



Matthew 19:1–6

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” 4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made

them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt)

On one level, there is nothing complex about this passage. Jesus challenges the religious leaders of his day, affirming that God created one man to marry only one woman; and that God has brought them together, and therefore no one should

separate them. People who get married, should, in principle, stay married.

The difficult thing is how it relates to complex situations. We will come back to that.

This is the second time in Matthew's Gospel that Jesus has affirmed classical marriage, the other time being in Matthew 5:31. It is worth looking that up in the Library section of the App. It's a great resource.

And tomorrow, Craig will take us through the second half of this section, where Jesus gets to the heart of our relational problems. He says: 'It is because your hearts were hard that Moses permitted the loosening of marriages.' So Jesus focuses on our hearts for nourishing healthy marriages and avoiding separation and divorce

(which is the loosing of a marriage).

And the 'heart' is exactly what is forgiven and renewed in the (eventual) death and resurrection of Jesus and in the pouring out of his Spirit. So the Gospel is the solution, not more laws about marriage. That's important because the Pharisees were thinking about the Law when they came to Jesus in verse 3:

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They have in mind Deuteronomy 24, part of Israel's law. Deuteronomy 24 is an unusual little passage, but it had become very important in Jesus' day, and quite po-

litical. It is basically Moses allowing a man to write a certificate of divorce, but only for a particular reason. Let me read it:

“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, ... he [may write] her a certificate of divorce...”

Some things to note. Firstly, it was written in a day and an age where men divorced women, not the other way around. Its just important to note that.

Secondly, the certificate was written to protect the woman and her children. For without it, she had no clarity. And without clarity, she could not remarry, and – in that day and age – this probably meant desti-

tution.

Thirdly, notice that Moses actually permits a marriage to be loosened. He writes that two people who were once 'bound' (married) can now be 'loosened' (divorced). Divorce is permitted.

What the argument was about was the grounds for divorce, that phrase 'something indecent' from Deuteronomy 24. What was 'something indecent'? Was it anything indecent? So they asked Jesus,

'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife *for any and every reason?*'

Or only for something more serious, like unfaithfulness? See the problem? Can I leave her for any and every reason I want

to? Can I just up and go because I'm not happy any more? Or does it have to be something serious? Like adultery? Or domestic violence? Or something that looks more like a genuine breaking of the vows?

In Jesus' day, there was a group of people who said: 'You can loose the marriage for any and every reason.' Today we call these 'irreconcilable differences'. And another group who said 'the reason has to be serious.' The two groups were at loggerheads. In effect, they're asking Jesus: Whose side are you on? (It's a test!)

Jesus says: I don't want to talk about the divorce clause in Deuteronomy. I want to talk about the marriage mandate in Genesis. Jesus says – somewhat cheekily – haven't you read Genesis 2?

‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”?’

Jesus then adds his own commentary,,

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’

Think

Jesus says: the ideal ought to drive us. The binding of marriage by God ought to be what keeps us focused. Amanda Vanstone (a former Australian politician),

a number of years ago, wrote in the Herald, in favour of same sex marriage. She wrote:

‘Perhaps we need a reality check on what we think marriage really means. Opponents of gay marriage often argue that marriage is “a union between a man and a woman, to the exclusion of all others, for life”. It is not convincing. It is a triumph of hope over reality. Marriage long ago stopped being to the exclusion of all others and for life. If we don’t care about those two elements being disregarded by so many, why should we care about the “between a man and a woman” part?’

In other words, since marriages are already so fragmented, why not fragment further? Jesus says to that: ‘No way!’ Keep

the ideal. Marriage is the triumph of hope over reality!

See how that works? Do you let God's ideal drive your heart and thinking on marriage?

This means a number of things. On one hand we need to support the loosing of marriages for the right reasons. When a wife is the subject of domestic violence, we need to support her choices and help her to make the decisions that are hard. When a man finds that his wife has been unfaithful, we need to help him work through grace, forgiveness, as well as working out when the behaviour is toxic. Sometimes that relationship needs to be 'loosed'. When someone comes to us saying that their husband or wife has left

them, we need to work out how to love, support and care for them, and make sure that no guilt is placed on their shoulders.

On the other hand, it means that we need to work on our marriages, nourishing grace and kindness, love and good communication. We need to teach each other how to do conflict resolution and to ask for and grant forgiveness. We need to get better at time management, keeping expectations in place.

In the end however, we all need to work on the heart, and out of a 'new heart'. But that's for tomorrow. You see, marriage ultimately points higher. Marriage mirrors God's love for his people, and Christ's love for the church. So we uphold it while ever we can. We know we live in a com-

plex world, but we have Jesus' mind: one man who covenants to one woman and for life. As it says in Hebrews 13:4.

Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Pray

So pray for the marriages of people in our church. All of us can support and pray for those families. Pray for those 'in Christ' whose marriages are 'loosing', that they will use the 'gift' that Moses provided, but for the right reasons, not the wrong ones. Pray for your own marriage, what needs working on? And pray that we will all have the mind of Christ.