

Luke 16:18**Divorce and Remarriage****Recorded 10/26/20, Preached Live 11/1/20**

We are continuing in Luke 16 today.

Today we will look at one verse in Luke, one that packs an awful lot of truth into a sentence spoken by Jesus.

But first it's important to remember the context.

Jesus is at a dinner party with Pharisees, the old guard religious leaders in Israel, and his disciples. And Jesus has been asked why he eats with tax collectors and sinners. So he tells the story of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son, all to show the heart of God for the lost. Jesus is here to redeem and restore, to bring people back to their purpose, which is living in relationship with and conformity to God.

People were accusing Jesus of being morally lax, and maybe even watering down the Bible because for some reason all of these sinful people were drawn to him. They accused him of being very liberal in terms of who he spent time with.

So Jesus makes it clear that nothing that he is doing should be interpreted as watering down or getting rid of one pen-stroke from the word of God.

Luke 16:17 “17 But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.”

Nothing Jesus is doing is contrary to the Bible. He appears to be lax and compromising God's commands for purity, but purity isn't staying away from the broken, it's restoring them. Jesus is upholding God's word.

And then Jesus drops one bomb of truth, to make the dinner-party even more awkward:

Luke 16:18 "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

Now this seems disconnected from everything else that's happening. Who was talking about divorce? But what Jesus is doing by laying out the simplest form of his teaching on divorce and remarriage is showing that it was the Pharisees who were watering down God's word.

They were doing the very thing they were accusing Jesus of doing.

The Pharisees had developed a very loose doctrine of divorce and remarriage.

The Bible has a number of important texts about marriage and divorce. But if you select some out of context and don't bring the whole body of biblical teaching together, you can make the Bible say almost anything you want.

So ignoring many of the passages about marriage and divorce, the Pharisees gravitated toward Deuteronomy 24. Which is God's word, but not all of God's word on the subject:

Deuteronomy 24:1 "1 "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 it goes on to describe some laws for divorce and remarriage.

And the Pharisees said, "Here's the law for divorce and remarriage - a man can divorce his wife if he finds some indecency in her."

And, though there was debate among the Pharisees, they interpreted that word indecency very very broadly. A man who influenced the Pharisees, who died in 10AD, was Hillel, who taught that this verse meant a man had the absolute right to divorce his wife for any reason, if he found anything displeasing in her, and it could be as small as him being displeased with the fact that she burned dinner (Morris 269).

And, of course, the way they interpreted it was that women had no such right, and if they could divorce their husbands the bar was much higher.

That's a really loose teaching on what constitutes grounds for divorce, even by today's standards. I've heard plenty of lame reasons for why people want out of their marriage, but nothing that small. But the same guys who held this position were accusing Jesus of watering down God's word and being too loose with it.

So Jesus drops his teaching. And from what we know, nobody in that day held this strict of a view on divorce and remarriage. Nobody. But Jesus is the king of a new kingdom, the chief interpreter of the law, the ultimate ethicist for the people of God, and he drops some teaching that shows way more adherence to all of God's word than the Pharisees would ever show.

So Jesus is being accused of being really liberal because he's hanging out with sinners, but then he teaches something that's wildly conservative, so he doesn't fit their boxes at all.

By the way, we hear often this week especially that Jesus didn't fit the boxes, he was too conservative for the liberals and too liberal for the conservatives. Which is true, and I've said it often. But that doesn't mean that Jesus fit neatly in a centrist box where he always came up with compromise positions between the competing groups.

He was too conservative for the liberals and too liberal for the conservatives, but He was also too conservative for the conservatives at times, and too liberal for the liberals at times. He didn't fit perfectly anywhere.

So right when the conservative Pharisees accuse him of being liberal, Jesus stakes out a position on marriage that is way more conservative than any of them held. Pharisee minds blown.

So why on this issue? Jesus is too liberal for the conservatives on issues like sabbath keeping and his associations with sinners. But why so much more strict than even the conservatives on divorce and remarriage? Why this issue?

So as we discuss it the goal will be to do 3 things this morning:

- 1) Give a broad overview of what Jesus thought about marriage that made Him so conservative on this issue. (And, because He is God, He is right in what He thought about marriage - so this should shape our view of marriage.)

