



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Jesus and Divorce

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Mark 10:1-12

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¹And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.

² And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” ³ He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴ They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” ⁵ And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ ⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

¹⁰ And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹ And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, ¹² and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

(Pastor prays)

Why does the hurt, the stigma, and the cloud of divorce seem to hang around

so long over your head? I mean, for instance, when a loved one dies after a prolonged illness or even if there's a tragedy, you lose someone you love, the Christian community comes around you. People send you things and flowers. You have a funeral. We have meals. And God uses that to help us recover, and pretty soon the pain dulls enough that you can start walking again, even if it's with a limp. But divorce, why does it linger so? Maybe it's because there isn't a funeral. Or possibly, in our day and age with social media and you see everything, maybe it's because you are still aware of the offending party. There could be a sense of rejection that you feel. If you're in a Christian community, you may have a sense of shame or kind of the *Scarlet Letter* syndrome. Why does this particular breakup have such lasting effects on us?

I think Jesus deals with some of these questions in our passage. Let's get the context here. In chapter 10, Jesus is now leaving Galilee and Capernaum. He's back on the road, but He is not walking aimlessly. He is headed in a direction. With His ministry in Galilee over, He is now traveling to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, Jesus will complete His purpose of redemption. He will go to the cross and, at the cross, He will die in the place of sinners. He will take the judgment for every sin of every sinner that will ever be saved. But He's not there yet. He goes to a certain place. Mark tells us that it is across the Jordan. And in this place, He starts to teach about marriage. And as He teaches about marriage, by association, He starts teaching about divorce. Now, whether you are single or married, widowed or divorced, or divorced and remarried, this lesson is from Jesus. It's given to strengthen your heart and to soothe your mind so that you might flourish as a son or a daughter of God. Because the deeper lesson underneath this talk about marriage and divorce has to do with your relationship with God through Christ. I'll make this the title:

At the Heart of Marriage Is the Gospel

We want to be careful. Be careful. I'm going to use that as the phrase for each of our points. Let's go to the first one. What do we need to be careful about?

Be Careful How You Rationalize

Be careful how you take the truth and manipulate it to fit your situation so that you feel alright. Be careful with the “what about”-isms. Verse one tells us that He left there. He was in Capernaum. He’s leaving His hometown. He is now on the road. We find out that He went to a place called Judea, which is across the river. He crosses over to the place where John the Baptist used to live. It’s actually a place called Perea, and that’s where John the Baptist lived. That’s where John the Baptist preached and that’s where John the Baptist got in trouble. Do you remember why he got in trouble? It was because he spoke poorly about Herod Antipus and his new wife. Herod had decided he would take his brother’s wife. Herod got the power and so he took his brother’s wife. I don’t know what was the matter with his brother. But anyway, he married his brother’s wife. We don’t know the back story. What we know is that John the Baptist looked at that and said that he had broken the law. Well, you have got to be careful what you say about a king. Herod didn’t like it, but what was worse was that Herod’s new wife really didn’t like it, to have some preacher talking to her like that. And so when the time came, after John the Baptist had been put in prison, she had her daughter do a little dance in front of her new husband. It’s a weird family. Her new husband says, “What would you like for doing that dance for me and my friends?” She asked her mom and her mom says, “Ask him for the head of John the Baptist.” John the Baptist was killed because he spoke against divorce and remarriage. Now, Jesus is traveling through that region in verse one and He starts to teach, and He’s teaching on something totally different. Verse two tells us the Pharisees are there, and they know what happened to John the Baptist in that region. So they bring up something in verse two. Notice that it’s not a sincere question. The Pharisees came up and in order to test Jesus, to call attention to Him, they asked Him a question. This is what they ask: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” The way Matthew writes it, they asked the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *any reason*?”

Now for context, you’ve got what happened with John the Baptist and Herod. You also have in Judaism, at that time, two schools of thought. One is by Rabbi Shamai. He said that you can’t have a divorce unless there’s adultery

involved. Then there was another Rabbi who was teaching everybody that you could have a divorce for any reason you want. He even wrote out reasons. He listed a whole bunch of reasons. One of his reasons you can divorce your wife is if you come home and the meals she cooked you are burnt. Divorce her, it's fine. You can divorce her because she made a bad cup of coffee. You can divorce her because, on the way to the market, she was walking and she stepped off of a ledge and people saw her ankle. She showed her ankle. So for basically any reason, men could get a divorce. That's what's going on. That's the tension underneath.

