

# Marriage: God's Holy Sacrament 7

## *Divorce and the Wedding Feast of the Lamb*

(preached 10/23/22)

Please turn to

***We've finally arrived*** at the sermon I warned you about weeks ago: divorce. There are certain subject pastors would rather avoid entirely and this is one of them. Whether from the pulpit or personally, this is one of the most difficult areas to navigate through. As I said in sermon #1 in this series, it's like sailing through the Straits of Gibraltar during a storm.

Before I begin, let me say a few things:

- **Don't jump ship.** I'm going to say a few things that may surprise some of you and might tempt some of you to think "there! That was the answer I was looking for!" Please wait until the end of the sermon, hearing everything, to make sure your understanding is clear.
- **Recognize your trigger.** This subject may trigger some of you and its important you move past both the trigger and the response to hear what's being presented. Years ago a WWII vet worked for us and the few times said war was ever mentioned in front of him, his eyes would get this far away look and he would shut down. You couldn't talk to him, get any response, or anything for hours after.
- **Divorce has a similar effect** on some of you when its mentioned and it important that you recognize your trigger and move past it in order to hear what's being said today.
- The purpose of today's sermon is to help you **relieve your conscience**, and not further condemn you.
- However...**that process can be painful** as it involves both parties in a divorce to recognize their wrongdoing and contribution.
- **Humble repentance** before God cleanses a guilty conscience with the blood of Jesus and frees us!

SINS. There are sins in the Bible that are listed just so directly: "thou shalt not steal." Not only does God forbid us doing these things, He does so under any and all circumstances.

LEADS TO SIN. There are other things in the Bible that aren't listed as sins but can lead to them: there's no command that says "thou shalt not drink alcohol." Yet the Lord does tell us in His Word to avoid drunkenness and debauchery. There are also several stories of Biblical characters who commit sins or do foolish things after getting sauced up.

**Divorce is in its own category:** it's not prohibited in any commandment, yet at the same time God says He hates it. A certificate of divorce is actually written into the Law, yet the Lord warns people against doing it and warns of certain consequences.

Most people are familiar with this quote from Malachi:

**Malachi 2:16 (NKJV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For the LORD God of Israel says That He hates divorce, For it covers one's garment with violence," Says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, That you do not deal treacherously."

WARNING. I'm going to repeat my warning to not jump ship until it pulls into port. I'm going to read certain verses and I don't want anyone using them to justify anything or prompt action until you've heard the entire sermon.

CERTIFICATE. First let's cover the "certificate" of divorce that God gives in the Law:

**Deuteronomy 24:1 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "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,

ONLY HUSBANDS. If you'll notice, the only ones who could file for a divorce during the Exodus all the way up to the days of Jesus and the Apostles were husbands—women could not do so.

MARRIAGE SYMBOLIZES.... Is that because ancient Hebraic society was patriarchal and suppressed the rights of women? No...it's because of what marriage represents and but now you should all know what that is. In OC times, it was God as the Husband and Israel as His wife. In NC times its Jesus as the Husband and the Church as His wife.

**Let's start with the OC.** God came and proposed marriage to Israel and laid everything out:

- He loved them and chose them first. "You are My people and I shall be your God."
- He laid out the covenant: FIDELITY: "worship me alone, no one else."
- SUBMISSION: "obey My commandments."
- PROVISION: "I will make you the greatest nation on earth in every way."
- PROTECTION: "I will give you victory over all your enemies."
- FUTURE: "My Kingdom is coming and you will be the kingly priests who rule over it, and everyone will come and serve you."

**Yet He also warned them:**

- ADULTERY: "don't go after other gods, worshipping them."
- REBELLION: "don't disobey My commandments and start obeying someone else's."
- POVERTY: "if you do, I'll take away what I've given you."
- INVASION: "I'll let your enemies overcome you."
- FUTURE: "I'll disperse you into the other nations and you will serve them."

GOD “DIVORCES” ISRAEL. God laid all this out in the Law, the first 5 books of the Bible. From there on out, whenever Israel and then Judah would fall away from God He would accuse them prostitution and adultery. In the Book of Jeremiah He actually uses the word divorce concerning His marriage to His people:

**Jeremiah 3:6-10 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there played the harlot.

<sup>7</sup> And I said, after she had done all these *things*, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it.

<sup>8</sup> Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but went and played the harlot also.

<sup>9</sup> So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees.

<sup>10</sup> And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the LORD.

