



## **Mark 10:1–12**

10 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. 2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ 3 ‘What did Moses command you?’ he replied. 4 They said, ‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and

send her away.’ 5 ‘It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,’ Jesus replied. 6 ‘But at the beginning of creation God “made them male and female”. 7 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.” So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ 10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.’

## Reflection

Today's passage comes from Mark 10:1–12,

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I don't know where this talk finds you, but I do know that in everything God wants

what's best for you (Rom 8:28). And that means talking to us about difficult and painful topics, even if we'd perhaps rather not, which is a confession that I make to you now about the state of my heart as I prepare this talk. As with Friday's topic of hell, this topic too breaks my heart, but God has something to say to us, so here we go.

It's no coincidence that in between ideas like the cost of discipleship and the lures of pride and wealth, Jesus teaches about divorce. But before we jump too quickly to the desperate pain and sadness of divorce in our society today it's important that we understand Jesus' words in their literary and historical context. Jesus' enemies have come to test him. They don't much care about the subject mat-

ter, they're more interested in the trap, although in today's text historical sources tell us that they do bring before Jesus a contemporary debate amongst Jewish scholars. Jesus, who know the Scriptures inside out, refers them to directly to Moses on the matter, verses 3 & 4,

3 'What did Moses command you?' he replied. 4 They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'

A little historical context is helpful here. As I touched on just before, it turns out that in Jesus' day two prominent Jewish Rabbis were debating what Moses meant in Deuteronomy 24:1, the passage they've just quoted when saying,

‘Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.’

Moses’ actual words were:

‘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,’

Now as you can imagine one of the Rabbis was leaning towards that bit about ‘becomes displeasing to him’ meaning that any manner of trivial thing could serve as justification for divorce. And so in our passage today Jesus is weighing into this contemporary debate by saying unequivocally that the grounds in Deuteronomy 24:1

for divorce is, and only is, sexual infidelity. The logic of Jesus' explanation unfolds in the remainder of the text, stepping out of contemporary debates and grounding his reasoning in God's pre-Fall intentions for marriage,

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Jesus then elaborates in private a little later on to his disciples, underlining in no uncertain terms that Moses is talking not about a wife displeasing her husband but rather adultery.

But again, before we rush to contemporary applications of this passage it's important that we remain in those times just a little longer. In a male dominated society without social welfare, the difference between being married and being divorced for a woman would often mean the difference between living a relatively comfortable life and life on the streets. And so Jesus is saying 'no' to the men who would twist God's words to be able to divorce their wife at a whim. In doing so Jesus is protecting women and again demonstrating very loudly in a male dominated soci-

ety just how counter-cultural the kingdom of God is.

The kingdom of God is still radically counter-cultural today and Jesus' views on marriage and God's design for marriage still stand today. In today's passage Jesus takes us back to God's intention for humankind by quoting Genesis 2:24 which lays the foundation for marriage in saying that when people get married they become one, and Jesus says what God has put together let no one separate. God hates divorce and anyone who has gone through one will know why.

In this passage too, however, Jesus gives the Jews who are questioning him about the Jewish law a concession, reiterating the concession that Moses gave them.

God hates divorce but it is permissible in the instance of sexual immorality. But it's important to keep this teaching in context. God is a god of peace, and as we read throughout in the teachings of Jesus and throughout the New Testament, blessed are the peacemakers, those who seek reconciliation, those who are meek, and poor in spirit. A person whose character reflects these qualities will not necessarily divorce a partner who has committed adultery. That person is within their rights to divorce if the situation is irreconcilable, but God hates divorce and the very nature of a member of the kingdom of God is to seek reconciliation.

Nevertheless, Jesus does say in our passage today that divorce is permissible for sexual immorality, and in the context of

the contemporary debate he was clarifying what Moses had said on the issue. The remainder of the New Testament goes on to provide other provisions for divorce which include the unbelief of a partner who chooses to leave you, domestic violence, and other tragedies within the marriage relationship. I can't go into these now as I neither have the time nor is this the place. But it is important to say that the whole Bible is the word of God, and thus it is perfectly internally consistent, so what Jesus is saying here cannot be taken to be in conflict with the New Testament's wider position in offering additional grounds for divorce that aren't captured in today's text. If you'd like to read further see at least Matt 5:32; Matt 19:3–9; Luke 16:18; and 1 Cor 7:10–15.

This is a desperately sad business in which, again, the attractiveness of the kingdom of God and the brokenness of the kingdom of this world are so starkly in contrast. There is almost no unhappiness so painful as the unhappiness of an unhappy marriage, and almost no tragedy so great as the degeneration of what God intended for marriage into a broken relationship of bitterness, discord and despair. Today the Jewish teachers are using divorce as a plaything and Jesus is haven't anything to do with it. Divorce is a very serious matter as well as an unspeakable tragedy. Yet God is a god of peace and so if reconciliation is impossible then God graciously extends us ways out of broken marriages, even if he does so with a broken heart.

**Think**

Wherever this passage finds you please take the time now to think about how today's passage impacts your past and present and how it may influence your future. And if this is painful for you please know that I write this talk with a heavy heart and that I'm praying for you.

## **Pray**

Please pray with me. If you're single and hoping to be married one day then pray. If you're happily married, pray. If you're unhappily married, pray. And if you're divorced or never married please pray. Whatever your situation please pray that your life and our world would reflect God's will for marriage and that the devastating pain and sadness of divorce which is one of

sin's heaviest tolls on our world would be spared from your life and the life of your children and the life of as many people as possible in our culture by the grace of God and the gospel of his Son.

In Jesus' name we pray.