled that.

And we said He's rather narrow in his view. One man, one woman, leave the family unit you were born into and form a new family. Marriage. One partner. For life. Until death parts you, you are one with your spouse. This is God's design. Any sexual unions outside of one person you are committed to in marriage for life, is sin.

And we didn't quite make it to vs. 6 *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*

God ordains marriage and families. If you think about it, that arrangement has lasted through three world eco-systems. Pre-fall in the garden, post-fall up to the flood, and post flood. The world changed. Tektonic plates moved. The creation was altered drastically. Family's did not. It is a design that Jesus traces all the way back to human 1 and human 2, and their children, to this day.

No wonder it's ground zero for Satan's attack on God and His creation. Destroy the basic building block of civilization.

So, let's review what we've got. God created male and female. He created them with a strong attraction to each other. He created them with a life long desire to be happy. He ordained marriage and sexuality for that purpose. But we're broken. We're sinful.

So we start down that road and for a thousand different reasons, we discover that we have a big hole in our life that isn't satisfied. We can be married, and desperately unhappy. Desperation and hopelessness set in and one of the most attractive dead end streets is, ditch this spouse that isn't getting the job done, I'm miserable, and go find one that will in fact, make me happy.

Jesus says; 6 *“So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”*

God's design is; You consummate the marriage. You aren't 2 people any more. You are one flesh with that partner. God designed that. He blesses that. Separation isn't possible. Divorce isn't possible.

A few years back we had a really awful boss out at work. Devastatingly bad. And we got the folks over his head involved. Upper management. And we all had interviews to document our grievances, which were well founded and quite real.

Time passed and upper management said, sorry, we're not going to grant

the divorce. You're just going to have to try harder to live together. It made me think of the catholic church. You're married and divorce is off the table. Make the best of it.

2 generations from me. My grandparents on my fathers side. Their marriage was arranged by their parents, in Italy. They did not like each other. They were catholic. My grandfather was a drunk. My grandmother bought a Singer sewing machine, somehow, and the family would have starved to death, the story goes, but for her. Their marriage was over when they died.

Drunk or not, I never really knew him, my dad was crazy about him and would tell me, his dad taught him how to work. And my dad was the hardest worker I've ever known. There's something to be said for that. When the options are off the table, you figure out how to do the best you can with what you've got.

Jesus said, divorce is NOT in God's plan. Two become one until death parts them. That is God's plan. Remember, the conversation was begun over a question about no fault divorce by the pharisees.

Jesus answers their question by defining the plan of God for marriages and families, and says no, divorce is not an option. At all. Not in the plan of God.

Remember now, their motive is not to further their education. They didn't ask Jesus the question because they want God's point of view. Their motive is to damage Jesus. Discredit Jesus. Maybe with a little luck, get Herod to fill John's empty jail cell with Jesus. Even better, a headless Jesus.

So they've got Him right where they want Him. He's given the most conservative answer possible. Go back to origins. Divorce is not possible. It circumvents and destroys God's plan for human thriving. And they say;

7They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?"

They quote a Deuteronomy 24 passage where Moses clarifies divorce.

Notice they make it sound like Moses is commanding divorce. He did not. So they begin by twisting words.

That's an old art form. Satan used it with Eve. "Hath God said . . . ?" and Satan twists what God DID say and confusion leads to disbelief, and ultimately sin. The sin that crashed the human race. Nothing new. That's what the pharisees are doing. Moses commanded us to divorce.

A careful reading of Deuteronomy 24 will show that divorce had entered into their culture. Moses had indeed allowed it, and scholars have wrangled over the words in Deuteronomy 24 since it was written.

Dt. 24:1 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,

So a guy gets married, and the relationship isn't working out. He's displeased with his partner. Why? Well, that's the question. The word in the hebrew is quite ambivalent. Listen to a bunch of our modern translations.