***Old Covenant human marriage was supposed to be a reflection of God's marriage to Israel under said covenant.*** If God discovered that Israel had adulterated Him He could divorce her, which is why He wrote the same provision into the Law—that if a man discovered his wife had been unfaithful, he could do the same.

PHARISEES. Centuries later, the Pharisees would ask Jesus about this very same certificate of divorce:

**Matthew 19:3-9 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

<sup>4</sup> He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,

<sup>5</sup> 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'?

<sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

<sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."

**Verse 3:** did you notice their question? They wanted to know if a man could divorce his wife “for any reason.”

HUSBAND TO LOVE HIS WIFE. Please understand God spoke of marriage in the Law as well but there isn’t time to quote all those verses here. The Lord makes it clear that the Husband—who represents Him—needs to be like Him. Same thing Paul says in Ephesians 5. In other words, even back then husbands were called upon to be righteous loving providers and protectors to their wives as God was to Israel.

### **In other words, a divorce would break his heart just as it**

**did God’s.** He still loves us, wants her back, wants to be with her, wants to give her everything, and wants her to love him. That he’s only seeking divorce when she’s not only left him for someone else, but is unrepentant about it. Even in Jeremiah, God gives both Israel and Judah multiple chances. Over and over He calls upon them to repent and return to Him, promising only mercy and full restoration. It’s only when she cheats over and over that He finally lives up to His warnings and takes action.

TRYING TO JUSTIFY. Back to the Pharisee’s challenge in verse 3, things had gotten to the point where husbands were divorcing their wives for any reason and then quoting God’s Word to justify their actions. Jesus responds to them by quoting from Genesis 2, reminding them of the covenant they entered into.

HARDNESS OF HEART. When they attempt to quote the Law back to Him, *Deuteronomy 24:1*, look at Jesus’ response: the root of their motivation to divorce is the hardness of their hearts. In other words, the love wasn’t there...any part of it. Not the feelings nor the commitment.

### **STATISTICS.**

- 630,000 divorces took place in America in 2020.
- Divorce rates of people 50+ are on the rise.
- The average length of marriage is 19.9 years.
- People are 75% more likely to divorce if someone close to them got one.
- Cohabitation before marriage *increases* the likelihood of divorce after they get married.
- “Incompatibility” is the leading cause.
- Children of divorced parents are more likely to get a divorce.
- America has 3<sup>rd</sup> highest divorce rate in the world.
- 53% of marriages in America end in divorce.

WARNING!!! We've come to a sensitive part of the sermon where I'm going to make a statement that may trigger a denial in some of you. Please remember what I said in the beginning: the process of healing and cleansing the conscience can be painful. It often involves a confession of wrongdoing on our parts and an internal repentance that will lead only to the Blood of Jesus rinsing guilt and self-condemnation off from us like a warm shower washes away dirt.

LOTS OF REASONS. There are lots of specific reasons and circumstances people cite including adultery, abuse, neglect, irreconcilable differences, and more.

The umbrella reason people get divorces is exactly what Jesus said: ***because their hearts become hard toward one another.***

BEEN DIVORCES? If you're a Christian whose been divorced and your conscience continues to beat you up, my goal in this message is **not** to further condemn you, but for you to have peace through a cleansed conscience. To not be triggered anymore, especially with guilt.

YOUR CONSCIENE NOT SATAN. If this is you and there's an inner voice beating you up over it, said voice is not Satan...it's your conscience saying the scales of justice aren't balanced. Therefore it's trying to get "blood payment" from you by beating you up...but it's not working.

**Your first step is to stop arguing with it.** Instead of telling it and others that you were a good and faithful spouse and that it was your wayward wife or cheating husband who did all the wrong, listen to what your conscience is saying to you about you.

**JESUS SAID THE ROOT OF DIVORCE WAS THE HARDNESS OF THE HEART.** Was it only your ex's heart that got hard, or yours too? Did you build walls around your heart against them? Even if you're able to admit that your heart became cold, do you blame them for it? Their words, actions, and neglect?

**THE WAY TO ENTER INTO GOD'S GRACE AFTER A DIVORCE ISN'T TO REMARRY AN EX, BUT RATHER TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR PART.** To confess this before the Lord Who is gracious and merciful to forgive. If we refuse to, our adversary--who is our conscience--will continue to hold it against us for the rest of our days.