And so the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus. They're hoping He'll say something that will get back to Herod. They're hoping that people will see that He is a narrow-minded fundamentalist. So what does Jesus do in verse three? Notice what He does. Jesus answered them and said, "You Pharisees, you believe Moses. What did Moses command?" You'll notice that Jesus hears something that is just right on the margin, so Jesus goes to the Bible to show the final authority. The Bible is our final authority. We get our truth from the Bible. So He says, "What did Moses say?" The Pharisees are going to quote Deuteronomy 24:1-4. They say that, according to Deuteronomy, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. Now if you go read the passage in Deuteronomy, Moses has said if you marry a woman and she displeases you in some regard—that something has happened—it is not going well and you are going to divorce her, you can't just put her in the street. People will think she's a prostitute. Instead, you make an official certificate of divorce and then she can go and remarry another person. Now, if that marriage ends and her new husband dies, you can't come back and get her. That's what Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is about. But instead, the Pharisees have ripped it over here and said, "Yeah, Moses said we can do whatever we want." That's twisting Scripture. Be careful, don't twist the Scripture to fit the spirit of the day. Be careful that you don't take the Bible and manipulate it. Moses had given the people a concession. In fact, in verse five, notice what Jesus says: *And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment."* Moses gave you

that as a concession, not a commandment. Why is the law given to us? It is to show us the holiness of God. The law shows us our own sinfulness, and the law of God is used to restrain evil. The reason Moses gave that to you is because you have a hard heart. Because you would have treated your wife terribly. And so that law is there to limit damage. This law is there to restrain evil. This law was there to protect victims. H.B. Charles is one of my favorite preachers. I love to hear him preach. He starts out real slow and then picks up speed as he goes. He wouldn't be any good in a drag race, but he's more like a freight train. You know what I mean? He's moving. He's moving real fast. And H.B. Charles looked at this and said, "You know, divorce might be the lesser of two evils but the lesser of two evils is still an evil." Let's not forget what God has said in Malachi 2. It says God hates it. Let's look straight at it now. God is never pleased with divorce. Even when He permits it. Yes, in Deuteronomy 24, He is permitting it to protect the woman, to restrain evil, and to provide justice. But when you look at the perfect law of God, be careful about the "what about us?" And be careful with the rationalization. Be careful how you might manipulate or how you might twist or even ignore what God has said. Be careful. Let's go further and see other things we need to be careful with. Here's the second thing, number two:

Be Careful Who You Listen To

Look what Jesus does when He starts to talk about marriage in verse six. There can be a whole lot in verse six. I mean, in verse six you find Jesus and His view of Creation. You find Jesus and His view of Scripture. You find Jesus and His view of gender. "*But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'*" This is Jesus talking. He's using Creation, from the beginning; He's quoting the Bible. God made them male and female. So what does Jesus affirm right here in verse six? Here's a little bit of an aside. So right here in verse six, Jesus affirms the historicity of Creation. He says that we didn't come from ooze. God created. Jesus affirms the historicity of Creation. I'm going to go further. Jesus affirms the historicity of the original Adam and Eve. Jesus affirms the authority and the reliability of Scripture. The Pharisees have asked Him a question and for Him to give them an answer, and He says,

“Let me point you back to what God said.” So He uses the Bible. When you hear someone say that the inerrancy of the Scripture or the infallibility of Scripture is a man-made doctrine, it is, but that man was Jesus. He’s the one who gave it to us. He’s the one who’s pointed back to the authority of the Bible. Not only that, be careful when you get to theology. Be careful. Don’t get your theology off *TikTok*. Do you hear me? You go to the Bible. Jesus has said that this is where we get our authority. Notice what else Jesus affirms in verse six: the goodness of gender. He says, “But from the beginning of Creation,” then He quotes the Bible. He’s quoting the Bible in Genesis one. God made them male and female. He has made it so that humans are binary in nature. This verse right here is from the mouth of Jesus quoting Genesis. This makes us take a hard look at the entire transgender movement. And the entire transgender movement that has swept the nation is nothing more than a dystopian reversal of God’s good creation of a man and a woman. That’s all it is. You don’t even have to be a Christian to see that. You don’t have to be a Christian to be watching an *ESPN* women’s swim event, and see it won by a really large person that gets out with a woman’s swimsuit on but is obviously a man. He’s standing in a crowd of women and he’s six to eight inches a foot taller than all of them. Or if you’d like to watch *MMA* and a man gets in the ring presenting himself as a woman and that man brutally beats a woman up. Now, a country that can watch that and call it entertainment cannot long last. You don’t have to be a Christian to know that is wrong. You don’t have to be a Christian to know boys don’t hit girls. I mean, as Christians, this verse six is partly why we can’t affirm same-sex marriage, or so-called same-sex marriage. Because according to God’s Word and the affirmation of Jesus right here, there is no such thing. Jesus is taking Creation to show us what marriage is. Marriage is not just a Christian invention, it is a Creation ordinance. And it is given to humanity for humanity’s good. God designed marriage to be the union of two different sexes, two different but complementary sexes for the flourishing of society. You can change all the laws you want but you can’t change divine order. Be careful now. Be careful how you rationalize. Be careful how you feel pulled in you one way and you decide I can probably have a foot here and a foot there. Jesus Himself, in this passage, reaches back

to Adam and Eve to affirm what God's Word has said. He presents marriage as something created by God to be between a man and a woman. Be careful who you listen to. Let me give you a third thing to be careful of. You'll find this in verses seven and eight. Number three:

