

Mark 10:1–12

Indivisible

North Center || June 15, 2025
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INTRO: We are continuing to follow the ministry of Jesus through the Gospel of Mark. If you are new here to North Center, you might be wondering why we are talking about divorce on Independence Day Weekend! 😊 The answer is because we preach **expositionally** (*as opposed to topically or thematically*) which means that each Sunday we just pick up where we left off the Sunday before. One of things that makes this kind of preaching so helpful is that it ensures that we **preach the whole counsel of God** – and not just the parts that we want to preach. Some messages are really exciting to preach (*like Jesus walking on the water & calming the storm*), and some messages are harder to preach (*like Jesus preaching against divorce*). In the book of Acts, the apostle Paul is talking to the elders of the church in Ephesus, and he says, “***I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God***” (Acts 20:27). Expositional preaching is one of the ways for us to make sure that we don’t skip the parts that are uncomfortable – like this passage today! I am aware that there are very few families in this sanctuary that have not experienced the devastation of divorce. This isn’t just a statistic; it’s a very personal reality without our church. Here’s what I want to say at the very beginning: if you are a child of God, it’s okay if the words of Jesus **convict** you – because you know they will never **condemn** you (Rom 8:1).

Now, **the timing of this sermon** is not lost on me: we are listening to a message from Jesus about divorce on the very same weekend that everybody is saying, “*Happy Independence Day*”. That’s called **divine irony**. 😊 Why the fireworks and parades and barbeques and lawn games? To **celebrate** our divorce (*our separation, our freedom*) from the political and religious oppression of Britain. In other words, we believe that there are times when political allegiances are meant to be dissolved. That’s the language of our **Declaration of Independence** (1776); the very first sentence in the Declaration highlights our belief that there are times when it is “***necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another***”. That’s “divorce” language – political divorce. As Christians, we will submit to the governing authorities to a point,¹ but when political leadership hinders our ability to follow the laws of God, then “***we must obey God rather than man***” (Acts 5:29). Our allegiance to the Kingdom of God comes before our allegiance to any earthly kingdom. We see this all throughout Scripture. In fact, some of the most beautiful stories in the Bible involve God leading people out of one nation and into another nation.² This is the heritage that we **celebrate** in our country on July 4th – God leading us out of a spiritually oppressive nation in order to form “***a more perfect union***”. That’s how the **Preamble to the Constitution** begins: “***We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.***”

The point is simply this: our independence (our divorce) from Britain is worth celebrating. Yet, as we **celebrate** this independence, Jesus reminds us that there is a relationship in which divorce is **never** to be celebrated – and that relationship is the marriage between a man and a woman.

OUTLINE

1. What does this passage teach about marriage & divorce?
2. Why is marriage so important to God?
3. How shall we then live?

PRAY

¹ Rom 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13.

² In the very beginning, we hear God say that a man shall “leave his father and mother” in order to be joined to his wife. In Genesis, we hear God call **Abraham** out of the land of his fathers to go to a new land that God would show him (Gen 12:1–4). In **Exodus**, God leads His people out of Egypt to establish a new life in a new land. **Rahab** (the Cananite) becomes Rahab the Israelite. **Ruth** (the Moabite) becomes Ruth the Israelite. One of the most beautiful passages in the entire Bible is when Ruth leaves her homeland and tells Naomi, “***Your people will be my people***” (Ruth 1:16).

1. What does this passage teach about marriage & divorce?

Before we look at what Jesus teaches here, it's really important that we pay attention to the **CONTEXT**:

- **Immediate context:** *Mark 10:1–2* || The pharisees are trying to **trap** Jesus into saying something that will get Him in trouble. They aren't coming to Jesus because they want to grow in their understanding. They aren't interested in hearing truth; they aren't here to listen to the incarnate Word of God. They have come with the devious intention of **tricking** Jesus into saying something that will get Him in trouble. In their mind, they have presented Jesus with a test that has no right answer.

Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan.

And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

The Pharisees came and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” testing Him.

