**THE TRUE MEANING OF MARRIAGE**

Mark 10:1-12 (Key Verse 8, 9)

*and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

Today’s passage is one the hardest teachings in our Christian faith. It is not hard because the passage is hard, its hard because it is an area that truly challenges our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. The religious leaders came to Jesus with a question of divorce. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? In others words does is there some reason where God permits divorce between a husband and a wife. To this day in our Christian community the answer to this question has resulted in divisions within churches. Even preachers who share same theology differ in their answer to this question. This just goes to show how something that may seem obvious, is actually not. Because even seasoned men of God who I respect, differ in their response to this question. Though we shall see that this question is presented to Jesus with an alterum motive, to actually test Jesus. Jesus uses this opportunity to teach on what marriage is. It is when we understand what really marriage is that will help us pave the way through this passage. May the lord grant us one word in our hearts, so that it is Jesus who rains above all things and not our agendas, our emotions and desires. Amen!

Look at verse 1, “Then Jesus left that place and went into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. Again the crowds came to Him and He taught them, as was His custom.” When crowds came to Jesus, he did not sit there and enjoy their attention, Jesus taught the word of God. It was his custom to teach the bible to people. And now they had moved into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. While he is busy teaching the crowd, some Pharisees came to Jesus. Look at verse 2, “Some Pharisees came to test Him. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” they inquired. They came to ask Jesus something, however the bible makes it clear that they had come to test Jesus. Which means that they had come to trap Jesus with a question. They were not really coming with a open mind to learn from Jesus but rather test Jesus. The Pharisees tried to get Jesus to speak against Moses or against popular thought; they hoped to catch Him in a trap.

Their question was, “is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” in other words before God, is it ok for a man to divorce his wife. In fact when we go to the book of Matthew on the same invent, Matthew provides more detail to this question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife **for any and every reason**?” in other words is there any provision where a man can divorce his wife and as a law from God. As we shall Jesus showed them that the issue of divorce came about because of the hardness of man’s heart, not a law from God.

At the time there were two prominent Rabbi’s who had differing views on the subject, Rabbi Shammai and Rabbi Hillel.Their teaching on divorce came from what Moses had taught in Deuteronomy 24, verse 1 reads, “If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,..” **Rabbi Shammai** understood that uncleanness meant sexual immorality and said that was the only valid reason for divorce. But **Rabbi Hillel** understood uncleanness to mean any sort of discretion, even to the point of burning the breakfast being valid grounds for divorce. Now from Rabbi Hillel there could be any and every reasons a man could divorce because the word unclean is too broad.

Now instead of Jesus giving an answer Jesus asked a question in response to their question. Look at verse 3-4, “What did Moses command you?” He replied. 4They answered, “Moses permitted a man to write his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away.” Right here we see that, it was not divorce that was in question but rather, **could a man divorce his wife for any and every reason**. I say this because they did not even struggle to give Jesus answer to what Moses commanded. They came to Jesus having accepted that divorce was permitted as Moses taught. However, their test or trap question was, could it be for any reason.

This was because at the time Jewish society was getting sexually corrupt under the influence of Rome. Jews also tendered to abuse women, abandoning them at random. Divorce was such a controversial issue even among the teachers of the law. King Herod had divorced his wife and taken his brother’s wife for marriage. John the Baptist tried to rebuke him that it was not lawful. As a result John the Baptist was beheaded. That had just happened recently, so their test question could land Jesus in trouble politically, if he says there is no reason to divorce.

Let us look at verse 5, “But Jesus told them, “Moses wrote this commandment for you because of your hardness of heart.” Jesus begins to address their fundamental problem. That their question to begin with is wrong. Jesus begins to address why the letter of divorce was issued to begin with. It was all because of the hardness of the heart. In other words the reason for divorce had nothing to do. But rather it was fundamentally because of the hardness of the heart. From God’s perspective there is no reason for divorce. In fact God hates divorce [Malachi 2:16].

Moses certificate of divorce was not to promote divorce but rather discourage divorce. Because of the hardness of their hearts he issued these letters of divorce. For example, a man came to Moses wanted to divorce of differences in character. When Moses asked please be specific, the man would say I liked how my mother cooked this woman does not cook in that way. Another man came up an said, I met another women whom I fell in love with and now my wife is displeasing to me. I made a mistake in marrying this woman, she was not the one. I have now met the one. I want to divorce. Please I do not want my life to pass away with a wrong woman. Moses would try discuss with him, how can human love be perfect? Though now you think your love is perfect it will soon be tested and cool down. It is best to love the woman God gave you first. But the man would be so hard headed that he would not change his mind. Even if there was evidence of unfaithfulness, rather than forgiving one another. The heart would remain hard and choose to want what it wants.

So when a man did decide to divorce their wife, they could later on feel they made a mistake and want her back. A letter of divorce was to make it legally binding decision that once you take this step you cannot turn around and change you mind. It was a certificate to also protect the woman so she does not end being pull forwards and backs. So in that way, it was a certificate that was actually discouraging divorce, because then the man had to really think hard on that decision because there is no turning back. Moses reluctantly permitted divorce because of the hardness of man’s hearts.

