



Sermon Text: Matthew 5:31-32

Sermon Date: August 11, 2019

On Sunday we examined Jesus' teaching on divorce found in Matthew 5:31-32 & Matthew 19:1-9. While we were unable to cover this topic exhaustively in a single sermon, Pastor Justin did unpack Jesus' general teaching on divorce and remarriage.

THE IDEAL

In Jesus' day, there were two schools of rabbinic thought on divorce. Both of them based their view on the meaning of the obscure phrase "some indecency" in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The stricter view of Shammai defined some indecency as serious sexual sin. The laxer—and more popular—view of Hillel interpreted the phrase to mean almost anything about a wife that a husband found displeasing.

In Matthew 19, the Pharisees bring the opinion of Hillel before Jesus for his opinion— "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" Instead of trying to identify when it is okay to leave a marriage, Jesus points his hears back to God's ideal for marriage in creation. In God's design, marriage is a union of exclusive allegiance and unparalleled intimacy that lasts a lifetime. Divorce was never God's design. Instead of commanding divorce, Deuteronomy 24 permitted divorce due to humanity's hardness of heart. Since God joins husband and wife, only He can separate them; therefore, to remarry after an illegitimate divorce is to commit adultery.

THE EXCEPTION

Having upheld the ideal of marriage, Jesus nevertheless highlights one exception that makes divorce and remarriage permissible—sexual immorality. The word translated sexual immorality carried a fairly wide meaning of sexual sin and unfaithfulness. It included adultery but also other serious sexual transgressions that fell short of copulation.

Sexual immorality is a legitimate ground for divorce because it dissolves the one-flesh union of marriage like no legal document can. Once again, we are forced to reckon with just how powerful and sacred sex truly is. Society tells us that sex is inconsequential and cheap— "just" sex. But that is not true. The only exception Christ gives to a lifetime of marriage is sexual immorality. (Later in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul expands upon Christ's teaching to include abandonment as a legitimate ground for remarriage).

THE EXAMPLE

The danger of examining the exception to God's ideal, is that we can focus on it so much that we misconstrue God's intention. Many people are all too eager to seize upon the exception instead of striving for the ideal. Therefore, it is important to see God's faithful love for His people as an example for our marriages.

Throughout the Old Testament, God portrays His relationship with Israel as a marriage covenant. And even though they violate that covenant and incessantly commit spiritual adultery, He remains faithful. Even when he has ever legitimate reason to divorce them, He loves them still. Beyond this, we have the example of Christ's faithful love for his bride, the church.

- **Undeserved Love:** Christ loves his church with an undeserved love. "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8)
- **Costly Love:** The love of Christ is costly. He absorbed the penalty of our sin, endured the wrath of God on our behalf so that we could be freely forgiven.
- **Enduring Love:** Even though the church is wrinkled and blemished, with enduring love Christ will one day present us to himself in perfect purity. He keeps loving us even in our present unloveliness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you from the sermon and the biblical text from Sunday?
2. Why is it important to view our marriage (and the failures of our spouses) in the light of God's example of loving faithfulness to His covenant people?
3. How does Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage challenge you to think differently about marriage?