

## ASTONISHED prt 9

### Matthew 5:31–32

MPS: **God's opposition of divorce is always paired with His love for people.**

#### PRAYER TIME:

*1 As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?*

There will be a day when we see Him in His fullness - when we appear before Him.

What are some things you can't wait to see when you appear before Him?

Lord, I long to see you \_\_\_\_\_.

Face to face, in all Your glory, smiling upon me with eyes full of love, seated on Your throne, high and lifted up, in the beauty of Your holiness and perfect light, as the King of king - reigning forever, and hear You say, "Well done, good and faithful servant", in the place You've prepared for me - my eternal home.

*4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul: how I would go with the throng and lead them in procession to the house of God with glad shouts and songs of praise, a multitude keeping festival.*

Think back on all the good, fruitful, experiential, even pivotal times in our church body that make you praise God.

God, I remember when You \_\_\_\_\_ in our body, and I thank you!

Filled our gatherings with Your tangible presence, poured out Your Spirit in powerful worship, healed many who were sick among us, brought restoration to relationships, united us in deep love and harmony, raised up new leaders and servants, answered our prayers in amazing ways, saved many souls and added to our number, provided miraculously for our needs, restored broken relationships, moved in power during our prayer meetings, gave us courage to step out in faith and mission, blessed our times of fellowship with joy and laughter, spoke clearly through, Your Word and changed hearts

*8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love, and at night his song is with me, a prayer to the God of my life.*

A God who loves is a God who generously pours out to us. He is worthy; we are needy.

You are the God of my life – my prayer to you today is for your provision in

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My daily bread and every need, strength and endurance for this season, healing in my body and mind, wisdom and guidance for the decisions ahead, peace that guards my heart, financial provision for my family and Your work, boldness and courage to follow You, joy that overflows in hard times, protection over my loved ones, unity and love in our church family, fresh passion for Your presence, restoration in my weary soul, opportunities to serve and glorify You, comfort in my grief and sorrow, faith to trust You more deeply

#### **INTRO:**

- ASTONISHED describes the crowds after Jesus' sermon on the mount
- We are in a section, as we go verse by verse, where Jesus says the phrase "you've heard that it was said."
- 6 is number of man - You've heard that it was said... FROM MAN; now you get to hear from GOD – The author of the law astonishes His people with the intent of the law.
- Of those 6, 5 of them have to do with our relationships (don't be angry at your brother, don't commit adultery, love your enemies, don't be retaliatory).
- Today's topics of divorce has affected everyone in this room at some level.
- If I were choosing sermons based on 'good and inspirational' then I would not choose this Text to preach on. 10 out of 10 times, I would not. But, when you teach/preach expositional, you can't dodge the hard passages. So... then here we are.

#### **OPEN:**

- Divorce has affected me: my parents divorced after 40 years of marriage. If I ask anyone in this room if divorce has affected their lives to at least some degree, I believe almost all of you would say 'yes.' (some it's your parents, some it's your kids, some is you)
- So don't feel like the spotlight is entirely and only on you... it is on all of us.
- The statistics back this up.
  
- Roughly 41% of first marriages end in divorce. (That is low as it has been in decades – but...)
- Only 46% of adults today are married – down from 66% in the 1950s
- You used to hear that divorce rate was 50% and it's the same in the church.
- New data shows lower divorce rates over all and now a distinction has been studied between those who identify as Christians and those who are actively engaged in the local church.
- Active, regular church attenders have 47% lower divorce rates than non-churchgoers.

- Nominal Christians (those who identify as Christian but rarely attend church) actually have higher divorce rates than non-religious people — about 20% higher in some studies.

### **Key findings for children whose parents divorced (when the children were ages 0–5):**

- Adult earnings reduced by 9–13% in their mid-to-late 20s.
- Teen birth rates increased by up to 63%.
- Risk of incarceration increased by roughly 40–43%.
- Risk of early death (before age 25) increased by 35–55% and stayed elevated for at least 10 years.
- Children of divorced parents are at least 50 percent more likely to get a divorce than those from unbroken homes.
- When both the husband and the wife come from divorced families, the odds of divorce are 200 percent higher
- The study shows these effects are causal (not just correlation) and are driven by drops in household income, increased family instability/moves, and reduced parental supervision/resources.

