

Text: Mark 10:2-16

Theme: DEALING WITH DIVORCE

1. Jesus Defines Marriage
2. Marriage Is for Life
3. Divorce Is Not the Answer

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The institution of marriage is under attack today. Homosexuals and lesbians want to expand marriage to cover up their sins. Others want to have the benefits of marriage without being married and expect us to quietly accept their sinful lifestyle. “No fault” divorce ends 50% of first-time marriages and 75% of second marriages. Should we even be surprised by it? Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes, **“There is nothing new under the sun,”** and that includes sins against the Sixth Commandment. In Jesus’ day too, sinful minds tried their best to sidestep the will of God concerning marriage. And, like today, people often tried to put a godly veneer on their sinful actions.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with a question meant to test him, to trap him: **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”** If Jesus answered yes, then he would be denying what God had said in general about the sanctity and duration of marriage. If Jesus said no, he would be denying what Moses had seemed to permit when he told husbands to give their wives a certificate of divorce if they wanted to leave them. How transparent! How obviously insincere! How insultingly hypocritical for them even to speak such words to Jesus!

Our first thought might be, “Jesus, don’t even give them the satisfaction of an answer! Ignore them!” But he didn’t. In fact, he did something that was typical for Jesus. He used their question to reteach God’s people some important truths about Christian marriage.

JESUS DEFINES MARRIAGE

Jesus laid God’s unchanging Word before these men when he went back to God’s first description of marriage found in the opening chapters of Genesis. He knew that every sinful interpretation of what marriage is, whether proposed in A.D. 30 or in A.D. 2012, tries in some way to sidestep God’s gracious plan for husbands and wives. Let’s take the opportunity Jesus gives here to focus our attention on what our gracious God says about marriage.

By the way, even if you are not married, and remember, Jesus was not married, our Savior lays out timeless truths for all of us as we strive to fight against the attacks of Satan, the world, and our flesh in this blessing of God.

First of all, we see that MARRIAGE IS FOR LIFE. Following their honeymoon, John and Mary (a fictional couple) began to settle into what would soon become routine in their married life. John was an accountant and Mary was a legal secretary. Like most couples, they divided up the various responsibilities of running a household, fitting necessary chores into evenings and weekends.

But Satan was working too. They began to neglect doing the little, self-sacrificing things that foster a caring, loving relationship. Disagreements became common, with arguments left unsettled. Sharing the Savior's words of forgiveness became less frequent. Tension hung in the air. Their devotional and worship life began to fall off.

They remembered their pastor's words about marriage as a lifelong commitment. But more and more they felt as though they were losing their way toward that goal. Marriage was hard work.

Perhaps that was going through the minds of Jesus' disciples too. When they heard what Jesus had to say about marriage, **The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry" (Mt 19:10).** Here we see that God's people are influenced by the world's attempts to sidestep God's will.

Jesus' words, **"What God has joined together, let man not separate"** remind us of an important biblical truth: It is God who blesses in marriage, but sinners often, in the words of the Sixth Commandment, "adulterate" his blessing. The purity of God's intentions as he joins husband and wife is often defiled by the sinfulness of the very ones he wishes to bless.

Scripture teaches that sin separates sinners from God and his will and from others too. But in Scripture we also learn of the One who can fix that separation—Jesus, whose loving actions for us—his life, death, and resurrection—provide the only solution to what troubles Christian lives and marriages.

John and Mary needed help. They weren't showing the kind of forgiving love that God promises to bless. They were sinning against God and against each other, and they weren't looking to their Savior for the solutions to what troubled their marriage.

So, it happened. **DIVORCE IS NOT THE ANSWER.** The word hung like a cloud between John and Mary, shocking them both into silence. The "D" word—*divorce!* Neither had asked the other for a divorce; the word just slipped out as they argued. Later, they couldn't even recall who actually said it. After months of putting it off, Mary went to the phone, dialed the church number, and a few minutes later they were sitting in their pastor's office.

The next two hours began with bitter accusations and ended with John and Mary in tears. Along the way, as their pastor applied God's Word, he saw a tremendous struggle take place. The D word was out in the open, and Satan tried to make the most of it. The pastor watched as two sinful hearts tried to justify their sinful actions by contemplating yet another sin. He confronted them with their sinful selfishness. The words of Jesus rang out: **"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her....And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."** Would they harden their hearts to their Lord's call to repentance? The pastor had seen that happen before. **"Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."** But that did not make it pleasing in God's sight. It was a judgment on their impenitence and a way of merely protecting an innocent spouse.

Today so many people try to suggest divorce as the solution to serious marriage problems. In reality, all divorce does is pile one more sin on top of all the others. But God says that we Christians have another option. **“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).** Confession and forgiveness are not just something for our weekend worship. They can easily be part of the daily routine in every marriage, as any Christian husband and wife will admit.

With tears in their eyes, John and Mary confessed their sinful selfishness to each other. Each announced forgiveness to the other and promised to be more Christlike in their love. The D word disappeared.

Marriage in a sinful world between a sinful husband and a sinful wife will always be imperfect. But when husband and wife look to the forgiving love of Christ and strive to reflect and imitate that love, they will be laying the foundation of a godly union and can be sure of the Lord’s richest blessings! Amen.

PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Lord, although many people today have little regard for the holiness of marriage as you describe it in your Word, we thank you for establishing marriage for our good and blessing us through it. Help us all to honor marriage as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman. Guard us from all impurity in thoughts, words, and deeds. Strengthen those who are married, keep them faithful to their marriage promises, and increase their selfless love for each other.

We ask this in the name of our precious Savior Jesus, who taught us to pray:

THE LORD’S PRAYER