Be Careful Where Your Loyalty Lies

Or, be careful who you're loyal to. I get that from verses seven and eight. Verses seven and eight are direct quotations from Genesis 2:24. Jesus is making the argument of the longevity of marriage based on Creation. Let me read it along with verse nine: *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”* So you've heard the leave and cleave. The leaving, that this is an abandoning, you are walking away from the security of the home. You were a part of the provision of your dad's home, of the protection of being there. But you leave that, and you go out on your own. You take hold of that woman and you keep her as tight as you can. What verse eight says is that it is so tight, this covenant, that it will be as if you are one flesh. No longer two but one. That's the Covenant of Marriage, and it is a picture of the gospel. When Paul is trying to explain the relationship between the Church and Christ, God brings to mind for him the picture of marriage. And Paul, in Ephesians five, uses marriage to explain how the Church and Christ relate. Remember what it says in Ephesians 5:22-25. Paul writes, *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.*

Here's the relationship for husbands. What did Christ do? He goes to the cross and He dies in the place of sinners. And Paul says to husbands that that's what you do. Do you see how he takes marriage and infuses it with the gospel? Do you see that marriage has the highest regard of God? It's given at

Creation. It displays the gospel.

Maybe you're not clear on the gospel. The gospel tells us that God has loved you, even when you are a rebel, and you are running from Him. You didn't know He existed. He loved you. He loved you to the degree that He gives us Jesus. Jesus is the God-Man, the Perfect One. Jesus lives perfectly. He follows all of the commandments of God—all of them. He always honored His father and mother. He never murdered, never committed adultery, never told a lie, never stole. He didn't covet. He kept all of the commandments you can think of. He kept them all in a way that we can't. And at the cross, He does something different. The Perfect One takes all the punishment. That's what the cross is. The cross is punishment. God punishes Jesus in our place. So He takes the wrath that we deserve, and then we get the life He earned. He gives that to you. So that anything you've done, He takes the punishment, and all the perfection He did, you get that righteousness. The gospel here becomes a picture of marriage. Be careful where your loyalty lies. Let me give you a fourth thing to be careful of. Number four:

Be Careful of Your Foundation

Verse nine: *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."*

I'll say that every time I finish a wedding ceremony. We stand there and go through the vows and then after the vows, I will charge the husband and wife with their responsibilities. I'll say, "By the power invested in me by God in the great state of North Carolina, I now pronounce you man and wife." They will kiss. And when they do that, the crowd gets really excited and everybody claps. And I'll stand over to the side and I'll say, *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."* Jesus is the one that's pointing to the permanency. What does He say? God did marriage. God brought you together. And if God has done this, man must not undo it. If I had to give a definition of marriage, I would say it like this: marriage is the God-ordained indissoluble union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant. It's a lifelong covenant relationship to display the gospel of grace. Let me say it again:

marriage is a God-ordained indissoluble union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant relationship. What's it for? It's to display the gospel of grace. It is the foundation of a society. It is given to us for our good and for God's glory. Now, to treat marriage flippantly is to treat God's Word flippantly. Now, that is going to lead me to my last point. All of you that have been through a divorce; you are divorced or you've been remarried after divorce and you wonder where you fit. Here is my last point, number five:

Be Careful What You Count as Sacred

Verses 10-11 are heavy, but join me there. Jesus has taught all of these things. He did it out in front of everybody. So, like the disciples always did, they said let's have a conference after this, and in verse 10, they're asking Him to revisit what He said about divorce— *And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.* And in verses 11-12, it's as if He's saying, "Okay, I'm going to try to make this as clear as I possibly can." Notice what it says verse 11: *And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her..."* And then Jesus adds something that is only legal in Rome: *"...and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."* What Jesus is going to say will be hard for you to listen to. Keep looking at it now, stay with me. Divorce is a violation of God's intention for marriage. It always is, and it always involves some kind of sin. And to show how serious it is, Jesus quotes the commandments. That's what He's doing, quoting Exodus 20:4. He quotes the seventh commandment, and He says that if you divorce your wife, or you divorce your husband, you break the seventh commandment.

It's depressing. I mean that's it. That's the end. Especially when I know so many people I love and respect and call friends who have walked through divorce. What do you do here? What do you do with this? Well, remember what we're doing now. We always take a passage in its context. What Jesus has done here in verses 11 and 12 is that He has pointed to the mountain of God where the law is given in Mount Sinai, and He's pointed up to the 10 Commandments. And this is what it says: you broke those but don't forget,

Jesus is on the road. He's headed to a different mountain. He is headed to Mount Calvary. And at Mount Calvary, He will then take the punishment for every commandment broken on Mount Sinai. And look at me, if you've gone through a divorce and you've felt weird in the church, let me just tell you that on Mount Calvary, all the judgment, all the shame, all the stigma, all the wrath, all of it, He takes it all at the cross. And once again, what He does is not just take the wrath from you, He then brings to you a sparkling white garment, the one of a virgin bride, and puts it on you, washing you, cleansing you and making you His. Because at the heart of marriage is the gospel of Jesus Christ. You put your faith in Christ, and you believe that where the gospel is, there is hope, there is restoration, there is joy, there is forgiveness. There is a future. Where the gospel is, there is a promise. Thank the Lord for that.

(Pastor prays)