Jesus did not shrink before their hard heartedness. Jesus rather taught them the true meaning of marriage. Look at verse 6-9, “However, from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’ 7‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Jesus extracted truths from Genesis on what marriage is. So what are these truths about marriage?

**First, Marriage is leaving his father and mother.** Notice that, it is male and female from the beginning. Marriage presents a new start as a responsible man. His purpose is to carry God’s mission. Marriage in this regard, is a divine calling, the woman as a suitable helper to the man so the two can fulfill God’s mission.

**Secondly, marriage is the two becoming one**. Being united to his wife does not just mean physically getting together. It is to be united in personality and even in spirit. Therefore, a couple is a whole person. It cannot be divided into two. Because verse 8 says, “and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

**Thirdly, marriage is what God joins together**. Jesus said, “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Some do an arranged marriage and others a love marriage. Overtime arranged marriage can develop into love. Either case, marriage is what God joins together. In our ministry we discourage boyfriend and girlfriend before marriage unless there is a clear intention for marriage and the two are ready for marriage. Traditionally in our ministry people married because they had same mission of living as a campus shepherd. Shepherd and shepherdesses married looking up to God only, firmly believing that it is God is joined us together. Some people is because they feel strong connection of romantic love, they feel crazy about each, keep dreaming about each other and so on. Others are marry because of political power, to sustain a certain legacy of the families. Some because they have child decide to marry. Either way, when the two people decide to marry, it is God who is joining them together. The two may think they are joining themselves together, but in truth its God who does the joining. So it is important that the two are conscious of God in their union. It does not also however mean if they are not conscious of that, then God is absent. Our ignorance to God presence in our lives does not nullify the fact that, it is God who is doing the joining. It is God who created marriage from the beginning.

This means that to divorce then is to enter into an abnormal situation. Divorce is then not solving any problem, what it does is to turn things upside down. I have a friend who came to the point of seeing no reason to be in his marriage. However, one thing that he told me keeps him married is because he wants to honor God, since he knows that God hates divorce. This is how real God is to him such that he is willing to set aside how he feels to honor God. Because he is staying to honor God, I could hear many instances where he would sacrifice and do things for his wife. For example, he chose to drop something that he had committed to completing so that he may provide emotional support to his wife. In turn this allowed his wife to progress in her career. Unlike some people might stay in marriage in the name of God yet still abuse or mistreat their wives. However, from him I could see that indeed he really wanted to honor God through how he treated his wife. The bible says, what God has joined together let no man separate, this also include the two couple. Let neither of them cause any divorce.

As I said there are all kinds of reasons why people marry. We need right marriage view, in marriage the two are made to become one. How then can we split into two? In marriage is what God joined together. And if God joined together how can one separate. Indeed there may be cases of abuse or unhealthy environment in the home. Separation for a while is an option while the two seeks help to restore their union. We should be careful of friends and family members who encourage divorce, God said, what he has joined let no man separate. As Jesus said, the root issue is the stubbornness of our hearts, we would even go to those people whom we know will support us to divorce. Christ calls us to forgive one another. To deny ourselves and carry our cross of living for his honor and glory. You may ask how many times then should I forgive, Jesus said 70 times 7 [Matt 18:22] which we all know to mean, no end. Cause even if you started counting before you reach that number you would have being changed and learned to forgive. Because Jesus keeps forgiving us, and says in the lords prayer, “…forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us...” if Jesus was to count how many times to forgive us, no one will make it to heaven.

After Jesus had explained what marriage is, that divorce was never in the equation from the beginning. The disciples still had a burning question, what it really all means. What happens then in a case where a person does divorce? Look at verse 11-12, “11He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.” So here we can clearly see that either way, whether the man divorces his wife or the wife divorces her husband, if they are to marry another person they would be committing adultery. This does not matter whether the person is not intending to commit adultery. Luke 16:18, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

**In conclusion**, marriage is sacred before God. unfortunately, we live in a culture where divorce is rampant, even within the church. We have prominent church leaders who are able to divorce and marry at will. However, this does not change God’s word and how it was in the beginning. So going back to the Pharisees question, “is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” Jesus provided a clear answer, that from the beginning, it was not so, that God joined the two to become one flesh. Jesus even goes further than the old testament law, because in the old testament it was about the man divorcing his wife. Now through the new testament Jesus sets the tables straight. That, even if the woman was to divorce, she will be committing adultery if she was to marry another man.

Since marriage is from God, he makes the two one and no man shall separate. Marriage mirrors the relationship between Jesus and the Church. That is why he can say, husbands love your wives as Christ loves the church. So when you consider marriage one day in your life, take note that it is simply about you and the other person. But God is actively involved. And what he joins no one shall separate, no one. There is no biblical divorce. Marriage is a serious life commitment so that God is glorified in it. Amen!