NIV NAS ESV; all go with indecency. KJV; uncleanness. Holman; improper. ISV; objectionable ASV; unseemly

Here's what we know. At the time Moses wrote this, adultery could have been cause of death. So whatever this word means, it's something short of adultery. We'll probably never know. Would have never known, except Jesus is going to clear it up in the next verses.

Suffice to say, Moses never commanded divorce. What Moses said was when it was necessary for whatever the muddled reason is, you're commanded to give her a certificate and send her out of your house. It has to be a clean break. No cohabitation.

Not only a clean break, but after she's had some other man, and is again

on the available list, you can't have her back. That's an abomination.

So they've twisted what Moses did say into something he never intended. Notice Jesus addresses their Bible twisting game.

8He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.

It's a 2 part answer. First let's get the word twisting sorted. Moses permitted divorce. It isn't a command. Permissive will is totally different from command.

Second, the reason is because of sin. Hardness of heart.

God recognizes that after the fall, on a cursed earth, with sin reigning, hardness of heart has to be addressed. This is ultimately a grace to the less guilty party.

Because of sin and all of it's consequences, marriage can become dangerous for one of the parties involved. Usually the woman. The Bible recognizes her as the weaker vessel. That's by God's design.

Sin entered and God has to make permissive grace possible for the sake of parties in a marriage that are actually in harms way. It's not the original design, but it's a reality. Because of sin, the weaker person can be abused. Harmfully, dangerously, abused. God had to introduce grace for this. It's a reality caused by sin. God recognizes it.

9"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Here, I think, Jesus clears up the confusion surrounding Moses original word. I'm going to jump to a conclusion here so take this with a grain of salt. We can ask some day in heaven.

I think Moses original word was as close as close can get to adultery. I'm going to guess there were cases of adultery where the parties didn't

want the ultimate solution. Death. So this word allowed the divorce and separation, short of killing one of the parties.

We can ask in heaven. But what Jesus says here, sort of aligns with that. Immorality is cause. Jesus says, if we're going to go down this road, there had better be immorality causing the divorce. Otherwise, if you divorce for something less, and re-marry, you've committed adultery.

So Jesus begins with the highest model, a marriage commitment to one person, for life. And then He recognizes Moses permissive model, but clarifies, divorce is only possible where the marriage contract, that union, is shattered by immorality.

That's it. Paul later clarifies. Paul adds abandonment. Your partner walks away from the marriage. His context was someone becomes a christian and the non christian partner wants out. Walks away. That person who is left bereft can re-marry.

So there we have it. The biblical standard. Choose your partner well. You'll be expected to honor God by keeping that partner until death separates you, or the union is shattered by abandonment or immorality.

Note the authority. Jesus doesn't approach the question like a lawyer. He doesn't discuss this person's view and that person's view. He doesn't argue that rabbi Hillel taught this, and rabbi Shammei taught that.

His approach is that of author of the Book, not commentator on the book and what everybody else said about it. Total authority. Based IN the book, but as if, He wrote it in the first place. He did.

Did Jesus audience understand what He just said? Well, that's the end of the discussion for the would be Jesus condemners. His authority has silenced them.

Want to look stupid? Argue with God. They're silenced. For now. They aren't very bright. They always come back for more.

But the disciples are in shock. They've also understood. And by their reaction we can tell, what He's just said is completely foreign to the culture they've grown up in.

10The disciples said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”

Let me give you the Jim paraphrase. Really Jesus?? REALLY?! You get married and your stuck with that person?? For life??? You'd be better off never getting married if that's the case.

Their argument is vociferous. They voice their protest. Who would get locked into a deal like that?? IF that's true, no one would get married.

It's actually quite a reaction. They've understood. Perfectly. One man. One woman. Joined for life. To them it seemed un-tenable.

Did they ever buy in? Yes. Something we'll study in the future. Listen to the first qualification for shepherds in the church. Titus 1:5 *For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, . . .*

The disciples DID get this. Eventually. And it filtered down as the standard for christians. Qualifications for elders are the gold standard for all christians.