- 2) Give a broad overview the biblical teaching on divorce (this verse in Luke is not the whole of Jesus's teaching on it so we'll look at some of the other teaching in scripture on it that spells it out further.)
- 3) And not as a third section, but all along the way, we'll deal with some practical considerations for practicing this high view of marriage as Christians.

Let me disclaim that it is impossible to say all that needs to be said about marriage and divorce and remarriage in a single sermon - the fact that some things aren't addressed doesn't mean they have no place in this discussion. It just means there are time limits to a sermon. Jesus didn't say everything there was to be said about it in this one sentence either.

We won't be able to discuss every nuance and every what-if. We'll be painting with broad brushes, which is certainly what Jesus did in this verse, but can leave some questions unanswered.

So why so strict? What is it about marriage that made Jesus take this position?

Jesus often took controversial stands, again, all over the spectrum on issues. On the sabbath he didn't abide by the hundreds of pages of sabbath law the Pharisees had added on top of the bible, and that was because sabbath was made for man, it was made for human flourishing, and they had made it an oppressive system of rules. They made it do the opposite of what it was supposed to do, so Jesus gladly opposed their position. The sabbath was a day of rest, so Jesus said we should make it one.

He hangs out with tax collectors and sinners because they are the sick in need of a physician, he wants to see them flourish. People were made to be in relationship with their God, so Jesus goes near to them so that they can be. His position on the issue of hanging out with sinners was tied to his desire to make people what they were meant to be.

Jesus knows that the flourishing of humanity is strengthened by marriages being strong and permanent and not easy to dissolve. Marriages were meant to be clung to, fought for, stayed in - and they create the maximum flourishing for humanity when done right.

He has proven he won't buy into rules for rules sake, and He won't be strict for strictness' sake. So we can't accuse Jesus of being too strict in general. But He is the truth, and He

is righteous, and if true righteousness is looser than the religious crowd thought it should look, so be it. And if true righteousness is stricter, so be it. What mattered was not aligning with a group or party or checking all of the boxes of the religious elite, but truth mattered. Love for God and man mattered. Obedience to God's law and God's pattern mattered.

So what is so important about marriage?

And before we go further, I know there are many singles at Grace Road, and there is a tendency to tune out this sermon. But nothing I say should make you feel like a single is less of a Christian or an incomplete person. Jesus was single, and He was a pretty good Christian.

You are a vital part of the body of Christ, marriage isn't essential for your personhood or value in the body, and some never marry and they are no less vital to the flourishing of humanity.

But I also know that many of our singles desire to marry someday and will marry someday, so I'd urge you to practice Biblical wisdom today, which involves not only learning things that will benefit me now today, but also as I grow through other seasons of life. And allow whatever is true and biblical that I say today to shape your choice in a spouse if you're pursuing one or waiting for one. To shape your expectations for marriage.

So what is marriage? When Jesus is asked about divorce and remarriage in Matthew 19, he doesn't quote from the divorce law in Deuteronomy 24, but goes all the way back to the root, when God creates marriage in Genesis 2.

He goes back to the core of the issue. They ask, "Can we divorce?" and he says, "Well, what is a marriage?"

So in Genesis 2, the context here is that God has spoken everything into existence on six days of creation, and on several of those days God pronounces a benediction over His creation and says "it is good." Then God makes man, he makes Adam, all by himself. And God's design was that humanity would be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, but Adam is alone:

Genesis 2:18 Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I

will make him a helper fit for him.

God God says, "It is good, it is good, it is good," over his creation, and then over Adam, the single guy, he says, "that's not good."

So God looks at man and says, "He shouldn't be alone." And maybe you've known certain bachelors that cause you to agree, you go to the bachelor pad and can find all kinds of evidence that it is not good for man to be alone. Dishes stacked high in the sink, odors that go unnoticed, a shower that makes you wonder what color it originally was. And you've probably said, "Its not good for man to be alone."

But this anti-benediction or malediction that God pronounces isn't over bachelorhood. It's over the fact that man cannot accomplish his purpose on earth - the be fruitful and multiply purpose - all by himself.

So God says I'll make a helper. Now don't get tripped up on the language. We can read helper and think "This means Adam is superior and she's just his little helper, there's the Bible being all chauvinist."

