



Matthew 19:10–12

10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

11 Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the

sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Reflection

We're so fortunate to have the gospel of Matthew because in his story of Jesus' life Matthew has included five lengthy speeches given by Jesus. These five speeches are the most extensive collections of Jesus' teachings found anywhere in Scripture. We're in the middle of his fourth speech. It's a speech about the church. In particular, relationships within the church.

Jesus loves his church. One of the most precious images in the bible is the picture of Jesus being the groom and his church being his bride. Jesus loves his church so

much that he'd do anything for her. In fact he died for her. He laid down his life for her, sacrificed himself for his bride. This is such a precious image of the love Christ has for his church, his bride. The book of Ephesians picks up on this and says that in some mysterious way it's actually more than an image (Eph 5:32). It says that human marriage is somehow caught up into the relationship that Christ has with the church. Perhaps it is a foreshadowing of it, an anticipation of it – but either way, Christian marriage takes its model from Christ's relationship with his church.

We've been looking at marriage over the last couple of days, or perhaps I should say divorce? Where has this come from? Jesus is teaching us about relationships within the church. First Jesus taught us

how to become part of the church. He taught us how to enter into relationship with God and with each other. This was through childlike humility and faith. Then Jesus quite quickly turned to what might get in the way of these relationships, to what might divide the church, even tear a church apart. Of course this is sin. Unrepentant public sin can divide a church and so Jesus gave us four very practical steps by way of church discipline for dealing with this type of sin in the church. But sin like this isn't the only thing that divides churches. So does bitterness, holding grudges and unforgiving hearts. So Jesus next teaches us to forgive like we've been forgiven. Then in chapter 19 Jesus he sets his sights on another great sadness that can divide churches and tear people's lives apart. The sadness and re-

ality of marriage breakdown and divorce.

In today's passage Jesus' disciples are responding to his teaching on marriage and divorce. Clearly they've misunderstood something, or perhaps they're being cynical, and so they say to Jesus privately,

10 The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

It also isn't out of the question that they're joking with Jesus. Jesus has just raised up the institution of marriage to its appropriate heights. 'What God has joined together, let no one separate.' Yet Jesus and the other authors of the NT also deal in the realities of a sin saturated world and so Jesus has provided grounds for divorce

– sexual immorality – grounds which are added to in other parts of Scripture. But divorce is devastating and marriage is far more of a permanent, and unbreakable commitment than most in Jesus' day would have thought. So whether the disciples have misunderstood something, or are being cynical, or are simply having bit of a joke with Jesus, they point out perhaps rather cheekily that if these are the high standards of marriage it is better not to marry.

Wherever they are coming from Jesus isn't playing along. If they're somehow trying to present marriage in a bad light, or somehow suggesting that singleness is a secondary, kind of back-up option, Jesus isn't have a bar of it. Instead Jesus takes the opportunity they offer to raise

up singleness; without in any way detracting from what he's taught about marriage. Because the church isn't just made up of married people. And as important as marriage is, singleness too is to be celebrated. He says,

“Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

‘Not everyone can accept what I'm about to say, but there are some who can. There

are some who have been called to singleness.’ Some are unable to marry because of physical lack or deformity, and others in Jesus’ culture were made eunuchs by others, but there are those who have been called to singleness who choose singleness for the sake of the kingdom of God. Now Jesus is by no means raising the status of those who choose to stay single over those that marry. Not at all. But in the same breath we can admire their dedication to the kingdom. And it’s hard not to note that Jesus was single, and John the Baptist was single, and we’re pretty sure that so too was the Apostle Paul who highly commends singleness in 1 Cor 7 simply because of the extra time you’ll have to do Christ’s work in the world if you don’t have to divide that time between caring for your spouse and children.

Think

If Jesus celebrates both marriage and singleness then so should we. So please take some time now to think about marriage and singleness especially in your church community. If you're married, who do you know who is single? And if you're single, who do you know who is married? As brothers and sisters in Christ, as members of the family of God, are there any barriers between you? You might like to think about this dynamic in your church context and work out ways to cut across this social divide. What's something practical you can do this week?

Or perhaps you are single and desperately want deep in your heart to meet the

right Christian partner. Given Jesus' views about marriage these are good and natural desires. But so is remaining single if that's his will for your life. In fact, God even gives some Christians the gift of singleness which can mean a wholehearted devotion to the kingdom of God. And this is a very special thing indeed. But no matter the scenario we must never lose sight of the fact that our identity and worth isn't found in our marital situation, or in our career, or in anything else. It's found in Jesus.

Pray

Please close this morning by praying for single people that you know within your church. Being single can sit very heavily with some people, it can be very painful,

especially if singleness has been forced on them by an unfaithful partner. Pray that if it is God's will and theirs, that they'd find Christian partners, be blessed with children (if, again, that this is God's will and theirs), and that as families they'd go on to do great work for the kingdom of God. But equally, if God wants them to stay single, pray that they'd always feel loved, and never lonely, as part of the one big family of God that we're all a part of together. And pray that they might come to see their singleness (for however long it lasts) as a precious gift from God that they can use for the good of his kingdom.