



## **From the Beginning It Was Not So**

*Series: Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*

Matthew 19:1-12

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We have just come out of a very challenging chapter of Scripture in Matthew 18 and beloved, it doesn't get any easier today. We're going to talk about marriage today. It is the second time in Matthew that Jesus has talked about it, the first being back in the Sermon on the Mount. And I am so thankful that the underlying foundation of all of the commands and instruction of the Word of God is God's love for us, His heart of mercy toward us, His desire to bless us and do good to, for and in us. It is important for us to keep in mind, especially as we hear these really sharp and penetrating words from our Lord.

As we look at this text today, we need to remember that it is not possible that Jesus could articulate and explain the ethics of the Kingdom in anything other than ideal terms. It is what he did in the Sermon on the Mount and it is what He does here. He is going to describe marriage from God's eyes, as God intends it to be, and not as sinful man has made it to be. As we dig into this text, we are going to see that all of us who are married are desperately needy of God's grace in our marriage. And yet our Lord is just that – gracious, compassionate, consistently merciful to those who fail, repent, and come to Him for renewal, for strength to walk in holiness, and for restoration. There is no softening the words of Christ this morning. But here's the thing. This One who speaks authoritatively about marriage and divorce is the One who is immeasurably gracious toward fallen sinners who come to Him in humility and faith. He is our refuge, even when His teaching is strong.

And let me say one more thing. In what can become endless discussions of what are allowable contexts for divorce, what are special circumstances, what are loopholes to God's command and design for marriage, the command and the design itself can be lost. That is exactly what had happened with the Pharisees. We are not going to do that today. That is a discussion for the pastor's office or my living room, not for the pulpit. We all realize that we live in the fallen world and sometimes we have to choose between the lesser of two evils – but there is no way

to cover every possibility. Rather than deal with all of the what-ifs, we are going to focus where Jesus focuses His attention – on the divine plan for marriage before sin entered the creation. God’s design still stands and that is going to be our focus today. I have preached from this text back in May of 2011, when we were in Matthew 5, so you have heard much of what I am going to say, but it all bears repeating to the church and the reapplication of this text to our marriages. Pick it up with me and see first

An Insincere Question (v. 1-3) Look with me starting in verse 1: “Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”” (Matthew 19:1–3, ESV)

Jesus has finished instructing His disciples regarding His heart for His church and for the life of His church -- what life in the church should be like, how we should think about one another and act towards one another, how we should care for one another, how we should live together in community in a manner that displays and confirms the power of the gospel to save sinners and to transform the human heart. Now, He and his disciples break camp and leave Galilee for Judea to begin His trek toward the cross. Immediately swamped with crowds, Jesus is busy healing and ministering to the people when the Pharisees show up.

They have a really important question, or so it seems. “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause? Now why do they ask this question? It is not because they really care about the truth – they don’t and they never have. They are just simply trying to catch Jesus, trying to look for some way to accuse Him or to paint Him into a corner, a way to alienate Him. They want to try to get Him into a debate. This was an old, old question but also a hot contemporary issue. But the very fact that they asked it in the way that they did, demonstrated that the Pharisees had no concept of the either the weight or the worth of marriage at all. It was just another sacred thing to be debated and to be used as bait to catch Jesus, but Jesus turns it around on them beautifully and rather than focus on divorce, takes the issue back to the divine plan for marriage, back to the creation.

The Divine Plan For Marriage (v. 4-6) Starting in verse 4: “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.’” (Matthew 19:4–6, ESV)

In essence, Jesus says to them, “Haven’t you guys ever read Genesis? If you have you certainly didn’t understand it.” The question of when divorce is permissible and justified is the question of the Pharisee, of the legalist, of the outwardly religious and superficially righteous – it misses the heart of God in marriage altogether. The proper heart and desire of the disciple of the godly, of the kingdom citizen, of the disciple of Christ is to know the divine plan, the divine purpose, the divine beauty of marriage, to know what God intended in marriage and then to pursue that ideal by His empowering grace and steadfast love and mercy. And Jesus wastes not time in explaining exactly what the divine intent in marriage is.

Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female? – Marriage, He says, is God’s plan. From the very beginning God ordained marriage. He created it and it is the very reason why He made mankind male and female. Marriage is good and holy and God intended it to be a wonderful blessing for mankind. That is what Jesus is saying. So beautiful is marriage, so excellent is it, that marriage is the very picture that God uses to describe, the prism through which God illustrates the covenant relationship that God has with His people through out the OT and which Christ has with His Church. The reason that God uses this picture of marriage to illustrate his relationship with his people is because marriage is more than a contract, more than a convenience – marriage is a covenant, a sacred covenant. That much is made clear by the words that are used to describe it – leaving, cleaving, one flesh. That is the language of covenant. Jesus saw marriage as a covenantal commitment between a man and a woman to love in a permanent and exclusive union of two lives for the glory of God and for joy of the two who are married, united by God to bring forth godly offspring and to bring glory to God by magnifying His covenant love and union with His people whom He has made for Himself.

Eve, the woman, was created for Adam exclusively. She was made for him and to be prized by him above every other relationship but his relationship with God. She was made for him to respond to him in the same manner. God did not make 3 Or 4 women for Adam, He made one. God did not create another man to alleviate Adam’s loneliness, He made for him Eve. Do you see? The first and primary relationship for a man or for a woman, next to God, is his wife or her husband – not the bros, not her girlfriends. That was never the intention. Marriage as God

designed it to be involves the total commitment and consecration of the husband and the wife to one another and to God Himself as the divine author of their union and witness to their covenant. Jesus reminds us of all of this as He quotes from Genesis regarding God's heart for marriage:

A man shall leave his father and his mother—The first step in establishing the marriage covenant is the leaving of all other relationships, including the closest ones of father and mother. All other relationships, all lesser relationships must yield to this newly formed marital relationship. A leaving behind of every other relationship must take place and the marriage relationship takes precedence over every other earthly relationship and pursuit – that includes family, jobs, hobbies, friends, past pursuits, everything. In the divine picture of marriage, there is a leaving of the old life, a decisive break with our old lives. We leave and we cleave...

A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast (or cleave) to his wife – This idea of holding fast or cleaving to someone is at the very heart of covenant faithfulness to one another. The Hebrew word for cleave is the idea of being permanently glued or joined together, to stick with someone. It is one of those words that is used to describe the idea of exclusivity and permanence. Just as God commits Himself to His people, joins Himself to His people throughout Scripture saying: "I will be your God and you shall be my people" – this at the very heart of marriage and the covenant of God with His people. Holding nothing back, I am exclusively, loyally, faithfully, utterly, entirely and permanently yours. That is the idea of cleaving. Marriage by God's design is that we leave, we cleave and

The two shall become one flesh—Marriage is a creative work of God. From two people God makes one flesh. This is about so much more than the sexual aspect of marriage. It includes that, but it is so much more. It means our lives are bound up with one another in every way. Emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, financially, physically and in every other way, the husband and the wife become one. They have been divinely united to each other in a way that they will never be with anyone else. Everything that affects one affects the other. To tear away at the relationship is as the ripping of one's flesh; a severing of the limbs and tissue and organs that make up the whole. In marriage, the word "my" gets replaced with the word "our." It means that as a husband and a wife, the entirety of our lives are folded into one another and I can no longer live to myself or for myself. The husband and wife become one functioning unit – two people interpenetrating one another's lives in such a way that we become one flesh – one new entity. It is an extraordinary thing, and we will never plumb its depth. It involves the

joining of our spirit to someone else's. It involves the intertwining of our emotional life with theirs. It involves physical intimacy, taking on life together, and raising a family together (if God allows children to be born). Marriage grants the deepest possible intimacy in earthly relationships, deeper by far than the relationship with the children that come from our bodies or our parents before us. I love my kids deeply and I have a strong bond with all of them yet, I am not one flesh with them. I am one flesh only with my wife. We share one life together. And it points so beautifully to God's covenant with His people.

The underlying purpose of God's covenant, through the Bible, is to create for Himself a people to whom He will unchangeably give Himself as their God and Lord, and who will give themselves to Him as His people, a people with whom God will dwell in communion and union. And that is exactly what marriage is to reflect a man and a woman giving themselves unchangeably to one another, freely and fully. Out of two independent people, God makes a husband and wife, one flesh. The woman for the man, created from his rib, taken from his side to be his helpmate and his partner in life, to be his covenant love, to seek the heart of God and to know Him together and to display His glory in the earth. Of two, God makes something new.

And even more, though the Pharisees never would have known this -- because it was as yet still a mystery -- on this side of the cross, we know that marriage has an even more exalted purpose: to reflect the beauty of the relationship of Jesus with His church. We read in Ephesians chapter 5: 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, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "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. (Eph 5:22-32) Our God has established Christian marriage as the picture of Christ's perfect relationship to His Church. For that reason, godly marriage is never the absorption with self or what you can get out of it, nor is it about making a idol of your spouse. It is not just about your happiness or satisfaction. It is about the glory of God's grace to His people. Your

marriage is a stage for God's love and redemptive grace. And yet a biblical marriage is such a great blessing. In reflecting the relationship of Christ to His church, marriage grants the greatest of joys possible – love, care, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical intimacy and oneness. Not that there will not be trials, but there are great joys to be had.