But we often ask for help from a superior. I hire a guy to help do my taxes because he is my superior in accounting. We hire doctors as our helpers because they have a superior knowledge, and as much as I like to think I can be my own doctor because of google, I need a helper. Someone who is strong where I'm weak.

So that's the kind of helper Eve is, a complement to Adam. Not an inferior or superior. A human who is not a man. Someone who can help with what he just can't do. This is no statement of inferiority to call her a helper.

Skip down to 2:21

Genesis 2:21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;she shall be called Woman,because she was taken out of Man.24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

Adam looks at Eve and loves her. Lots of good romance here, he possibly sings these words in the first love song, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh."

And Moses here writes for us, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to (cleave to, be joined with) his wife, and they shall be one." This language points to the fact that marriage is to be a deep and permanent (for this life) thing. There is a deep, fundamental connection made in a marriage.

So marriage is made of a complementing pair of a man and a woman, there is a connection made between the two. They are naked and unashamed, which is a blessing on physical and sexual intimacy in marriage, and also a call to be fully known by the other within marriage. These are two people who know each other completely, are vulnerable to each other, and who are joined as one.

So we have the first wedding in the Bible. Adam sings, and God is there as the witness to the whole thing.

And verse 24 shows that this is the pattern for all marriages: a husband and wife are joined together, God joins them together, and a new primary family unit is formed as they leave father and mother and cleave together.

And Jesus protects that vehemently.

For human community to thrive, marriages and families must thrive.

(Again, this doesn't mean singles are less a part of the community - but thriving marriages are an essential element. This also doesn't mean no person can thrive outside of a healthy family. Because God gives grace, and plenty of people thrive in difficult and broken marriages, broken homes. We don't want to pronounce doom over someone who grows up without an intact family at all. God is very gracious.)

But the general way of things is that a community thrives only when marriages remain intact and thrive. This is true of the broader community and a church community.

And because God is doing something unique in joining a married couple together, we should see marriages as uniquely His work, just like Adam and Eve's marriage was his work. And to treat them as easy-to-leave is to insult Him, and to miss out on what He is doing in marriage.

We have redefined what a marriage is supposed to be in our day. We believe that it is a union designed to fulfill the self. That it is only a romantic union. And romance is good and marriage, again, is the only righteous place for sexual intimacy. But we have said, only, marriage is what two people who are really in love do.

And then, when excitement-love and romance inevitably fade, when sickness, weakness, sin, and difficulties come in, we think we are justified in getting out. Because it isn't fulfilling its purpose. But its purpose is so much more than that.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while imprisoned, wrote a wedding sermon for his niece. In it, he wrote, *"God is guiding your marriage. Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance, through which He wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time."*

In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to His glory...

In your love you see only the heaven of your own happiness, but in marriage you are placed at a post of responsibility towards the world and mankind. Your love is your own private possession, but marriage is more than something personal—it is a status, an office. Just as it is the crown, and not merely the will to rule, that makes the king, so it is marriage, and not merely your love for each other, that joins you together in the sight of God and man. ... love comes from you, but marriage from above, from God. As high as God is above man, so high are the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of marriage above the sanctity, the rights, and the promise of love. It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love."¹

Marriage can't be sustained by love and excitement and romance. Love, and excitement, and romance are to be sustained by marriage. God made this, God joined you together, and within that permanent abiding context you can work on rekindling romance, clearing out relational clutter, forgiving wrongs by applying the gospel, pursuing intimacy. And by saying, "God joined us together, so that's all we will ever do when something is hard," you can find love rekindled again and again.

But if you expect to stay married as long as you always feel totally in love, you will inevitably hit a hard time or a boring time or a time of sickness or poverty or strain and say, 'our marriage is no longer being sustained.'

So God made marriage, God joined you together with your spouse, therefore, Jesus says, to leave that union and pursue another is to commit adultery. This isn't the kind of thing you bail on because she burned the toast or because he is a Patriots fan. (You get him counseling - you don't leave him.)

¹ <https://fiercemarriage.com/a-wedding-sermon-from-a-1943-prison-cell-dietrich-bonhoeffer>

But marriage is an even bigger deal. We fast forward to the new testament where the apostle Paul interprets this passage in Genesis for us:

Ephesians 5 31 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

So marriage is not only a core unit for human flourishing, but the design of marriage is that it is a union that paints a picture of Christ and the church. And the whole passage that precedes this that we don't have time to dive into, calls husbands to love and lead like Jesus, it calls wives to respect and be led by godly husbands like the church is by Christ.

