KINGDOM of HEAVEN

A SERIES IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

Matthew 5:27-32 & 19:1-12

(Sermon from Sunday 21 May 2023, Richard van Lieshout)

Approach this week

This week we deal with the difficult topic of Marriage & Divorce. The subject comes up in the second example of Jesus's treatment on the law, but he only deals with it in summary form in the Sermon on the Mount. Later, in chapter 19, he deals with the subject extensively (the longest single passage on marriage and divorce in the Bible).

I did not think it would be helpful to only glance at the subject of divorce, and not deal with the extensive teaching, given the sensitive nature of the topic.

For that reason I dealt with both passages in the sermon. I also dealt (briefly) with the topic as presented in 1 Corinthians 7.

As you can imagine, trying to adequately unpack three passages on a difficult topic in one sermon is challenging, to say the least!

For that reason, in the sermon, I focused more on the direct implications of the passages, without going into a lot of detail on the text itself.

However, since the subject is so sensitive, and since there are nuances in the text that require time to adequately deal with, I decided to have an open Q&A forum on the Tuesday after the sermon (**23 May**).

My main aim was to ensure that, as far as possible, people understood the texts. The Q&A session would not primarily be a 'counselling' session, although I do anticipate lots of practical questions, the main aim would be to ensure that we're not confused about what Jesus is saying.

As to the implications, we trust that people, guided by the Spirit, would reach conclusions through personal interaction with other Christians.

To that end, we strongly advise that if there are any members in your group who are a) considering divorce or b) have been divorced, and are not sure that it was for Biblical reasons, that you direct them to one of our Elders for personal counsel (or to yourself, if you feel adequately equipped to handle the subject!).

Our Elders have discussed the topic and are ready to interact with people who are wrestling with these questions in their own lives.

Elders can be approached directly, but also through our new 'helpline': letschat@ruc.org.za.

Suggested Resources

However, should you wish to progress as per usual with your group, I can suggest reading through the sermon notes of **Daniel Akin** on these two passages, which can be found here. I came across his material in one of the resources I'm using, which is a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount by Akin, in the 'Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary' series. You can find the book here. The material in the book is just a formatted version of his sermon. I can also send you my sermon notes too if you think that would be helpful (I cover a lot of additional ground on lust, pornography etc).

For a comprehensive view on marriage and divorce I highly recommend the book by J**im Newheiser** 'Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage' available here. It is helpfully divided into 40 questions on the topic.

Wayne Grudem's book 'What the Bible says about Divorce and Remarriage' is also helpful. You can find it here.

Group Discussion Questions

In Akin's book he suggests the following questions for discussion, based on the text. Use them if you wish!

1. The Bible describes God's relationship to his people as a marriage (see Eph 5:25-33; Rev 19:7-9). How does this teaching help us understand Jesus's teaching in Matthew better? What was the only exception Jesus gave for divorce? What other exception did Paul offer? Why are all other reasons not valid?
2. In what ways is Jesus's prohibition of divorce a good thing for us?
3. This chapter shows the many reasons divorce occurred in the first century. Is our culture more or less like that context in our inclination to divorce? Why or why not?
4. Should one try to seek divorce immediately upon discovering a spouse's sexual immorality?
5. If a spouse is repentant, how can the gospel be shown through a reconciled marriage? What other benefits are there when a marriage is reconciled?
6. This chapter teaches that divorce should not be the norm in the Christian community. What can the church do to help marriages last?
7. Why would it be wrong for a Christian who has divorced and remarried to reunite with his or her first spouse?
8. Jesus's teaching about divorce comes immediately after his teaching about lust. How are these two connected?
9. Place marriage in the Bible's story line. What was God's design for marriage? flow has it been tvisted by sin? How can Christians bring healing to marriage through the gospel? How will Christ restore marriage completely one day?