

Mark 10:2-16

Pentecost 19; October 3 & 4, 2021

In 2011, an Iowa couple, Gordon and Norma Yeager, that had been married for 72 years - and who their children said were always together - died one hour apart at the hospital as they held hands, following a traffic accident. When they were first brought into the intensive care unit they were holding hands and were placed in the same room, according to the couple's son. He also was quoted in saying: *"They're very old-fashioned. They believed in marriage til death do you part."* Gordon passed away first. Yet, even though he had stopped breathing, the heart monitor was still going. The article goes on saying: *"The nurse checked and said that's because they were holding hands and it's going through them. Her heart was beating through him and picking it up."* One hour later, Norma passed away as well. For the funeral, the family made the request that they would be placed into the same casket holding their hands because that the way their life was. Following the funeral, they were cremated and their ashes were mixed together.

Our heart is warmed by stories like that. When the Pharisees asked Jesus the question in today's text, **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** you would hope it was being asked because they had such a high regard for marriage and they really wanted to know what Jesus thought about marriage. Sadly, weren't at all interest in what Jesus thought about marriage. Mark tells us: **"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'"** The question was all about setting a trap for Jesus. They wanted to drive people away from Jesus.

There were two major schools of thoughts among the Pharisees when it came to marriage. Both schools of thoughts went back to what Moses wrote in the book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 24, Moses wrote: **"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."** (Deut. 24:1-2) Both side focused on two words in that passage – **"Displeasing"** and **"Indecent."**

Rabbi Hillel (around 5 BC) defined those words to mean – *"anything you didn't like."* So, if a wife burned her husband's toast in the morning and he didn't like it, he could send her away. If his eye caught someone who looked more attractive to him, he could send her away.

Rabbi Shammai (around 25 BC) defined those words to mean – *"sexual misconduct."* In other words, you could get a divorce if your wife was unfaithful in their marriage.

So, this is the context in which these Pharisees bring this question to Jesus - **"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"** They thought that they had Jesus trapped. Even though the Pharisees weren't in agreement with each other, it really didn't matter. They thought that if they ask Jesus this question, and no matter what he says, they would be able to argue with him, divide people and drive them away. If Jesus agreed with the side that said that the husband could divorce his wife for any reason whatsoever, then Jesus could be labeled as being a *liberal*. He would drive away the side that interpreted Moses in a much greater conservative way. If Jesus agreed with the side that said that you could only divorce your wife if she had been unfaithful in her marriage, Jesus could be labeled as a *conservative*, and they could drive away from Jesus all the people who had a much more liberal interpretation of Moses. You see why I said that the initial question that the Pharisees asked wasn't really all that much about marriage and divorce.

So, what does Jesus say? **"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law. But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 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."** God's plan for Adam and Eve was simple. God's plan for mankind was simple. God designed marriage to be a blessing. He connects men and women together in marriage. He wants them to be connected to him. He wants families to be connected to each other.

Yet, you and I both know that sin destroys relationships. It destroyed the relationship that Adam and Eve once enjoyed with God. It destroyed the perfect relationship that they once had with each other. Sin destroys relationship between husbands and wives. The question that the Pharisees were asking is the question: *"How far can I go before falling off the edge?"* Let me give an illustration. Last week, we made a quick trip out to California to see our son and his family. I found

one of those really good deals again. Because they were still working the first two days we were out there, we made a trip out to Yosemite National Park for one night. If you have ever been there, you might know what I'm talking about. There is a lookout that you can drive up to where you can see the entire valley below. As you overlook it, there is a rail that you can stand by and look directly down to the valley which is about 3,200 feet straight down a rock cliff. I can only get close just long enough to see it, and then I need to step back. I just can't handle it any more. As I was standing back, there was a man who was sitting on top of the rail and just hanging out there looking at his phone. As soon as I spotted him, I couldn't even look his direction. The thought that was going through my head what happens if he slips, he's dead. I can't watch that happen. The Pharisees were asking the wrong question. They wanted to know how far can you go before you fall off. The question should be: *How can both a husband and a wife strive to carry out this incredible blessing that God gives to us in marriage?*

Yet, what happens when sin destroys that relationship that God desires? There are a number of really ugly things that begin to happen. One of those things that happens is what Jesus describes in our text. **"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."** This passage would be better translated to say: *"I tell you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, causes her to be stigmatized as an adulteress, and whoever marries a divorced woman is stigmatized as an adulterer."* Reputations are ruined. Lives become messy. People make assumptions. There are all kinds of things that divorce brings into people's lives. Moses needed to have a way to keep order in society when sin would break a marriage - Just as it may happen today. This passage isn't the only place that God talks about marriage and divorce. There are other better sections of the Bible that talk more about this subject. Here we need to remember why Jesus answered the question that was really asked to back him into a corner. They wanted to divide and destroy Jesus' followers.

What happens when divorce happens? I'm going to guess that probably everyone here knows someone who has been touched with divorce. Maybe it has even touched your life. Divorce hurts people. Divorce has a way to bring all kinds of guilt into people's lives. I realize just how emotional this subject can be for people. I've wrestled all week of how to word all of this. But I also want you to know that Jesus doesn't leave us alone if divorce touches lives. He wants the guilt to be lifted off your shoulders. We also need to remember where Jesus is going in our text this morning. He's on his way to Jerusalem to die on a cross. With that death, sin is paid for. We are his children who are deeply loved. On that cross, he wipes the slate clean.

How can I say that? Look at the last verses that Jesus speaks in our text. **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.** Why does Jesus transition so quickly talking about a subject like marriage and divorce to putting a little child on his lap? I think, the point is simple. Children trust parent. He wants people to have that child-like faith and to trust those opens arms of Jesus. He wants to hold your hand every day to give his love to you. May God grant it. Amen.