So marriage is a life-long covenant between a man and woman to reflect to their children, their community, their church, their world something of the love that Jesus has for his people.

And Jesus's love isn't just sentimental love and feeling. When we say Jesus loves you we don't just mean He feels warm and fuzzy when He thinks about you.

We mean *the Gospel*. We mean that He gave his life for you. We mean that He endures with you. He loves relentlessly. He is attentive to you, ever interceding to the Father for you. It's that gritty, active, sweating and bleeding kind of love that Jesus has and that is to be reflected in marriage.

But it's not joyless. We also know that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him, So in marriage we are to strive to be full of joy to reflect His love fully.

So staying married is important. For honoring the fact that the marriage was God's work and to divide it is to divide what he joined. Staying married for human flourishing is important. For kids thriving its important. For accomplishing side-by-side God's purposes for you in the world.

But far beyond that, it is important because marriage was designed to paint a picture of Christ's love for the church.

And just like working to keep rules on the sabbath went against the design for the sabbath, just like Jesus keeping away from sinful people would keep people from being what they were designed to be, clinging loosely to marriage and moving toward divorce and remarriage easily goes right against what marriage is for: to reflect Christ's love.

This means that because a marriage is designed to reflect Christ's love, you can expect that at times you will be loving a spouse that is unlovable (just like Jesus does for us). At times it won't be easy. At times you might be tempted to dream of the freedom that would come from being out of this.

And if you spend a lot of time on facebook, you might be tempted to think that your marriage is uniquely boring, uniquely hard, uniquely challenging. But, I do have a somewhat unique perspective on this: I counsel a lot of people with instagram-perfect marriages and families. And it is not often what it seems.

Something huge for all of us to know, and I forgot which verse says this, but "social media is not real life."

And remember that we, as the bride of Christ, have not been easy for Him to be married to. He has to be patient with us, His love is often not reciprocated. The love of Christ can still be reflected in a difficult marriage. So don't treat the difficulties as any calling to get out.

That's where we start. This is a permanent union, and to leave it and marry another is to commit adultery. Even if the state says you were legally divorced, to leave without biblical grounds (which we'll get to in a second), is to commit adultery when you remarry.

We want to do life among people who treat marriage this seriously - it isn't a temporary thing, it isn't a flimsy thing, it isn't something we are committed to as long as it feels right. This is a covenant designed to reflect the covenant of God's faithfulness that we are in if we are in Jesus.

Nothing is more discouraging than the stream of people who say they believe those things about marriage at the altar, but then when times get hard, they bail quickly. It reveals that we don't believe, just like adultery reveals that we don't believe.

OK, I'm single. Does all of this talk about the exalted role of marriage mean I have to get married, or that I should be planning and working toward getting married?

Not necessarily - again, because of Jesus. He was single, and if our standard for holiness is higher than Jesus, we might wanna lower that bar a little.

And in 1 Corinthians 7 says this. Paul, who is single, writes this:

1 Corinthians 7:7 “7 I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another.8 To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. 9 But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.”

So Paul says God has gifted some for singleness. (And the joke is that the gift of singleness is the gift that nobody wants. But some are actually uniquely content single. They don't have unbeatable feelings of loneliness, they don't have really strong desires for physical intimacy. They can handle it.)

But that isn't most. So while God may lead you to be single by not providing someone and that can be a good life, it is wise for most singles to plan on being married, and pursue that.

This doesn't mean you rush into it - get good premarital counseling where you're open to the counselor talking you out of it. Only consider a Christian (2 Cor 6:14) who shares your view of Jesus and bible and authority and marriage. Treat marriage like you're supposed to treat it, like a life-long covenant. Don't rush in.

But also don't be too hesitant to commit. Plan for it, look forward to it, learn about it, develop the godliness and character for it, and make moves to get there prayerfully.

The two mistakes we make are that we rush into marriage in desperation and lower standards- that's bad. Or we are so risk-averse, so hyper-introspective, so needing a 100% sure feeling of this is the one (which almost never comes to anyone), we have such impossibly high standards, that we don't commit. (Underneath it all, we are so unsure that Jesus will be enough for us in the future that we can't accept any risk at all in a relationship. There's always some risk. So some rush in, others just need to put a ring on it. Get wise counsel to guide you if you're not sure.)