~ *Mark 10:1–2*

If Jesus says, “**Yes**”, then He would appear to contradict the heart of God who “**hates divorce**” (**Mal 2:16**). He would also be setting Himself against the religious leaders who held to a stricter view of marriage.³ On the other hand, if He says, “**No**”, then He would be setting Himself against the liberal scholars of the day and against the prevailing opinion of the land.⁴ He would also appear to be contradicting Moses who appeared to permit divorce under certain circumstances (**Deut 24:1–4**).

- **Surrounding context:** *Mark 6:14–29* || It is also really important to remember that Herod Antipas was the ruler of the region – the same Herod who had John the Baptist beheaded for saying that it was unlawful for Herod to divorce his wife and marry another woman. So, if they can get Jesus to publicly agree with John, then perhaps Herod will take care of Jesus the same way he took care of John.
- **The recipients Mark's Gospel** || We have already mentioned a number of times through this series that Mark wrote his gospel for a Gentile audience. In other words, they're not “*in*” on the Jewish conversations regarding marriage and divorce. They don't know what God says about marriage in Genesis or the story of Moses permitting divorce (Deut 24). Generally speaking, the only thing Mark's Gentile audience would know about God's heart for marriage is what they read in Mark's Gospel.
- **The timing of Mark's Gospel** || Most biblical scholars believe that Mark's gospel was written **before** any of the other Gospels (*so, Matthew, Luke, and John all wrote their gospels after Mark*). Why is that important? It's important because it means that when the original audience was reading this passage, they didn't have anything else to compare it to like we do today. When we read this story today, we can compare it to Matthew's account (**5:31–32**) and Luke's account (**16:18**), but not the original audience.⁵

And so, what I want to do this morning is ask the question: “*What would Mark's original audience have understood to be the plain teaching of Jesus in this passage – as He masterfully engages the Pharisees' test?*”

Jesus knows that the context of this question is **Deuteronomy 24** where Moses permitted the children of Israel to pursue a divorce under certain circumstances, and so He starts by asking them, “*What did Moses command you?*” – which is a way of saying, “**What does the Bible say?**” And He answered and said to them, “*What did Moses command you?*” (**Mark 10:3**).

Application: If you have an important math test coming up in school, and you really want to do well on the test, what are you going to use to study for the test: **(A) television, (B) video games, (C) TikTok, or (D) your textbook.** These other things aren't a reliable guide when it comes to doing well on your math test.

³ I.e., The School of Shammai.

⁴ I.e., The School of Hillel.

⁵ I don't think I've ever heard a sermon from this passage where the preacher didn't spend most of the time preaching from Matthew's Gospel instead – because Matthew appears to release the pressure on this teaching by giving an “exception clause” (*παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας*). Not all Biblical scholars are in agreement on exactly what Matthew meant by that phrase, but (regardless of what Matthew meant) Mark doesn't give any exceptions.

Christian, where are you going to look for wisdom and guidance when faced with questions in the Christian life? Are you getting your information from **cultural sources** (*Hollywood, social media, public opinion, multi-millionaire tv preachers, family members...*), or are you going to the Word of God for answers?⁶ Church, this Book is our only source of inspired and inerrant truth in the universe.⁷ Yet, in my experience, when it comes to questions of the Christian life, **it's amazing how many professing Christians would rather CLOSE this Book than be CHANGED by this Book**. Instead of seeking to know what the Word of God says, first we decide what we want, and then we cherry pick any Scripture verse that seems to support the decision that we've already made.

“We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior.”
~ John Stott

“We do not stand in judgment over Scripture; Scripture stands in judgment over us.”
~ R.C. Sproul

The Pharisees ask an important question regarding morality, and Jesus goes straight to Scripture for answers: “*What did Moses command you?*” And so, they answer by going to **Deuteronomy 24**.

They said, “Moses permitted⁸ a man to write a certificate of divorce,⁹ and to dismiss¹⁰ her.”
~ Mark 10:4

So, how does Jesus respond?

