

## And the Two Become One Flesh

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### Mark 10:1-9

Sevan and I were visiting a friend in Athens, Greece. While we were there, he and his wife attended a Greek wedding. Late night they came back from the wedding, and I asked them about it, thinking he would describe to me the Greek wedding. He looked at my face and said: **“We will know about this wedding in 10 years.”**

Officiating weddings is part of my service to our community. I have seen all kinds of weddings, from a 10-people wedding at home to a 500-people wedding at wineries, from a modest budget wedding to a crazy budget wedding. I made an oath to myself that I will not officiate a wedding without premarital counseling. Some couples get annoyed and ask me why I am spending time on this. I tell them, “Weddings are short; they last half an hour. Marriage is much longer: **“till death do us part.”**”

To keep this covenant of marriage is not easy, and all couples will face challenges. How can anyone keep the marriage oath sacred? *(by the way, only after forty years things become easy)*

Today’s sermon will touch a sensitive topic, **divorce**.

Some of us went through it; some have family members who went through it; some of us are thinking about it.

I asked a friend who went through it, and the person said:

“I think that marital problems are extremely difficult and that we oftentimes don't know how to handle them. We just don't know how to do it, and the world holds out divorce as an option. It just seems like it's held out as an easy option without consequences. And when you go through it, you realize that it is very destructive, and it leaves damages in everybody. It damages kids, damages you, damages relationships, damages communities, it damages relationships within the church, and it damages our relationship with the Lord. You know I'm not talking about someone who's been abused or living in a situation where they're being abused. I'm talking about really cold marital problems that people might not have the resources to deal with and so they just opt out. But they don't tell you how hard it is and how hard it's going to be...”<sup>1</sup>

Those are tough to hear.

And today my sermon is not here to judge any of you who went through divorce; and I am not covering how the entire Bible deals with divorce.

Today we have arrived in the Gospel according to Mark chapter 10, and we have group of *charajji* Pharisees who like to trap Jesus, such as they brought a woman who was found in adultery, or when they asked is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? They are not interested Jesus' explanation; they are interested to test Jesus and put him in trouble.

Let us start:

**And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.** (Mark 10:1 ESV)

-Let us look the map again, as you see Jesus is moving further towards Jerusalem. He was in **Capernaum** (9:33) on the **shores of Sea of Galilee** and now he moves south **entering Judea**, on the **other side of Jordan**. This is the area John the Baptist baptized people.

Let me stress again and again, Jesus did not give up from his mission while he was going towards the cross. He took time to give them what they needed most, teaching. We see this occurring again and again. Our role as pastors is the same as well. This should remind us that as we are in the Kingdom of God, constantly we need the Word of God as main dish.

-Saying that, as Jesus is coming closer to Jerusalem, Pharisees are not happy about all this. And today we have a group who wants to test Jesus:

**And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** (Mark 10:2 ESV)

Mark clearly states the intention of this question: **to test Jesus.**

Here is the trap:

If Jesus says he is against divorce in the land of Herod-Antipas who married his sister-in-law Herodias, most likely Jesus will be killed like John the Baptist who challenged Herod. I think that was their wish; they wanted Jesus to be eliminated.

I love how Jesus answers them by asking them a question:

**He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away."** (Mark 10:3,4 ESV)

Their argument comes from the OT Deuteronomy 24:

**“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, (Deut. 24:1 ESV)**

“The instruction in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 leaves the matter of divorce entirely to the husband’s discretion. It does not outline the grounds for divorce, nor does it endorse it. It simply places restrictions on the husband if he should decide to put his wife away. For example, after giving her a bill of divorce he may never remarry her after she becomes the wife of another man.”<sup>2</sup>

There is certain context how those laws were written.

With Pharisees asking a question like this, **they are not seeking what the will of God is.**

“They come at the law asking, ‘What does it allow me to do?’ or, to put it more bluntly, ‘What can I get away with?’ They are ultimately neglecting God’s will, **which is primarily concerned with love for the neighbor** (Mark 12:31).<sup>3</sup>

They are interested in their self: “what’s in it for me?”, rather than “what is my responsibility?” They look after the husband’s rights neglecting what happens to the wife, and to the children.

What was response of Jesus?

<sup>5</sup> **And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.** (Mark 10:5 ESV)

Do you hear what Jesus is saying: because of your **hardness of your heart...**

*sklērokardia (sklay-ro k-ar-dee'-ah) (this word appears three times in NT) (Matt 19:8, Mark 10:5, Mark 16:14)*

Jesus challenges them by changing the focus from “**what**” to “**why**”.

In my words, “Moses got tired of you who are so selfish and live in constantly in a fight, or you were so selfish, and you did not want any responsibility to live in harmony at home.”

**Hardened hearts...** how many times we see this phrase appears in the Bible... and how many times we have seen it is disaster when we harden our hearts, towards God and towards each other...**disaster...** (I know it, I have seen it how my marriage would collapse when I had a hardened heart...)

Jesus continues saying: let me tell you, the same Moses who wrote Deuteronomy, also wrote Genesis, and told us this:

**But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.'** <sup>7</sup> **'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,** <sup>8</sup> **and the two shall become one flesh.'** **So they are no longer two but one flesh.** <sup>9</sup> **What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."** (Mark 10:6-9 ESV)

I love how Jesus handles this situation.

**Instead of talking about divorce, he shifts the focus to God's desire in marriage. They ask him about divorce, he tells them about marriage.**

And that is what I intended to do today.

**And two become one flesh.** It is sacred, it is God's desire and plan to bring humanity together and create the family.

Jesus is reminding them what desire of God is when two people become one flesh. And that unity is so sacred that nothing should come between them to separate, nothing. This is the ideal plan of God when two become one.