So marriage is a good thing. So Jesus defends it.

Luke 16:18 "Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery."

When Luke recounts Jesus talking about marriage, he doesn't name any exceptions to the law that you can't divorce and remarry. Same in Mark's account. So the general teaching on marriage from Jesus was it is one man and one woman for life.

Matthew recounts something Jesus said at another time, and he says this:

Matthew 5:32 "But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

So why does Luke seem absolute - no divorce and remarriage ever, and Matthew allows an exception for sexual immorality.

And there is debate about the reason for that. Some that I admire a great deal, would say that the exceptions are basically just for the betrothal period. In their day, you would get betrothed, which was a strict engagement, basically like a marriage without sex, it lasted a year. And if, during that period your fiance cheated on you, you could divorce them. Some would say, "that's the only time you can divorce and then remarry without that second marriage being an act of adultery up front - if you divorced out of a betrothal but not a full marriage." That's why Matthew could say Joseph was just when he considered divorcing Mary during their betrothal when he first found her to be pregnant.

And these people make serious arguments, and I am sure they are born from a desire for marriage to be every bit as permanent and serious as Jesus calls for in Luke.

The other position, which seems to be the majority position among serious Bible scholars in history, is that Luke lays out the general principle, but it is not a principle with no exceptions.

Historically, it seems that the majority opinion is that divorce and remarriage is allowed in cases of adultery or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (which would include abusive situations - you can abandon within the home.)

The Westminster Confession of faith concluded:

In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, (Mat 5:31-32): and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead, (Mat 19:9; Rom 7:2-3).

Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such wilful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage...

And I would share that majority position, though there are some differences of opinion on that at Grace Road. (By the way, it's OK to disagree with your pastors about some things!)

I think that as much as we want to honor the role of marriage by insisting on its permanent, we also can't go beyond the bible in what we require (and I believe it does allow some rare exceptions to permanence.)

Also by allowing divorce as a last resort in those rare circumstances, we are preserving the meaning of marriage. When a spouse is actively, unrepentantly, committing adultery against the covenant or abandoning the covenant or being violent with a spouse as a form of abandonment, or has deserted a spouse, we don't honor the institution of marriage that was made for human flourishing by insisting that those marriages stay together.

So, again stressing that divorce is not the best option, there are texts which would imply that divorce followed by remarriage is sometimes permissible after all attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted:

It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. Matthew 5:31-32

In the Old Testament, someone caught committing adultery would be put to death. It was a capital crime. Under grace and under non-theocratic governments, it isn't a capital crime. So the adulterer keeps living. But it seems the innocent spouse is allowed to remarry just as they would have been in the OT days when the adulterous spouse was put to death.

But it seems that the exception here, “except on the ground of sexual immorality”, is given as a provision so that remarriage can occur without it being sin after one spouse committed adultery and ended up severing the marriage.

Now this doesn’t mean divorce must occur. We’ve seen lots of marriages put back together after adultery, after long processes of confession and forgiveness and rebuilding trust. There’s often hope for a marriage even when it seems bleakest. But there are times that what has been broken by adultery can’t be put back together, and divorce and remarriage is allowed.

Another situation where it seems to be allowed is the desertion or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse:

1 Corinthians 7:12 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. 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 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. 15 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.

In verse 15, you have an unbelieving spouse leaving the other - abandoning them. In those cases, the abandoned party is not bound, and it seems can remarry.

It’s important to see the contrast between between verse 15 and 13. In verse 15, one spouse is abandoning the other. The opposite of abandoning in verse 13 is “consenting to live with her,” or literally “pleased to dwell.”

This can be literally translated “pleased to be together with.” Paul is saying that if an unbelieving spouse is pleased to keep on being married to a believing spouse, the believing spouse shouldn’t leave. But if the unbelieving spouse leaves, the believer is free.