Do you see? Marriage is the only relationship that can reflect the scope and the glory of the Father's covenant with His people, of Christ's union with His church. The reason is clear. Marriage was made by God to be the single most lasting relationship in life. Parents eventually die, children grow up and leave the home, brothers and sisters form their own families, friendships are fragile and changing, but marriage is the one relationship in which people live in the same house, eat at the same table, and sleep in the same bed as long as they both shall live. Husband and wife promise to love and to trust each other, to make their lives with one another, without reservation or qualification. It is the only relationship, a relationship established by God from the very beginning in the Garden of Eden, which can approximate God's union with His people.

Rather than be sucked into a debate regarding the permissible and justifiable reason for divorce, Jesus instead magnified the beauty of marriage. When we consider all that God designed marriage to be, we have to realize that just because you may have been married a long time or short time and have never been divorced does not mean that you have a marriage that looks like this. The truth is there are many marriages that remain together out of convenience, for the sake of reputation, marriages that are devoid of the passionate faithfulness and love that is to characterize the union of two believers in Christ. They are satisfied with less than the divine design. There are too many who are functionally married singles with their own separate lives but who share the same bed and roof, those who are married in name only but whose marriages lack vitality and intimacy, joy, a sense of purpose or shared life. That is just as much a denial of the divine purpose of marriage as divorce is.

So Jesus reiterates the divine blueprint and beauty of marriage and then He finishes by saying: What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. His whole point is this: God is the one who joins people in marriage. God is the one who forges one flesh from two. God is the author of marriage, not man, and we have no right to tamper with what God has done. It is an attempt to uncreate what God has created, to undo what God has done. To see divorce as man undoing the work of God puts the whole issue in a radically new perspective. But the

message is lost on the Pharisees. Rather than receive the truth they offer a confused counterpoint.

#### A Confused Counterpoint and Clarification (v. 7-9)

The Pharisees still don't get it. "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." (Matthew 19:7-8, ESV) The passage that the Pharisees were referring to was Deuteronomy 24:1-4, a passage they had deliberately misread. There Moses said this: ""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." (Deuteronomy 24:1-4, ESV)

The heart of this text is easy to comprehend. What Moses was saying was that if a man finds some indecency in his wife (something short of adultery by the way, since the penalty for that was death) and he divorces her, giving her a certificate of divorce, and she then marries someone else who in time either divorces her or dies, then the first husband was not allowed to remarry her. Why was this instruction given? Because there was a problem with casual divorce in Israel. This instruction by Moses does not provide for divorce, much less command divorce, nor does it make divorce inconsequential in any way. To read it that way is to really read into the text what you want to be there.

All of that to say, the Pharisees – surprise – were wrong in their interpretation of the Word of God. God, Who made marriage in the beginning, did not approve of their sin of divorce. Instead, as Jesus makes clear here, divorce is an evidence of the depravity and hardness of man's heart in sin. It was never God's plan. How could it be? There was only one man and one

woman in the beginning and for that very obvious reason, marriage and divorce was not an option. Nevertheless, Jesus goes on to say

“And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (Matthew 19:9, ESV) Beloved, this is pretty straight forward, isn't it? From Jesus' perspective, the very straightforward reading of this text tells us that divorce and remarriage without one spouse being guilty of sexual immorality becomes adultery. The word that is translated here as sexual immorality is the Greek word, “porneia.” It's a wide-ranging word that includes such things as: adultery, homosexuality, sexual abuse of minors, voyeurism, addiction to pornography, and the like. Divorce is not to be condemned when a husband or a wife persists in these kinds of sexual sins and are unrepentant of them because the exclusiveness of marriage covenant has already been broken. But notice something: Jesus is not commanding divorce in this case. In God's eyes, the better way is always the way of love and grace, repentance and restoration. It may seem impossible, but nothing is impossible with God. God is not for divorce. It is never God's will. God never rejoices over divorce. Divorce is always the result of sin. Always.