And Jesus answered and said to them,
“Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.”
~ Mark 10:5

Jesus only has one response regarding Moses' permission. He said... *Yes, Moses permitted divorce. But why? Because the people's hearts were hard – just like yours.* That purpose word (**because**) is SO IMPORTANT here. **Why** did Moses permit divorce? He didn't permit divorce because of **marital unfaithfulness** – or because a spouse was **abandoned** – or because of **financial stress** – or because of **irreconcilable differences** – or because they got **married too young** – or because of **addiction** – or because they'd just **fallen out of love** (the feelings just aren't there anymore...). These are all part of the catalogue of reasons for why people pursue divorce today, but none of these are the reason that Jesus gives for why Moses permitted divorce.

Jesus says, “*Moses permitted divorce because the hearts of the people were hard.*” Meaning...what? Meaning, they didn't care what God had to say about marriage, and so they were going to get divorced no matter what. God had already spoken to the permanence of marriage (Gen 2:24), but they didn't care about what God had to say; all they cared about was how they felt. {{{{REMEMBER: this is the same group of people who were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land because they refused to take God at His word.}}}}

Jesus is very clear here: Moses didn't give them legal permission to get divorced because they were justified in doing so. He didn't permit divorce because they had a so-called “valid reason”. According to Jesus, Moses permitted divorce because their hearts were so hardened toward God & His design for marriage that they were going to get divorced anyway. So, to quote one biblical scholar, “*Moses permitted divorce...as a way of limiting the damage that hard-hearted men would do to women if they just threw them out.*”¹¹

⁶ “*Scripture is not just the church's textbook, but her judge*” (J.I. Packer).

⁷ **John 17:17** = **Your Word** is truth; **Psa 138:2** = You have exalted **Your Word** above all things; **Psa 119:9** = How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to **Your word**; **Psa 119:105** = **Your word** is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path; **2 Timothy 3:16**.

⁸ ἐπιτρέπω: *allow, permit.*

⁹ ἀποστάσιον

¹⁰ ἀπολύω.

¹¹ John Piper, “*What God Has Joined Together, Let No Man Separate*” (May 2, 1982).

So, while the Pharisees had built their doctrine of marriage on this passage in Deuteronomy, notice that Jesus spends hardly any time talking about that passage. He makes one passing comment about the reason for Moses' permission, and then He immediately moves the conversation back to Genesis – where the Creator Himself speaks to the permanence of the marriage union.

But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'
'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.
Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.'

~ Mark 10:5-9

God is the One who created man & woman, male & female. And so, He is the only One who has the sovereign right to declare the essence and the boundaries of a union *between* a man and a woman. As Bible-believing Christians, we know this is true. **Marriage does not belong to the government**, and so the government does not have divine jurisdiction over this union. They don't have the right to determine what a marriage is (*though they try*), and they don't have the right to determine how a marriage ends (*though they try*). **Marriage isn't a cultural institution**; it is a divine institution that was designed & instituted by God at the dawn of creation.

And so, the pressing question is NOT, ***what did Moses permit***, but rather, ***what did God design***? That's where Jesus takes this conversation. And when you follow Jesus back to the roots of marriage in Genesis, this is when your view of marriage ends up looking very, very, very different from the world around you.

Pointing to the design of God in creation, Jesus says that when a man and a woman are joined together in marriage, God makes them "**one flesh**". He's quoting from **Genesis 2:24** where God says that "**they shall become one flesh**".¹² In marriage, they are no longer two, but one. And you cannot naturally separate something that is "one".

Illustration: Let's say that you go to the Lego store to buy some individual Lego pieces. If you walk up to the register with one Lego in your hand, how many Legos are you going to pay for? Answer: one. If you walk up to the register with two Legos in your hand, how many Legos are you going to pay for? Answer: two. Now, what if you stick those two Legos together so that they are connected...now how many Legos are you going to have to pay for? Answer: two. Even though you connected them together, everybody knows that you still have two individual Legos. And, because you have two individual Legos, you can take them apart any time you wish.

That's the way our culture views marriage, but this is not a good example of what God does when He joins a man and woman together in holy marriage, because He says that they are no longer two, but one. So, what if I was to give you one Lego... Would you be able to separate it? Not naturally. Not without causing damage (*both to the Lego and to your thumb!*).