STILL MARRIED? Shifting gears now, I want to address anyone listening ***who is still married and contemplating divorce***. What Jesus says still applies: **your heart is hard toward them and they toward you.**

**ADULTERY & ABUSE.** If your spouse is committing physical adultery or physically abusing you, that's one thing. Even Jesus said divorce could happen in the case of adultery. At the same time, He reminded all of us that marriage is a lifetime commitment for both husband and wife. It's a covenant that reflects the one Jesus formed with us.

**WHAT GOD HAS PUT TOGETHER.** What's more is the part He added in Matthew 19 that doesn't appear in Genesis 2: He says that God is One Who put us together. Marriage isn't a piece of paper or a formality—it's a Holy Sacrament created by the Lord Himself. Not only was a pastor of JOP officiating your wedding, but the Lord Himself was there.

**BLAME & SELF ASSESS.** Instead of blaming our spouse for \_\_\_\_\_ and allowing our hearts to become even more like a stone, why don't we do a sober self-assessment and take responsibility for our part while we're still married?

I hear people say love blinds a person toward the person they adore and sometimes it does...***but a hard heart blinds us to God.*** Not only does it cause us not to see our own toxic contributions, but also the possibility of forgiveness & reconciliation.

**DEAD?** You may think your marriage is dead and maybe it is...but we worship a God Who specializes in raising dead things to life.

**IMPOSSIBLE?** You may feel that recovering your marriage is impossible and with us, it might be...but with God all things are possible.

**QUICKSAND.** You might feel as though your marriage is sinking in quicksand, called "miry clay" in the Bible, but the same Lord living inside us can pick it up out of the miry clay and set our feet upon solid rock.

**New Covenant marriage** is superior to that of the old because Jesus will never divorce us. He's committed to us eternally. He died on the Cross and rose from the dead to eternally satisfy the Law's demand for justice for His wife: us. He still expects us to worship Him alone, submit to His authority, and live like He does...yet He won't cast us away when we fall short.

**DIVORCE NOT IMPOSSIBLE.** For a Saved Christian, we're to treat our marriages the same way. That doesn't make divorce impossible, because we can still be married to an adulterous spouse or an unbelieving one who wants to leave. In the latter case, the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that if you're unequally yoked with an unbeliever and they want to leave, let them.

**NO WALLED CITY.** For us, however, we cannot allow our hearts to become like a walled city and keep our spouse out. Unless the circumstances I just mentioned are present, we shouldn't be serving them a certificate of divorce.

### **1 Corinthians 7:10-16 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband

<sup>11</sup> (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.

<sup>12</sup> To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.

<sup>13</sup> If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him.

<sup>14</sup> For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

<sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

<sup>16</sup> For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?

WEDDING SUPPER. We have one more wedding to go—the biggest and best one of all.

***Everyone wants to know when Jesus is coming back.*** When He does, it will be the most dramatic event to have every taken place on this planet. Mounted on a white horse, massive army behind him, descending from the sky, every eye will see Him, etc. It will truly be colossal!

What's His preparation for this glorious moment? A wedding...His:

### **Revelation 19:6-9 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.

<sup>7</sup> Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready;

<sup>8</sup> it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure" — for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

<sup>9</sup> And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

DEEDS. We are His bride and we've made ourselves ready by dressing ourselves in fine linen, bright and pure labeled as "the righteous deeds of the saints." The word "deed" here isn't that we fed the homeless or converted lots of people. It also means "decision." In context then, it means saying "yes" to the marriage proposal of Jesus. It means getting Saved and becoming His Bride

PREPPING FOR THIS EVENT. Here on earth we're commissioned to share the Gospel and anything else the Lord wants us to do to expand His Kingdom and live holy lives. Yet this event is our great hope. Our "wedding garment" that the Lord is describing here is our new resurrected bodies that we'll receive at the Rapture, whenever that is. We will finally cast off this mortal body and take on immortality!

Once we do, ***we'll be ready for our wedding!*** At this point we will be joined with Jesus completely in spirit and never be separated again! No more faith required, we shall behold Him face to face!

CEREMONY NEEDED. In the beginning of this sermon series I cast down the moniker of "we're married in our hearts and don't need a ceremony" thing and here's why: if the Lord is putting on a ceremony for us and its only official after said ceremony—all the way down to the way we dress—then our own lives should reflect the same because we're made in His image. Just like an earthly human marriage, the ceremony that will take place in heaven will be in front of millions of witnesses and God our Father will officiate it. He will declare it so!

LOVE IS OPEN. Just as our love for Him should be open for all to see at the Wedding Supper, so should it be on earth for our human spouse where we call upon family and friends to come and witness our commitment to them.

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