### **Important Nuance**

Most researchers emphasize two key points:

1. **High-conflict marriages:** In homes with very high, ongoing conflict or abuse, divorce can sometimes improve outcomes for children compared to staying in the toxic environment.
  2. **Most children are resilient:** The majority of children of divorce do eventually adapt, especially when parents handle the divorce with low conflict, consistent co-parenting, and strong support. However, on average, they still face higher risks across multiple long-term outcomes.
- Just based on how divorce hurts our children, it seems God would be opposed.
  - And He is – the OT and NT both consistently show us that.

### **God's opposition of divorce is always paired with His love for people.**

**Vs 31** *“It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’*

- The certificate of divorce served as a legal document that protected the woman. It publicly declared she was free to remarry which would provide her with some social and financial protection from a new husband.
- According to some Rabbis of Jesus’ day, a man could divorce his wife for almost any reason (even trivial reasons like burning dinner, speaking too loudly, or simply finding another woman more attractive.) as long as he gave her a certificate of divorce – called a “get” - think permanent hall pass, or maybe a green card.

- The divorce was considered valid under their interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1.
- Not all rabbis agreed — the school of Shammai was much stricter — but Hillel’s more lenient view was the dominant one in Jesus’ day.
- These two Rabbis, **Hillel** and **Shammai** were among the most influential rabbis whose teachings and debates are preserved in the Mishnah.”
- The **Mishnah** (major written collection of the Jewish oral law around 200AD) clearly records both schools: the lenient view of Hillel and the stricter view of Shammai.
- This debate was active during Jesus’ ministry. That’s why the Pharisees asked Him in **Matthew 19:3**:

**Matthew 19:3–9 (ESV) 3** *And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”*

- The Pharisees were essentially asking Him to pick a side in the Hillel vs. Shammai debate.
- Jesus rejected the permissive “any cause” approach of the day and pointed people back to God’s original design for marriage in the creation account.”

*4 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 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’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” 8 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. 9 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”*

- Rather than entering this debate among rabbis, Jesus first affirms God’s original plan for marriage and shows that it remains God’s ideal for all marriages.
- He does that in His dialogue with both the Parises and here in the sermon on the mount.

**God’s opposition of divorce is always paired with His love for people.**

### **1. God’s opposition of divorce.**

**Vs 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.*

### **Why does God strongly oppose divorce?**

**Malachi 2:16 (ESV) 16** *“For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.”*

- Marriage is often used to illustrate our relationship with God—marriage isn’t a contract, it’s a covenant. God has made a covenant with us that He will never break. Think about Abraham in Genesis 15: God made the covenant while Abraham was asleep, saying in effect, “Abraham, I am committed to keep this covenant—not contingent on you (you’re not even awake) but on Me. I will be cut to pieces before I break the covenant.” And He was—through Jesus on the cross.
- Marriage according to God is not simply a civil contract.
  - In a contract, 2 parties are committed to each other if this relationship is mutually beneficial.
  - In a covenant, 1 or both parties enter an agreement motivated by the deep desire to benefit the person.
- God’s covenant love for us is demonstrated by the institution of marriage (Eph 5:21-32) and divorce is the antithesis of this covenant picture.
- According to the Bible, marriage is a portrait and a picture of something far greater. The Bible tells us that marriage is a portrait and a symbol and a picture of Jesus’ love for the church. You can read this in Ephesians 5, where it says that Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to present her to himself as a radiant bride without blemish or spot. The history culminates in Revelation 19 near the end of the Bible with a wedding.
- God opposes divorce because it tears apart what He has joined (Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:6). In the original context of Malachi, God is rebuking treacherous, unfaithful spouses who deal violently with their wives through divorce. Divorce is covenant-breaking treachery that violates the picture of Christ’s unbreakable love for His church (Ephesians 5:25–32). **Yet God’s opposition of divorce is always paired with His love for people.** He condemns the sin, but He does not condemn the sinner who repents.
- Jesus does not accept the practice of easy divorce

- Why does Jesus call this remarriage adultery? Because God does not acknowledge the divorce.
- Jesus never commands divorce but only permits it if all attempts at reconciliation have failed because he recognizes that the adultery has already undermined one of the most fundamental elements of a marriage—sexual exclusivity
- The reason God is against both adultery and divorce is they tell a different story than the gospel.