So in situations where one spouse is not pleased to be together with the other, and abandons them, remarriage seems allowed. But “pleased to be together with” does imply that they are willing to live within the bounds of a biblical marriage. If they’re going to be committing adultery, or being hostile within the home (staying there but not being

pleased to be together with), that abandonment has occurred. So abandonment can occur through leaving altogether, but also through abuse and blatant disregard for what a marriage is for. A husband who physically abuses his wife is abandoning that union - that is not being pleased to dwell. And there are several ways that can occur.

So while I agree that divorce is a last resort, and that most marriages, however they've been broken by sin, can be healed and restored, I do believe divorce followed by remarriage is allowed in the cases of adultery or the forms of abandonment.

And there are some different convictions here at Grace Road about whether remarriage should be allowed. At times, we might have some pastors that would be willing to officiate a wedding that others might not feel comfortable with, and that's part of being in community.

But certainly nobody should take any divorce lightly.

Keller says that it is not like changing your clothing to get divorced, it is more like an amputation. Amputations should be rare and avoided if possible. Doctors that are quick to amputate for small causes are bad doctors. But occasionally an amputation is necessary.

In our day we amputate for mosquito bites, if you're following my analogy, but if we are going to amputate it should be a last resort.

So maybe some closing words, a few loose ends:

A word to the divorced and remarried

Some of you might be hearing this and realizing that the path to your new marriage involved some sin. I would encourage you to confess that to God and each other and not pretend that isn't the case. But God is a forgiving and gracious God who forgives sin. So you don't need to view your new marriage as not real, or as perpetual adultery. It is a real marriage, and with sin confessed you can know that it isn't cursed. It isn't less binding or less real, even if you look back and say "we sinned," or "we made some mistakes."

Promises that are made in confusion are no less binding. If a person goes out and gets drunk and then runs up a credit card charge, their debt is very real. That's not fake debt - just ask VISA. And your marriage is not a fake marriage, your covenant no less

binding if you took wrong steps to get into it. While the initial act of remarrying may have been adultery in some cases, the marriage can be blessed by God because He is merciful. So God will be with you in making your marriage a good one that honors him.

A word to the married

So much is at stake in doing everything possible to hold that together and to make your home healthy.

Never say stay in an abusive home - physically harmed or radically demeaned or abandoned within the home. It doesn't honor the institution of marriage to be abused because of marriage. So use the tools available to you - call the police, call the elders, don't feel you are honoring the abusive spouse by allowing abuse to continue.

But many are just in hard marriages. Get help soon. Be humble, be willing to confess sin, to listen, to not insist that you're always right. Clean out that relational clutter like people who believe the Gospel has real healing power for sin.

A word to the single

Talk of how marriage is hard can be overblown.

A lot can be done ahead of time, not to guarantee anything, but to make a good marriage more likely. Sometimes you check all the boxes ahead of time and the marriage still goes badly. But more often than not that isn't the case. Pursue Jesus and contentment, pursue marriage and strive for purity as you head there, get outside counsel from older trusted Christians when you're considering someone, grow in humility and grace, and marry someone who's doing the same. Then, probably, though not always, things will be fine.

Because this was a broad overview, just like Jesus statement in Luke, there was way more unsaid than said. But continue to study and learn.

A Few resources:

The Meaning of Marriage by Tim Keller.

When Sinners Say I Do by Dave Harvey.

And let's be a church community where we help marriages thrive like a lot depends upon it.

Sermon Notes and Discussion Questions

I. The Permanence of Marriage (Luke 16:18)

Jesus's position here is far stricter than any known teachers in His day. Why? Why would Jesus appear to be looser on other issues (such as sabbath keeping and association with sinners,) yet come down so strictly on marriage?

II. The Meaning of Marriage (Genesis 2:18-25, Ephesians 5:22-33)

Read these passages. List the things marriage is designed to be according to these passages.

How can married couples better live out the high calling on their marriage?

What elements of these passages are hard for modern minds to accept? Why?

III. Some Rare Exceptions (Matthew 5:31-32, 1 Corinthians 7:12-15)

When the Pharisees viewed marriage mainly through the lens of how one can get out of it, Jesus took them back to Genesis 2. While allowances were made, Jesus wanted the meaning of marriage to shape their view of divorce.

So do we run a risk of being like the Pharisees with these passages that allow for divorce?

Do we run the opposite risk of not allowing what God allows when marriage is being truly abused?

How might we wisely avoid extremes in our counsel to one another?