

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 22ND-23RD, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

MARRIAGE & DIVORCE (MATTHEW 19:1-9)

Jesus has begun to move in the direction of Jerusalem.

- His formal ministry is effectively over, and the large crowds accompanying Him are also making their way to Jerusalem for Passover.
- The Pharisees came at Jesus again with another test (vs. 3) concerning divorce.

The issue of divorce was of special interest to the Pharisees.

- The two schools of thought concerning divorce were those of Rabbi Hillel & Shammai.
- Hillel took a very lax view and said that a husband could divorce his wife for almost any reason, while Shammai took a much stricter view.
- No matter which side Jesus took, He would surely offend somebody.

This controversy had created a culture where some were divorcing for any trivial reason at all, while other Jews taught, "He who divorces his wife is hated before God".

- Rather than join in the controversy immediately, Jesus elevates the discussion by defining marriage, not divorce (vs. 4-6).
- Jesus makes it clear by quoting Gen. 2:24 that marriage is defined by God.

If God authored and defined marriage from the beginning, we cannot redefine what only God has the prerogative to define.

- Marriage is, according to Jesus, the one-flesh union between male and female in a whole-hearted, mutual, and lifelong relationship (vs. 4-5).
- So if God has made marriage, only God can break marriage ("...what God has joined together, let not man separate", vs. 6).

What Jesus is saying is that humanity lacks the right, the competence, and the authority to define something that God instituted.

- Therefore, we don't have the right to decide how the institution of marriage should be absolved- only God does!
- Marriage is a covenant under God and a demonstration to the world of Christ's covenant with His people (Eph. 5:22-33).

Now the Pharisees want to know, why did Moses command for divorce if two become one? How can man break a bond that was created by God? (vs. 7).

- Jesus clarifies the Pharisees' misquote- Moses "allowed" divorce in certain situations (he didn't "command" it) because of the hardness of the heart (vs. 8).
- But divorce never was or never will be God's will.

Scripture gives two biblical grounds for divorce, and one of them is here in vs. 9- "sexual immorality" (the other is 1 Cor. 7, abandonment).

- Jesus says that divorce is possible in this situation, but it's not commanded.
- We're not to look for reasons to divorce, instead we're to long for reconciliation to occur.
- But when reconciliation isn't possible, divorce is permitted (but not commanded).

Divorce and remarriage without biblical grounds is a sin in the eyes of God (vs. 9b).

- God defines the terms of marriage, and God defines the terms of divorce.
- Divorce always hurts- this is why God says He hates it (Mal. 2:16)!
- But God doesn't hate divorced people. He's forgiving, merciful, kind, and ready to redeem any situation that's been broken by past sin or mistakes.

SINGLENES (MATTHEW 19:10-12)

Jesus' disciples were young and mostly unmarried.

- After hearing Jesus' teaching on the seriousness of the marriage covenant and how there was no easy way out, they probably began to rethink the marriage commitment.
- They considered that it might be better to avoid the risk of getting into a bad marriage by staying single (vs. 10).

Jesus affirmed the seriousness with which the disciples had begun to see the permanence of marriage, but acknowledged that not everyone would accept this word (vs. 11a).

- The people who can embrace celibacy over the risk of marriage ending in divorce are, "those to whom it has been given" (11b).
- Singleness is a gift that not everyone has been given.

Jesus uses the term "eunuch" to apply to anyone who might refrain from marriage or sex.

- Some are "eunuchs from birth"- those incapable of marriage or with no desire for it.
- Others have been "made eunuchs by men"- in the 1st century, this was a common practice for servants/slaves that served women.
- Still others choose to remain single "for the kingdom of heaven"-

Singleness is a gift from God (1 Cor. 7:7, Matt. 19:11) and it has its advantages (1 Cor. 7:32)

- It's difficult, but singles are not a 2nd class Christians, singleness isn't permanent, singles have a family through the church, and singles are not alone.
- Singles have AMAZING potential to serve God in their singleness.

LET THEM COME (MATTHEW 19:13-15)

This account with the children seem to be linked to Jesus' teaching on divorce and singleness.

- After Jesus taught on a topic that so often involves the hardheartedness and selfishness of adults, Jesus is presented with a group of children- the primary victims of divorce.
- As adults we so often think that marriage is all about just making us happy.

But our choices as adults regarding marriage, singleness, and divorce affect our children.

- Children in the 1st century had little societal value and were seen by many as nuisances.
- This explains why the disciples rebuked those who brought their children to Jesus to lay hands on them and pray (vs. 13)- children, in their view, weren't as valuable as adults.

But Jesus contrasted the disciples' worldly values with His own.

- To Jesus, each person was of great value regardless of age, gender (15:21-28), social status (9:27-34), or nationality (15:21-28).
- "Let them come...and do not hinder" (vs. 14)- Jesus is equally accessible to everyone.
- The earthly systems of social ranking are completely useless in the Kingdom.

"For to such belongs the kingdom..."- the reason Jesus gave for welcoming children is that the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who share in the humility and simplicity of a child.

- When we come to Jesus without prideful self-reliance and admit our need for Him and His forgiveness, we gain access to the Kingdom.
- But when we come to Him self-assured, proud, and self-righteous...

A WEALTHY YOUNG MAN (MATTHEW 19:16-22)

Jesus received the ones the disciples thought He should reject (children), and now He will reject someone the disciples think He should receive.

- Many believed wealthy people would've been at the front of the line in the kingdom.
- Wealthy people were wealthy because they'd been blessed by God, so they must've been blessed by God because they were "good".

A certain wealthy young man that no doubt holds to this understanding approaches Jesus and asks Him, "what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (vs. 16).

- This is a flawed question from the start- eternal life is not obtained by doing good deeds, because none of us can live up to God's standard for goodness.
- But Jesus wants to draw this young man out by challenging his understanding of what is "good" (vs. 17).

In order to attain "goodness", Jesus says, one must keep the commandments (vs. 17).

- The young man replied, "which ones?", which revealed his flawed understanding.
- The young man seemed to believe that God grades on a curve and that his "goodness" in following most or some of the commandments would be good enough.

So Jesus lists commandments 5-9 of the 10 commandments as a representative sample.

- Jesus had already taught that adultery could be committed through lust (Matt. 5:27-28), and that murder could be committed through hatred (Matt. 5:44).
- Every human being alive has lied, and almost all of us have dishonored our parents.

Even this "short list" of commands is impossible to keep! But to earn eternal life one would have to keep all of God's commandments perfectly (James 2:10).

- But amazingly, this young man was so self-deceived and self-righteous he responded, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" (vs. 20).
- Jesus saw through this man's piety and self-righteousness & loved him (Mark 10:21).

Jesus put His finger on the real issue by saying, "Go, sell what you possess and give to the poor... come, follow me" (vs. 21).

- If he wished to be "perfect" on his own apart from Jesus', he needed to address what he was really worshipping in his life- his own self-righteousness, his money, and his stuff.
- Because he wasn't willing to have his heart transformed, he left sorrowful (vs. 22).

This story shouldn't be taken to mean that if we take a vow of poverty we can be saved or that if we have wealth we can't be saved.

- The point is that this arrogant, self-righteous young man couldn't earn eternal life through goodness because that's an impossibility.
- He hadn't kept the commandments perfectly; in fact, he'd broken the first one and made money his God.

In the end, it's not what "we think or feel"- it's God's standard (for marriage, divorce, singleness, the value of humanity, and salvation) that matters.