### **What are the biblical grounds for divorce?**

The Bible gives only two clear grounds for divorce.

- First, sexual immorality (Matthew 5:31–32; 19:3–9). Jesus teaches that anyone who divorces his wife “makes her commit adultery,” except in the case of sexual immorality (the Greek word *porneia*, which includes adultery and other forms of sexual unfaithfulness). In other words, Jesus makes one specific exception to God’s general rule against divorce: when there has been serious, unrepentant sexual sin that breaks the marriage covenant. We should also note in this case, divorce is allowed but not required. In fact, forgiveness and reconciliation, restoring the marriage, should always be the first option.
- Second, abandonment by an unbelieving spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10–15). Paul says that if an unbeliever deserts a believer and is unwilling to live with them or be reconciled, “the brother or sister is not enslaved” and is free to remarry in the Lord. These are the only two *explicit* biblical exceptions. In every other situation, God’s standard remains clear: “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6).

This leads to a sub-grounds for divorce question: (In many cases abuse is a derivative of abandonment.)

### **Is emotional/verbal abuse or addiction (porn, drugs, gambling) grounds for divorce, even if not physical?**

The Bible is not explicit here, so we must be careful not to add to Scripture. Keep in mind these may be determined case by case. There *can* be times when persistent, unrepentant emotional/verbal abuse or other destructive addictions effectively function as a form of abandonment—refusing to love, provide, protect, or live as one flesh (see 1 Corinthians 7:15 and the covenant language of Malachi 2:14–16). In such cases the church should first pursue every possible path of repentance, accountability, and reconciliation. But where the abuser or

addict refuses to repent and the marriage covenant is repeatedly shattered, the innocent spouse is not required to remain in ongoing danger. Safety and protection come first and the church is designed by God to walk with you through this to help provide support, comfort, guidance, and objective wisdom to help navigate such a difficult situation.

### **What to do if you are being physically abused?**

Do not stay silent. Tell someone immediately—tell a trusted friend, elder, or counselor. Let us (the church) know. If there is any physical danger, separate immediately, seek safety, and involve civil authorities if needed (Romans 13:1–4). The Bible is not explicit on whether abuse automatically dissolves the marriage bond, but what is crystal clear is that we are called to love one another and carry one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). Often victims won’t come forward fearing they won’t be heard. We will help you, and listen to you with care. The church will provide counseling, protection, and practical support. God hates violence in His house, and we will stand with the oppressed while calling the oppressor to repentance.

### **I’m considering divorce—how should I process this?**

Not alone. Not with the world’s advice. Process this with a trusted, mature believer or two who will point you to Scripture. Prayer is essential. Remembering the gospel is vital—Christ’s covenant love for you never fails, even when ours does. Surround yourself with people who will pray with and for you, hold you accountable, and fight for your marriage if at all possible.

Christians should aim to maximize the staying power of marriage and minimize divorce at all costs — even in very hard situations.

Staying married is not primarily about personal happiness or “being in love,” but about covenant-keeping and displaying the gospel through radical commitment “for better or for worse.”

### **How do I safeguard our marriage from divorce?**

Pre-decide in your heart that divorce is not an option (perhaps in the two biblical cases – but even then one doesn’t have to divorce). Abide in Christ daily—He is your staying power (John 15:5). Get marriage coaching or counseling before you need it. Keep working on your marriage intentionally. Remember what marriage is really about: your sanctification and a living demonstration of the gospel (Ephesians 5:22–33). For those not yet married, follow Scripture and marry only a believer—what else would keep an unbeliever from walking away when the world says it’s fine? The Scripture tells us it is not God’s desire or design. (mention some are called to singleness here: 1 Corinthians 7:7–9)

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## **2. God's love for His people**

- At the end of the day, the LORD loves His people and has already paid the penalty for all their sins including adultery and divorce. This is not an open door for cheap grace (antinominalism) but it's a humbling experience to know we have forgiveness and love from a good God.
- We see this with the woman caught in adultery (tell the story)

**John 8:10 (ESV) 10-11** *Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."*

- He affirms His love for his people throughout the sermon on the mount.

