

MARK 10:1-16 – MARRIAGE, DIVORCE AND CHILD-LIKE FAITH

This is a very relevant subject, talking about marriage, divorce and child-like faith. This passage primarily focuses on Jesus's teaching on these subjects – relevant topics for us to look at given the stagnant and compromising climate that plagues many of our churches today.

We are going to be talking about divorce. It probably comes as no surprise to you that 40 to 50 percent of American adults living in 2025 have experienced divorce first-hand. But according to the Barna Research Group, there is no statistical difference in the divorce rate among born-again Christians and non-Christians. Divorce is the end result in more than 2 out of every 5 marriages across the board. So, let me say this – even if YOU have never been divorced, the chances are very high that you know someone who is divorced or who will very soon be divorced. Over a million people per year experience divorce in our nation. In Mark Chapter 10 Jesus is going to tell us what God thinks about marriage and divorce.

I want to go ahead and set the stage for today's lesson. Since we last left off (at the end of Chapter 9), six months has passed. Jesus and His twelve disciples were up in Capernaum (Galilee). They have made their way down through Samaria into Judea. Mostly during these six months Jesus has been in Jerusalem and regularly teaching in the temple.

After a series of hostile confrontations with the Jewish religious leaders (one time they even tried to stone Jesus in the temple), Jesus and His disciples leave Jerusalem and they head east. They cross the Jordan River into the region of Perea. Large crowds follow Jesus, and where the Jewish crowds go, the Pharisees are right there with them. The Pharisees, however, have no desire to become disciples of Jesus. Rather, they want to get rid of this trouble-maker once and for all. So, that is what is going on as we get into Mark Chapter 10.

READ Mark 10:1-2

So, you have these Pharisees that are tagging along. They approach Jesus and they ask Him a question. Q1 asks why? What was their motive? To discredit Him. Verse 2 says they wanted to “test” Him, right? They are attempting to discredit Jesus in front of the people. That is their strategy.

Then, Q2, what subject do the Pharisees choose in questioning Jesus? Divorce. In Jewish circles at that time, divorce was a very contentious issue. There were two main schools of thought being taught by well-respected rabbis. First, there was the liberal view of divorce, which is that divorce is permitted for almost any reason. And second, there was the more conservative view of divorce, which says that divorce is not allowed except on grounds of adultery. The Pharisees had adopted the more liberal viewpoint, advocating that divorce was OK for any reason. They ask Jesus, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Matthew adds in his account, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” (Matthew 19:3). That is their viewpoint.

So Q3, true or false? By “lawful” the Pharisees meant “legal under Roman Law.” That is false. What did they mean? The Law of Moses. The Law that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai that is recorded in the Old Testament (Exodus).

Now, the whole strategy of the Pharisees is to force Jesus to take one side or the other on this very contentious issue. No matter how Jesus answers the question, they have already come up with a response that is going to make Jesus look bad. So, it is a trap.

READ Mark 10:3

Jesus answers their question is Q4, how did Jesus respond? “What does MOSES command?” In other words, “What does the Law as stated in the Old Testament scriptures have to say about this issue?” So basically, He answers their question with a question.

If someone were to ask you a moral question – there are all kinds of moral issues being debated out there – it would be best for you in answering their question to go back to what God’s word has to say about it

and then base your response on that. Wouldn't that be best? Whatever the issue is? That is exactly what Jesus does here. He goes back to scripture.

Well, the Pharisees answer Jesus's question with a correct answer. They know their Bibles. They know their Old Testament.

READ Mark 10:4

That is exactly what Deuteronomy Chapter 24 (where they got it from) says. It talks about a certificate of divorce. Now, in this passage here it is a specific situation that is being dealt with in the Law. If a man divorced his wife for the reasons stated (he "found some indecency in her"), he was not allowed to marry her again if she remarried and her second husband died or divorced her. Once he divorced her, that was it. That basically summarizes this passage (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

READ Mark 10:5

Jesus tells the Pharisees "Yeah, that is in the scripture, but there is a reason why God allowed this practice. It was not part of His original plan." Q6 asks, what reason did Jesus give for divorce being allowed? Because their hearts were hard. Now "hardness of heart," the phrase that He uses here, is a euphemism for SIN. God's original plan was for marriage to be a permanent union, no divorce. So, what was it that messed up God's original plan for marriage? What event? The Garden of Eden. And what happened there? The Fall of man, the first sin, original sin as it is called, Genesis Chapter 3. Well, how did that mess up God's plan?

John MacArthur summarizes how the Fall ruined marriage: "When sin came into the world, when Eve sinned and Adam followed in sin, the [human] race was cursed. Adam was cursed. He was cursed to labor by the sweat of his brow and earn his bread. And the woman was cursed. She was cursed by having to suffer pain in child bearing and then this: 'Your desire shall be toward your husband and he will rule over you.' That curse spells out the conflict in marriage... instead of her willingly, graciously submitting to [her husband] and he tenderly, compassionately leading her, she has a desire to dominate him and he has an overbearing reaction of

over-dominating her... That's all a part of the curse." That was all a result of original sin.

READ Mark 10:6-8

Q7, where did Jesus go in Scripture to support HIS position? Creation, back to God's perfect creation which was ruined by sin, rebellion against God. God's original design, God's original intent for marriage was one man with one woman for life. This was meant to be an independent and strong union. A married couple breaks their previous family bond (with mom and dad, brothers and sisters, all that original family). It says, "A man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife." Leave and cleave, right? This union is so strong that the two become one flesh. The idea was that they become inseparable.

Q8 says that Jesus cited all of the following (about marriage) EXCEPT what? A man will be the head of the house. He does state that a man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and the two will become one flesh. The original plan for marriage stated in Genesis.

READ Mark 10:9

Q9 asks, what is it that Jesus said no one should separate? What God has joined together. You hear this verse quoted at almost every Christian wedding, don't you? "What God has joined together..." A marriage union is, in effect, the work of God. He, God, not the preacher, not the priest or whoever is up there officiating, is the One who joins together two people in holy matrimony.

But, because of the Fall, original sin, and the often-escalating conflict that arises between two very strong-willed people who are quite different (because opposites tend to attract) who are growing apart, divorce is far too often the end result. Now, we know from other passages in the Bible like Malachi 2:16 how God feels about divorce. In that passage he says that God hates divorce. In the Deuteronomy passage we read earlier you will notice that God never commands a man to divorce his wife if he falls out of favor with her. God allows it. It is a concession that God made. But

it is not a part of His plan. Jerry Vines in his commentary made a really good statement: "God instituted marriage while man instituted divorce."

Well, the Pharisees fail to achieve the result that they wanted. There is no mass revolt against Jesus. There is no reaction recorded at all. The next verse tells us that later on, probably that same day, Jesus and the disciples are together in the house. That earlier conversation that He had with the Pharisees about divorce is still on their minds and so they begin to ask Jesus questions.

READ Mark 10:10-12

Matthew Chapter 19, which is the parallel passage to this one, this is what Jesus says there: "And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery" (Matthew 19:9). By the way, that is the same thing He had said in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery..." (Matthew 5:32).

So, there is an exception added. And that exception is "sexual immorality," for a spouse committing sexual sins (adultery, fornication, or any other sexual sin). Jesus Himself taught that divorce for sexual immorality is permitted. But it is NOT commanded. Adultery, as bad as it is, does not have to spell the end of a marriage. We have an example of this in the Old Testament book of Hosea. Do you remember Hosea the prophet? He had a wife who was a prostitute. And God said, "I want you to take her back and keep that marriage going (Hosea Chapter 3). So, he does. He follows God's instruction and makes every attempt to salvage that marriage, terrible as it might have been.

We all make mistakes. Nobody is perfect. Both our dads – both Robin's and my dad – had a saying that goes, "it takes two to tango." Both the husband and the wife, both must want the marriage. If one wants it and the other doesn't, it is not going to work. Both parties must be committed

to the marriage moving forward. Both have to work at it. Even in a really good marriage, it takes effort. Sometimes more effort than other times.

In the real world we are going to have family issues, kid issues, health problems, death, financial worries, career changes, and on and on and on we could go. All of these can put a strain on a marriage relationship, even a good marriage relationship.

Now, before I move on to verse 13, I think it is appropriate just to mention that there are other places in the Bible (other than what we see here in Mark and Matthew) that address the issue of divorce. In First Corinthians 7:15 Paul sanctions divorce on the grounds of desertion by the unbelieving spouse. God mandated that a believer does not sin by allowing a divorce when the unbelieving spouse wants out of the marriage. Then you can take passages like Exodus 22, Leviticus 18, Isaiah 10, just some examples, and you can make a reasonable case from the Old Testament for divorce on the grounds of abuse. Yes, we know God hates divorce (He said that in Malachi), but He also hates domestic abuse. He is definitely against that in the Bible. God has a deep compassion for the most vulnerable in society. In Bible times that included women, children, the poor and the elderly. They completely depended on the men in their lives. That is a little different from nowadays where you have all these social groups that help out in these various areas, a lot of assistance. You did not have that back then. So, they were completely dependent on the men – on their husbands, their dads, their sons in some cases. God really says a lot about compassion for the most vulnerable.

For us Christian men, we have a responsibility to treat our wives with love and respect. Ephesians 5:25 (you will hear this at weddings too): “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her.” You talk about sacrifice! You talk about commitment! That is a pretty high standard, men, to live up to – the standard of Jesus.

READ Mark 10:13

The people are bringing their children to Jesus. Matthew says, "Then children were brought to [Jesus] that He might lay His hands on them and pray" (Matthew 19:13). Q10 asks, what did Jesus do when people brought their little children to Him? It says that He blessed them, right?

Just so you understand why they did this – it was customary for parents to bring their little children to be blessed by the elders of the synagogue. Jesus is the great Teacher. He is often referred to as "Rabbi." He is a well-respected teacher. And so, in addition to His position of authority, the parents of these children have seen the love and compassion that Jesus exhibits for children. Many of these parents believe Jesus to be sent by God and they want their children to know God. They want their children to be a part of the kingdom of God, to have eternal life. And so, they bring their children to Jesus to pray for them and to give them a spiritual blessing.

We are told that the disciples rebuke, they chastise the people for bringing their children to Jesus. Q11 asks why? Why did the disciples rebuke them? What does the passage say the reason is? No reason is given. Now, we can conjecture that perhaps the disciples resented their interruption of Jesus. But the truth is we don't know for sure. It doesn't really say. It is not that important. We do not know what their motive was, but we DO know is that Jesus was not very happy with them. He did not like the way the disciples were speaking to the people. We know that from v 14, right?

READ Mark 10:14

Q12, what was Jesus's reaction when He saw His disciples doing that? He was angry. It says that He was "indignant." He was really angry. So, Jesus rebukes them, speaking of the disciples. Instead, He instructs them to do something else. That is the answer in Q13, "Let the children come to Me. They have a place in the kingdom of God. Let them come!"

That is very interesting. Nothing is said at all in the passage about the parents' faith. Nothing is said about baptism (there is no mention about

infant or child baptism at all in this passage). Nothing about circumcision. Nothing is said about any rite or ritual, any parental promise. Jesus's words simply and completely include ALL children. These little children belong to the kingdom and the kingdom belongs to them.

A little theology here, a little theology about children...

Babies and young children are born with a sin nature. You do not have to teach them to sin. But they have yet to reach what we call "the age of accountability" or "the age of discretion." That is the age when you become aware of the difference between right and wrong and when you become responsible for your own actions. The age at which a child can distinguish right from wrong, become responsible for their actions, realize that they are a sinner and need Jesus – it depends on the individual, on the person, on that child. It could be as young as 5 or as old as 13 (in most normal cases). A mentally handicapped child might NEVER reach that point in their development. So, until they reach that age, what happens if they were to die? Well, they fall under a special state of grace. So, if they were to die, they would automatically go to heaven. That is why Jesus says what He says here, that these children belong to the kingdom of God.

READ Mark 10:15

Q14 asks, what does Jesus mean by this statement? What does He mean by receiving the kingdom of God like a child?

Let me just paint a picture for you of little children. Maybe you can think back to when you were a child, how you were (for many of us that was a long time ago). Young children, little children are weak. They are helpless. They might think they know it all as they get older. They are unworthy, though, aren't they? They haven't really achieved anything. They may have a little bit of talent, but they have not really done anything. They haven't achieved anything other than maybe getting an A on their report card. They are totally dependent on you as the parent in their life, as the responsible adult. They are humble (for the most part). They have accomplished nothing in their lives. And so, this picture that is offered by

little children shows how we – all of us – must come to Christ. That same way. We must come as helpless, unworthy sinners that have nothing good to offer. We completely depend upon God to have mercy on us and save us because we don't bring anything to the table. That whole Sermon on the Mount (Beatitudes) where Jesus talks about being "poor in spirit," that is the essence of what He is talking about. I have nothing to offer except me. I am completely unworthy. I completely depend upon God to have mercy on me because of His love for me and to save me. That is what it means to have "child-like" faith.

We know this theologically, that we can do nothing to earn our salvation, right? What does a child do to receive the love of his or her parents? Nothing. The love is a free gift based on who they are, their position in that family as your son or daughter. They belong to you. They are a gift that God has given to you. So therefore, you love them because of who they are in relation to you rather than on what they do, even when they do not obey. Likewise, this is the application here, the only possible way can ever make it into heaven is by grace. Salvation is a free gift based on God's love for us. We are part of His family, right?

READ Mark 10:16

Jesus pronounces a blessing on these children. Can you imagine being one of those children that actually got blessed by Jesus while He was here? These children do not deserve His blessing. At the same time these children don't pretend that they do not need His blessing either. They just receive it, the unworthy recipients of God's grace, just like we are.

In the next lesson there is going to see a contrast between these children that we have just seen in these verses and how they come to Jesus and a rich young man, a self-righteous Jew, whose approach to Jesus is completely different. We will see a contrast between these two approaches to Jesus.