This "exception" is an act of mercy from God toward those who are trapped in a situation in which one's spouse is aggressively and habitually violating the marriage vow. But let's remember: To focus on this exception clause and make it the key point of this passage is to commit the same error as the scribes and Pharisees had committed with respect to the letter of the law. Marriage is to be binding. The response of the disciples to all of this is somewhat surprising. They seem to have more in common with the Pharisees than they do with Jesus.

A Surprising Statement (v. 10) Look at it in verse 10: “The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”” (Matthew 19:10, ESV) They understand the seriousness with which Jesus is speaking of marriage. They understand that Jesus is saying that marriage is a weighty and serious thing, a covenantal commitment to between a man and a woman to live in a permanent and exclusive union of two lives, a great blessing and gift from God and not a casual contract or a temporary relationship. There was no divorce before the fall, and there should be none for the members of the kingdom in whom the ravages of the fall are being restored. The disciples hear what Jesus has to say and their sinful and immediate response is: Man, if that the case, it's better to remain single.” At which point the young unmarried guys started to high five. But notice something, Jesus doesn't soften what He says. Jesus does not equivocate, does not beat around the bush” at all in His answer to His disciples.



An Unequivocal Answer (v. 11-12) “But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.” (Matthew 19:11, ESV) In other words, what Jesus is saying is this: “You know what, you are right. If you cannot enter marriage with a strong spiritual resolve to remain faithful and devoted to the end, if you cant treat this as the blessing that it is, if you do not understand and embrace the weightiness of having a marriage that reflects God’s original intent, it is better for you not to marry at all.” Jesus goes on to drive this point home saying:

“For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”” (Matthew 19:12, ESV)

Wow. Jesus words here are kind of uncomfortable, aren’t they? We all know what a eunuch is. A eunuch is a man who as a result of being castrated, cannot enter into the sexual union of marriage, cannot become in the physical sense, one flesh. Jesus is using graphic language here to say that there are really three kinds of eunuchs in the world. There are those who are eunuchs as a result of physical deformity; those who are eunuchs by action or injury – for instance the men who used to guard kings’ harems were often made eunuchs for obvious reasons; and then there are those who are eunuchs by choice – for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The first thing most commentators will do is take these words and springboard to the discussion of singleness that Paul has in 1 Corinthians 7. That can be a secondary application for sure, but I think the context of these words really needs to drive our understanding of them.

Jesus has been laboring and demonstrating to show the worth and the value of marriage, the serious and weighty commitment and blessing that it is, something not to be entered into lightly or to be treated as insignificant or casual. Instead, marriage is an institution of God, a stage for His glory, something intended to reflect the steadfast, sacrificial, intense, unending, forgiving, grace-filled covenant love of God for His people and the intense joys of union and communion with Him as husband and wife commune with one another and love one another. I believe, therefore, that what Jesus is saying here is that if you cannot enter marriage with this kind of intent, then do not be married – for the sake of the testimony of the kingdom of

heaven, for the sake of the gospel, remain single. These are high expectations by Jesus and that is why He closes by saying: Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.

It is clear that Jesus has a much higher view of marriage than do the Pharisees, a much higher expectation, a much higher vision of marriage than the Pharisees and, I would say, than the vast majority of Christendom today. If we are honest, we have to admit that ours is a throw-away society when it comes to relationships – not just marriages, but all relationships. Many give up too easily on spouses, children, parents, friends, and siblings, both in blood families and church families. When a relationship no longer does it for us, when it is no longer enjoyable, when it is no longer “working for me”, when it requires “too much” we are so quick to get rid of it, no matter what the relationship is – but especially marriage.

And yet, Jesus’ point was that marriage was something to be held in high esteem. There is no other relationship on earth more important or more sacred than this one is. To belittle it with tactless jokes, to neglect it in favor of other things, to refuse to invest your heart in your marriage, or to trample upon it by indulging in sexual immorality, to destroy what God loves and what God has joined is great sin. Marriage is to be held in the highest esteem.

Here’s the truth beloved, the vast majority of people, including many, many Christians do not know the joy of the self-giving, self-sacrificing, devoted and faithful love that knits two hearts together in a God glorifying and soul-satisfying marriage that nourishes the soul. Instead of the rich, growing, deepening, intimate, satisfying and meaningful relationship that only that kind of love can bring, they settle for a cheap, shallow, stunted, distant, and disappointing substitute. Some of you are in this kind of a marriage. But beloved, when two Christians really love Christ as they should, and love each other for the other’s sake and seek to live in humble submission to Christ, to His word and to one another; when two Christians really determine to love one another on this earth above everyone else, there is union that is formed that is so strong that it can withstand and conquer every temptation, every trial, every disappointment and every sin that Satan and this world can throw against them. They forgive one another because Christ has forgiven them. They must love one another because Christ has loved them. They must serve one another as Christ has served them. When Christians are determined to live for Christ, as real Christians are, the result is always a faithful marriage. That man and woman become one flesh, friends and lovers in a way that unbelievers and rebellious Christians have no hope of ever knowing. In sharing the whole of their lives together with one another, they build a relationship that knows no bounds, no conditions, no secrets – but one that is beautiful and

pleasing to God and truly satisfying to their souls. That is marriage the way that God intended it, marriage that Christ loves and protects with His words in this text. A marriage that points faithfully to God's love for His people.

You may need to confess today that your marriage does not look like what God intended from the beginning of creation. Instead of being marked by joy and commitment, it is too often a stage for bitterness, anger, pride, coldness, lust, unforgiveness and disappointment. Do not give up. Do not be satisfied with that. I can say to you that in my experience as a pastor, I have seen couples that have overcome some of the most horrible sins and failures in their marriage, some of the most horrific things you could imagine, to find renewal and resurrection, really, through real repentance and forgiveness, and through a true desire to see God restore them, by His grace, to a union of real love. Christ's power can do this. Do not give up hope – give up your pride and come to Christ for healing and restoration. His grace is sufficient.

You may need to confess today, if you have been divorced and remarried in a way that has been in disobedience to God, that you have been guilty of not valuing marriage as you should. What should you do? Recognize that you are sinners who need a Savior, that you have sinned against God and that you need forgiveness and grace. We need to confess our sin, admit that our divorce was an offense against God. If you were unbiblically divorced, then you confess it and repent of it as you would any sin. You cannot go back and try to unscramble the egg; that will just result in more sin. Having confessed your sin, trust in Christ's forgiving grace, give yourself fully over to Him in the marriage you are now in.

No matter what, all of us who are married -- what we need to do today is to repent of the ways in which our marriage has not reflected the divine will and plan for marriage, the ways that we have fallen short in fulfilling the divine picture of the covenant of marriage. Perhaps we need to repent of our low view of marriage, of our unfaithfulness to God or to our spouse. Be honest about the state of your marriage and seek God's grace for it. We all need to pursue a marriage that will please God. It is not optional.

How do we do that? As we close this morning, I want to read to you the words of another preacher from another era named John Brown. I have read these words to you before, but they deserve to be repeated. Old as they are, his biblical understanding is as relevant now as it has

ever been. I modernized the language so it is more easily understood, but think about what he says here.

Few things have done more to promote the happiness and the moral improvement of man, than our Lord's re-establishing the principle that the marriage relationship is unbreakable save for one cause. Let all who are married, seriously consider the nature of what it means to be married, and the importance of their duties. Let them consider, that since are one flesh, they ought also to have one mind and heart. Let them consider, that as they are so intimately connected, they ought to love and cherish each other with the same attention and affection, as they do their own bodies. Let them strive to have the same inclinations and desires, as they have the same interests, and guard against all disputes and disagreements. Let them beware of all irritating language or disrespectful treatment, and always be kind and gracious to one another. Let them bear with each other's weaknesses; study each other's character; make an effort to correct each other's failures. Let them always conduct themselves with gentleness, and perform their respective duties faithfully, though they may not receive the return they have a right to expect. Let them suppress every dislike, which might produce in their mind even a wish to be separated, or which might render them more negligent in the duties which they owe to each other. Let them bear with, and forgive, and make peace with, and comfort, and cheer one another. Let them consider themselves as obligated by love to promote to the uttermost of their power, not only the present happiness, but the future joy of each other. Let them often together draw near the throne of the Father, and pray for one another, mutually exhorting, instructing, and comforting one another. Let them live together as heirs of the grace of life, as those who know that death, the only lawful cause of separation, will soon cut the otherwise unbreakable bond; and let them seek to be bound together by a tie, which even death itself cannot dissolve, - even the faith of the same truth—the gospel, the love of the same Savior, the hope of the same salvation. Thus will they spend a happy lifetime together on earth: thus will they spend a happy eternity together in heaven.

Let me tell you where this all begins. It all begins with Christ, knowing Christ as Savior, obeying Him as Lord, loving and abiding in Christ. Whenever anyone talks to us about marriage counseling, it all starts with this question: “Tell me how you are trusting Christ and abiding in Him.” Then the follow-up question is usually something along the lines of: “Tell me how that is impacting your marriage.”

May we all pursue marriages that please our Savior and King.

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