**Matthew 7:11 (ESV) 11** *If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

**Matthew 6:32–33 (ESV) 32** *For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

- We must remember Jesus has couched His sermon on the mount in the Kingdom of Heaven... everything he teaches is how Kingdom people live and flourish. (Illustrate)
- All the commands of this sermon are BECAUSE He *loves* you not because He wants to *limit* you – though limits are a good thing not a bad thing. (illustrate)

### **Does God view all remarriages after divorce as ongoing adultery?**

No, not all. If the divorce was on biblical grounds (sexual immorality or abandonment), then remarriage is not adultery. If the divorce was not on biblical grounds, Jesus' words in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9 indicate that entering a new marriage would be adulterous. However, once a remarriage has already taken place, the current marriage is a real covenant that God now calls you to honor. True repentance does not mean dissolving the current marriage and creating another divorce; it means, "If I had to do it over again, I would because God has changed my mind about divorce."

### **If someone has been divorced and remarried (possibly unbiblically), what does true repentance look like now? Do they need to divorce their current spouse?**

No. You do not need to divorce your current spouse. True repentance means changing your

mind about divorce—you now see it the way God sees it. Acknowledge the sin of the past divorce, confess it to the Lord, receive His full forgiveness, and commit to radical faithfulness in your present marriage. God never leaves or forsakes us; He is eternally faithful to us, and we are to reflect that same covenant love now. His grace covers what is past and empowers what is present (1 John 1:9; Romans 8:1).

- **Part of God’s love for you is giving you a local church to help in these situations.**

#### **What role should the church play in divorce situations?**

The church must be compassionate and courageous. We provide biblical counseling, practical support, and (when necessary) loving church discipline according to Matthew 18:15–17. We walk with the hurting, protect the vulnerable, call the unrepentant to repentance, and celebrate restoration. Divorce is never the church’s first response, but when it happens we do not abandon people—we surround them with grace and truth.

#### **Does God so strongly oppose divorce so much that He condemns those who’ve been through it, or is there grace and restoration?**

There is always an unending well of grace He is willing to pour out on you. God opposes divorce, but He loves you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Whether you were the one who sinned or the one who was sinned against, the cross is big enough. Repentance opens the door to full restoration—forgiveness, healing, and a future that displays the power of the gospel. The same God who opposes divorce is the God who welcomes prodigals home with open arms.

#### **What if there have been multiple divorces and remarriages? Can God still bless or redeem that situation?**

Absolutely. God’s grace is scandalous! Our sin is great, but His grace is greater. He is in the business of restoring what is broken. No one is beyond the reach of the gospel. If you have repented, the blood of Jesus cleanses you completely, and God can still write a beautiful new chapter of faithfulness, joy, and gospel witness in your life. (reiterate number 9’s answer about repentance).

- The woman at the well is a good example

**John 4:16–18 (ESV)** **16** *Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.”* **17** *The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’;* **18** *for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”*

- Yet Jesus still ministered to her and she loved Him

## CONCLUSION

### God's opposition of divorce is always paired with His love for people.

- If the Lord has saved you, invited you into His kingdom, given you teaching to obey to glorify Him and benefit you, then embrace them – live by them and ask for His help as you do.
- Let me remind you how Jesus' the sermon on the mount ends:

**Matthew 7:24–27 (ESV) 24** *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”*

- Trusting His Word and teachings IS building a solid life on a solid foundation.

## QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. **God's Design vs. Our Culture:** Jesus pointed back to God's original design for marriage in creation (“the two shall become one flesh” and “what God has joined together, let not man separate”). In what ways does our culture today make it easy to treat marriage more like a contract than a covenant? How does remembering marriage as a picture of Christ's love for the church change the way you think about commitment in your own marriage or future marriage?
2. **Grace and Truth:** The sermon emphasized that God strongly opposes divorce but deeply loves people who have been affected by it. How does this balance of truth (God's high standard) and grace (full forgiveness and restoration in Christ) speak to you personally—whether you've experienced divorce in your family, your own life, or through someone close to you?
3. **Practical Application:** The sermon encouraged us to “pre-decide” that divorce is not an option (except in the very limited biblical cases) and to actively safeguard our marriages. What is one practical step you can take this week to strengthen your marriage (or prepare for marriage if you're single) and build it on the solid rock of Jesus' words?