So, Jesus concludes His teaching by saying, what God has joined together, do not let people separate. What does God say in the OT? "*They shall become one flesh*". What does God say in the NT? "*Therefore, let not man separate.*" In answer to their test, Jesus basically just says, "*Read your Bible and obey what God says!*"

Now, we don't have time to examine all the other relevant Biblical passages dealing with this question. But, as far as Mark is concerned, this teaching from Jesus was enough for his immediate audience to see the big picture of **God's heart regarding the institution of marriage**: one man & one woman – joined together by God – one flesh – for life – no matter what. And if this feels like a difficult concept for you, then I think you are understanding Jesus rightly... and you are in good company because **His own disciples were struggling to understand what He was saying**. Why? Because they too were products of their culture, and the popular opinion of their culture was that there were any number of reasons why a husband and wife might pursue a divorce. So, when they were alone with Jesus, they asked Him about it again.

¹² "Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter.

So, He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits **adultery** against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits **adultery** (μοιχάω).”

~ **Mark 10:10–12**

Let me make just a quick comment about these verses. **Q.** What is **adultery**? **A.** It’s “*marital infidelity*”, “*marital unfaithfulness*”. It is a moral sin that you commit against your spouse. **It’s a marriage sin.** So, now, listen to what Jesus says...

Q. If I was to divorce Liz and marry somebody else, what sin would I be committing against Liz? **A.** *Adultery*. **Q.** If Liz was to divorce me and marry somebody else, what sin would she be committing against me? *Same*.

But the question is “why”? If I was to divorce Liz and remarry somebody else, how can Jesus charge me with committing a “marriage sin” against Liz --- if we are no longer married?!?! The only logical answer from this passage is this: the God who joins together a man and woman and makes them one flesh does not acknowledge our certificates of divorce. Though the government may give me a **legal document** validating my divorce, in the eyes of God, I am still “*one flesh*” with Elizabeth. **A piece of paper** is not what united us in marriage, and so **a piece of paper** cannot separate us in marriage. I am committing a marriage-sin because I’m still married.

And that’s how Jesus ends the conversation!

2. Why is Marriage so Important to God?

I think the most succinct answer we can give as to why marriage is so important to God is because it is a living picture to the world of the way that Jesus loves the church (Eph 5:22–33). The way a husband loves his bride “*for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health...until death*” is the way that Jesus loves His bride (see Hos 3:1). The love that Jesus has for His church “*endures all things*” (1 Cor 13:8). And so, when a man and woman honor their marriage covenant (through all the blissful highs and through all the horrific lows), they are showcasing what the love of Christ looks like – He will never leave you (Heb 13:5). In other words, your happiness is not the ultimate purpose of marriage. The glory of Christ is the point of marriage. Yes, God designed marriage to be a means of blessing and source of a joy. He also designed marriage to be the means through which children are brought into the world. Marriage is the context in which a man and a woman come together in such a way that there is the potential for life to be born. Young people, if you have no desire to bring children into the world, the Bible has no category for you pursuing marriage (see Gen 1:28). The point is simply this: the highest goal of marriage is not your feelings...it’s the glory of God.

3. How Shall We Then Live?

1. Praise the LORD for the heroic bravery of the men and women who sacrificed everything to separate from a spiritually oppressive government in order to give us a land where we are free to gather in the Name of Jesus, to own a copy of God’s Word, and to worship God according to our biblical convictions.
2. Praise the LORD for the ultimate heroism of King Jesus who sacrificed everything to set us free from our sin & shame & death so that we might be united to Him both now & forever – no matter what.
3. If you have **divorce** in your past: **confess your part as an act of sin** against the LORD and against your spouse and then cling to the promise that “*if we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9; c.f., Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 5:17).
4. If you are **married** (*whether this is your first marriage or your fifth marriage*), give your marriage to the LORD as **a sacrifice of worship** and **submit your marriage to the unchanging Word of God**. **Pray** for your spouse. **Pray** for your marriage. **Fight** for your marriage. **Encourage** others in their marriage.
5. If you are **not married**, give your singleness to the LORD as **a sacrifice of worship**. Just as He has a purpose when our marriages are hard, He has a purpose when our singleness is hard. **He knows what He is doing with your life.** If you are male – *He made you*. If you are female – *He made you*. And He knows what He is doing with your life. And He is working even now for your good and for His glory.