But on this day, these folks are exhibiting some shock and awe. *“If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”*

I love Jesus approach here. He doesn't argue for the standard. At all! He just says, fair enough. The other choice is abstinence.

11But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12“For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made

themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.”

You can reject the one wife for life thing if you like. Your other choice is to be a eunuch.

What's a eunuch? Well, in the sense Jesus used it here, it's a person who lives a celibate life. No sex. Period. That is in fact, an option. For some.

11But He said to them, “Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given.

By God's design, this option has to be "given" by God. For most of us, this isn't an option. Most of us have a life long ongoing desire for the pleasures of a partner. Husbands need wives. Wives need husbands. That is normative.

But Jesus does here recognize there are exceptions to that normative rule. And He's going to expand on that. He'll give three scenarios.

12“For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb;

There are people who are born sexless. Not so much physically, a few are born that way, but this also encompasses those without those needs or desires.

I have a book of photography I love. It's called **Chavez Ravine, a Los Angeles Story**. And it's pictures of the little community up the hill from Los Angeles where Dodger Stadium was eventually built. There was a little mexican village, quite apart from Los Angeles proper, set apart, up on those hill sides.

Don Norcroft photographed it when he was a college art student in 1949. His photographs show a lost world within another surrounding world. Very poor people. Mexicans mostly. But on one side up on a hill there are pictures of the "batchelor" quarters. Men who live alone.

We've always had batchelors.

In Tonopah we've got a little batchelor quarter across from the Rebel station. Every community has one I think. Men who don't need all the trapments of marriage. A nice house and all the goodies that we end up with, because we love our wives. Jesus recognizes these folks. Eunuchs from their mother's wombs.

Next, He says; *and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men;*

This is a second possibility. A guys' got a harem. He needs male slaves to take care of that for him. They would undergo castration. Not a very pretty picture, but it happened. Jesus says, you don't want to keep a wife, that might be an option for you.

And the third possibility; *and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.*

This doesn't have to involve physical alterations. Let me introduce you to one such person. His name was Paul. He wrote 13 books in your new testament.

Paul says, hey, I have the right to lead about a wife, like Peter and the other apostles, if I wanted to. But I've foregone that privilege so that ALL of my energies can get used up on the furtherance of the Kingdom of God.

Was Paul better than Peter because of this? Heavens no. Jesus will clear that up too.

He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

His point is simple. A life without sex isn't common or normal at all. But some have that gift. So be it. But if you aren't gifted that way, if you can't accept that, you are defaulted back to what the disciples are shocked over.

One woman, one man, until death parts you. Especially for christians!

Especially for christians.

We are lifted up by salvation out of this sinful world and it's related problems. We are at some place, if we really are christians, some place on the road to sanctification. We're being changed by the renewing of our minds as we stare into this book. And we are forbidden to marry someone who isn't also on that same path.

For real christians. Born again christians, the permissive causes for divorce should be non players. Immorality should NEVER be named among us. Abandonment should be out of the question. Harm and danger for some partner should never be found among real believers.

Let me finish where I began. Let me read you something Matthew Henry wrote a little over 3 hundred years ago; I'm reading from his commentary on the Deuteronomy 24 passage where Moses does permit divorce.

Matthew Henry says christians should live at a higher standard than what Moses permitted;

Commenting on Deut. 24:1-4 he says; Where the providence of God, or his own wrong choice in marriage, has allotted to a Christian a trial instead of a help meet; he will from his heart prefer bearing the cross, to such relief as tends to sin, confusion, and misery. Divine grace will sanctify this cross, support under it, and teach so to behave, as will gradually render it more tolerable.

Let me bring this 18th century language up to date for you. Christians stick it out. Christians stick it out. For the Glory of God, we stay married.

You say, you haven't reviewed the latest statistics have you. Yes, I have but my question is whether I'll ever see all of those "so-called" christians in the next life.

Live for that life. Not for this one.