How far we are from this concept?

Illustration:

Sevan and I were doing once a premarital counseling to a couple. In my talk I said: **"Divorce is not an option."** The groom-to-be became so sad. He said: "Why not? My parents are divorced and one of them are remarried and they are happy."

I wish I had a camera to take the picture of his fiancé. She was astonished.

The couple entering to a marriage with the door open for divorce, thinking, "If it works, we will stay in this marriage; if it doesn't, we can get out..." They left sad.

I thought they would never be back. They came back after several weeks, and he

apologized in front of his fiancé, and he said, **"Divorce is not an option."** They are married until now. May God keep them humble and open to learn from Jesus how to love the "other", the "neighbor" ...

I will repeat what I said in my introduction. I am not covering in this sermon when divorce is permissible or not, I am not covering unhealthy marriages of adultery and abuse. **If you are in it**, please see professional help, please do not postpone. I am not also judging you if you went through divorce.

I am drawing the picture of **God's intention in marriage**. And why Jesus stood firm in quoting from Genesis and spoke against divorce.

"Divorce is not an option."

The vow "I promise to love and cherish you/ in sickness and in health/ in plenty and in want/ in joy and in sorrow... as long as we both shall live..."

It is changed to:

"As long as my spouse meets my needs and I feel fulfilled..."<sup>4</sup>

You see how selfish our union has become.

Instead of, "**How I can serve you?**" it is, "**What can you give me in my marriage?**"

Love means: me, and me, and me, you are mine, fulfill me...

Is it difficult to love each other?

Oh yes, it is...

Someone asked my friend who is pastor in the Bay Area who is happily married, yet as any couple they had their marital challenges; someone asked them if he was thinking about divorce at all. He said, "Divorce No, murder, yes." Needs context

We all are sinners, and we all need to learn how to **soften our hearts**.

It comes back to that sermon Kevin gave about **heart transformation**, that only Jesus can do.

And the best example of how we can learn forgiveness and love **is by looking to God who loved His people**.

God's relationship with his people in the OT uses the metaphor of marriage.

-Hosea's prophecy is all about God as being a faithful husband while his spouse is in adultery. God does everything to bring her back to the family. (Buys her)

God got angry from his spouse Israel who was unfaithful to Him and God send him to exile. Here we see God renews his marriage vow to His people:

In Isaiah we God renews his vow to his people:

**"Fear not, for you will not be ashamed;**

**be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced;**

**for you will forget the shame of your youth,**

**and the reproach of your widowhood you will remember no more.**

<sup>5</sup> **For your Maker is your husband,**

**the LORD of hosts is his name;**

**and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,  
the God of the whole earth he is called.**

**<sup>6</sup> For the LORD has called you  
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit,  
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,  
says your God.**

**<sup>7</sup> For a brief moment I deserted you,  
but with great compassion I will gather you.**

**<sup>8</sup> In overflowing anger for a moment  
I hid my face from you,  
but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,”  
says the LORD, your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:4-10 ESV)**

You see **God hates divorce.** (Malachi 2:16)

Because it is against his nature.

**God is love, and he wants us to be in that love, in relationship with Him and with each other.... God makes a covenant of love with us.**

This is more than emotions and my needs.

This is a **commitment** of holding our relationship holy and Godly.

-In the New Testament, the same image comes again. **Jesus** is the head of the church. We are the bride of Jesus.

**Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, <sup>26</sup> so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (Eph 5:25,26 ESV)**

The relationship of Christ with the church is the model how we have our marriage relationship in “better and worse, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want.”

When our marriage faces the worse, the sickness, the want, the troubles, we come to Jesus who brings forgiveness, compassion, cleansing and healing.

**This is commitment to love and be together.**

**Divorce is not an option....**

Once I saw a photo of couple who are married 70 years holding hands like they are in their 20s. Someone asked them, “What is the secret of your love?” They said: “We were born at a time when something was broken, we fixed it.”

-I don't know where you stand today in your marriage relationship.

“One needs to convey that the sin of divorce can occur in any marriage, whether there is a legal divorce or not. Many marriages may never end up in divorce court, but they are just as cold and loveless and filled with hate and anger. One unhappy spouse observed, “I am not married, just undivorced.”<sup>5</sup>

Marriage is more than me and my wife trying to fix it.

I have seen this in my life, I am happily married because of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is only when we surrender to Jesus, He can fix it.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once exhorted a couple whom he was marrying,

**“From this day forth, it is not love which makes your commitment strong, it is commitment that makes your love strong.”**

A friend once told me how he had an argument with his wife and they both went to bed not talking. Next morning, he woke up and asked her to look to each other eyes and talk like that. At night he was preparing like a lawyer how to retaliate. In the morning when he was looking to the eyes of his wife, compassion, forgiveness came from his heart.

### **What can we learn and do?**

Let me quote further from my friend:

“I look back on that time of my life that was 20 years. If I had been the person I am today back then, I would have understood I had other options. I would have known the Lord closer...

So I think as Christians and as a church we need to help people who are in that situation, help them see other ways, help them walk closer with the Lord and understand things that God calls us to do like forgiveness, and caring for one another and like patience, unconditional love and agape and what those things mean... I think as the church it's our responsibility to be that community to help people learn those things.

### **Let us approach the table of Lord.**

- **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”** (Heb 4:7 ESV)

- **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”** (Heb 3:15 ESV)

**-For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12 ESV)**

**- Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (Deut. 10:16 ESV)**

1. An anonymous friend told me the personal story when I asked about divorce.
2. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 379
3. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 379
4. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 387
5. David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 390