

Refuge City Church — April 14, 2024
Gospel of Matthew: “Issues of Life: Divorce” (Matthew 5:31-32)

Introduction

- Last Week, we started a new section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount.
 - Six sections dealing with issues of life that everyone is tempted by or struggles through.
 - Anger, lust, divorce, keeping your word, retaliation, and how to deal with those you may consider “your enemy”; Each pertaining to *relationship*.
 - *The* most God-honoring relationship we’ve been given is marriage.
- **REMEMBER:** In all these issues, Jesus points us back to the source for our consideration...where does our heart trend when these issues arise?

- A post-Christian world is not going to honor biblical marriage.
 - Divorce rate still hovers around 40%; even within the church.
 - Cohabitation has been steadily on the rise [living together outside of marriage; ‘test run’]
 - According to a survey a few years back, 57% of Christians say ‘casual sex’ before marriage is acceptable.
 - The continued normalization of homosexual marriage and transgender ideology.
 - Overall, marriage in the US is deteriorating into an institution full of sin-filled philosophies and anti-biblical practices.
- The intimate, covenantal relationship between a husband and wife should be one of thankful praise for what God created.
- So Jesus challenges what some will lean on when *their version* of marriage dries up.
 - In a direct follow up to the conversation on adultery, Jesus jumps right into the sanctity of marriage.
 - 2023 study: 34% of marriages ended due to an affair.
 - Top reasons for divorce: commitment, infidelity, & communication.

Matthew 5:31-32

“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

- The law = **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man’s wife, and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.”

- The reason = *indecenty* [not adultery, as that warranted death by the law; improper, shameful, or indecent behavior leading up to the point of adultery]
- Why would God give such a law to His people??
 - There are a couple reasons for the law
 - Laws inform you of what you can do [provision]
 - Laws inform you of what you should not do [prevention]
 - Through this law, God is showing the adulterous nature of what happens if divorce occurs.
 - **Verse 4:** The wife becomes defiled... Why? The grounds for divorce were unclear and therefore she was still married in the eyes of the Lord.
 - Ultimately, we look at this law as an *allowance* by God, under proper circumstances, to keep one from the sin of adultery which carried far greater consequences.
- The 'legalists' of Jesus' day were looking at divorce as being justified for any reason, as long as a certificate accompanied the declaration.
 - Most Pharisees came from 2 different schools of thought in Jesus' day.
 - School of Shammai: divorce was restricted to the indecency of sexual misconduct.
 - School of Hillel: divorce was justified for *any* cause of complaint.
- So let's look at another conversation Jesus had with some Pharisees regarding their question about divorce.

Matthew 19:3-6

"And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his 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."

- Knowing the Pharisees hold to their interpretation of the Law, Jesus responds with authoritative understanding of the law.
 - God's Word is authoritative. Not man's interpretation or emotional opinion of it.
- Jesus provides the answer.
 - He brings them, and us, back to God's *original intent* regarding marriage.
 - **Genesis 2:24**, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." ...and then Jesus adds, "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
 - **QUOTE:** "... the argument here is expressed not in terms of what cannot happen, but of what *must not* happen... To break up a marriage is to usurp the function of God by whose creative order it was set up, and who has decreed that it shall be a permanent 'one flesh' union." [R.T. France]
- This is not the only reference to the marriage covenant in scripture.
 - On multiple occasions, God discussed marriage, and used His relationship with His people as an example of a covenant relationship.

- We see it with the advent of sin, and the breakdown of relational purity and harmony; thus the provisions of serious consequences for breaking such a covenant.
 - [10 Commandments] **Exodus 20:14, 17**, “You shall not commit adultery... you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife...”
 - **Leviticus 20:10**, “If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.” [along with other forms of fornication: adultery, incest, polygamy, homosexuality, bestiality, etc.]
 - **Jeremiah 2-3**: God shows in all the ways Israel had broken her covenant relationship after all that God had done for them.
 - Likening them to ‘whoring’ after anything and anyone but God; they therefore committed adultery against God.
 - **Jeremiah 3:8**, “...for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce.”
 - **Malachi 2:13-16 NLT**, “Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord’s altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn’t accept them with pleasure. You cry out, “Why doesn’t the Lord accept my worship?” I’ll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows. Didn’t the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. “For I hate divorce!” says the Lord, the God of Israel. “To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”
 - **LASTWEEK**: Your religious practice is not accepted by God when there remain unrepentant sin. Go deal with it, and then bring your offering!
- God designed a divine, unbreakable bond in marriage.
 - If we truly seek to understand biblical marriage, and sought to exemplify that in our relationships, we would have fewer discussions regarding divorce.
 - **Matthew 19:7-8**, “They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.”
 - “Hardness of heart”: Refusing to accept God’s law, love, and grace.
 - The allowance for divorce does not, and should never equate to a *mandate* for it.
 - **Matthew 19:9**, “And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”
 - “The Exception Clause”: It is an exception due to the destruction that adultery can bring to all lives involved [husband, wife, children, and their surrounding community]
 - This should never be looked at as a command.
 - Understanding the various situations of those who have gone through divorce, remarriage, or may be currently navigating it...consider your heart and where God needs you to be.
 - **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**, “To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.”

Conclusion

- *Retreat is not an option!*
- The institution of marriage, as God intended, has been under attack since the beginning of time! It was attacked in the garden. It was attacked in Jesus' day. It's being attacked today!
- Your marriage is under attack from forces both external AND internal.
 - A culture and society driven by sexual promiscuity; established by sin, and promoted by Satan. [**1 John 2:16**, "...the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life..."]
- If those things are allowed in to your marriage, and the longer it's left to infest, roots will grow deep, and slowly choke out anything pure that remains.
- Divorce, Irreconcilable differences, or even "Conscious uncoupling" is a serious problem in our country.
 - This mentality destroys the sanctity and purity of something so holy that God Himself created.
- Christian marriages [**which are to be a picture of the Church**] *must*, with all *urgency*, *fight* against *anything* that would seek to destroy what God has joined together.
 - There isn't anything that has been done that Christ cannot forgive, heal, and bring hope and reconciliation to a marriage.
 - **QUOTE:** "Marriage is glorious but hard. It's a burning joy and strength, and yet it is also blood, sweat, and tears, humbling defeats and exhausting victories."
[Timothy Keller]
- **Hebrews 13:4**, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous."
- Biblical Marriage is an example to the world of love, trust, grace, forgiveness, peace, and joy that only God provides in covenant relationship with Him and each other.
- **Ephesians 5:31-33**, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband."