

3. A Covenant, not a Contract

14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. - Malachi 2:14 NIV

Our legal system recognizes marriage as “a legal contract whose terms and validity are determined by the laws of the state or country in question”. A contract is an agreement with mutual obligations. But marriage is a covenant. Traditional wedding vows demonstrate this when we say we will honor our commitment when it is easy and when it is not ; “for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health”. It is a pledge involving God, not only as a witness but as a participant. God joins together the husband and wife. But sin can destroy the covenant which marriage established. Divorce is the result of sin, sometimes it’s sin we commit, sometimes it is sin committed against us and sometimes it’s both. We can choose to make our marriage covenant a serious commitment between us, our spouse and God and fight to maintain its integrity, or we can treat our marriage like a legal contract and search for loopholes to release us from our obligations if we find it inconvenient.

Pray for the marriages that touch your life- your own, your family, your friends and neighbors. The enemy will seek to destroy this sacred bond, but it is a precious expression of God’s grace to us and is worth fighting for.

WRAP-UP

In Mark 10, we see Jesus being tested by the Pharisees on the difficult topic of divorce—a subject that has touched many of our lives, either directly or indirectly. Rather than focusing on legal justifications, Jesus points us back to God’s original design for marriage: a sacred, lifelong covenant where two become one. He explains that divorce was only permitted because of the hardness of human hearts, not because it was ever God’s desire. Marriage isn’t just a legal contract—it’s a spiritual covenant between us, our spouse, and God. This challenges us to examine our own hearts, seek God’s healing where there is brokenness, and commit to honoring and fighting for the marriages in our lives through the strength and grace that God provides.

MEMORY VERSE

7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. - Mark 10:7-8 NIV

Challenge –

Continue to pray for the marriages in your life this week.

The Heart of the Matter Gospel of Mark Ch. 10 - Week 1

INTRODUCTION

As we return to our study in the Gospel of Mark this week, we find Jesus being tested by the Pharisees. They questioned Him on the thorny subject of divorce. The issue is no less difficult for us today. Nearly all of us have been touched, directly or indirectly, by the pain of divorce. For those in the church, it can carry the added weight of shame and judgement. Divorce was never God’s intent as an option to marriage, yet we find several Bible passages that address it. Rather than responding with the specifics of what circumstances might allow for divorce, Jesus returns to the heart of the matter, the origins of marriage and what it is intended to be.

Ice Breaker

What couple have you known who was married the longest? At New Life, Travis and Katherine Evans were married 75 years and 42 days. (The Guinness World Record is 88 years 349 days)

Key Passages

2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" 3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied. 4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." 5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. 6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." - Mark 10:2-9 NIV

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Origin of Marriage

In our key passage Jesus refers to the origin of marriage in Genesis (Mark 10:6-8). In God’s sight, a man and wife are one. They are deeply bonded together, two parts of one whole. In fact, this bonding through

marriage is what God uses to illustrate the relationship between Himself and His church. We are the bride of Christ, and He is the bridegroom.

20 He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. 23 "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" 24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

- Genesis 2:20-24 NLT

How would you contrast the cultural understanding of a marriage commitment with God's intention for marriage as explained in Genesis? What are some of the greatest challenges we face when trying to "live as one" with our spouse? What is required to overcome those challenges?

2. Commands and Concessions

6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

- Mark 10:6-9 NIV

16 "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."

- Malachi 2:16 NLT

Jesus' response to the Pharisees was to ask what Moses "commanded" (*Gr. entellomai*) but their reply was what Moses had "permitted" (*Gr. epitrepō*). What is the difference? A command is an order; it is what you must do. But something permitted is also called a concession. It is something that can be allowed, even if it is not desirable. In Malachi 2:16 the Lord says He hates divorce. I'm sure we all agree. Divorce is a concession. It is not what God wants for us (as we see in Mark 10:9). But there are circumstances under which it is allowed for, and these are concessions.

In the passages above what is commanded to do and what is commanded not to do? What concession made in the passage below?

1 If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, 2 and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, 4 then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. - Deuteronomy 24:1-4 NIV

In Deuteronomy chapter 24 Moses was giving the people instructions about a concession that could be made which allows for a divorce. It appears that the people were already practicing divorce, and Moses is addressing the terms of remarriage.

Based on how you choose to define "displeasing and indecent" in verse 1, the grounds for a divorce can be either narrowly restricted (only meaning for adultery) or broadly applied (for anything that makes you unhappy). What might motivate someone to view divorce as permitted for "anything that makes you unhappy"? When Jesus said that Moses permitted divorced due to the hardness of our heart what was he referring to?

A hardened heart will not bend, will not yield, will not repent and will not forgive. A hardened heart is not open to being shaped by Jesus. One crucial step to healing a wounded marriage is to let God replace our heart of stone with a new heart.

10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. 11 Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. - Psalm 51:10-12 NIV

When David was confronted with his adultery with Bathsheba he repented and sought God. Even after David committed murder and adultery God heard his prayer and received Him back. God's forgiveness always exceeds our brokenness.

Take a moment to reflect on the condition of your heart. If you find that your heart is hard towards your spouse, or anyone else, do what David did, and repent, asking God to change your heart and renew His Spirit in you as you seek to be reconciled.

**As followers of Christ, we believe in the power of reconciliation, grace, and restoration. However, in situations involving abuse, it is critical to understand that reconciliation should never come at the cost of personal safety.*