

Gospel of Mark Chapter 10A

In the Mid 20th century, the Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorokin wrote a book in which he sounded an alarm about the impending disintegration of American culture and civilization. The central concern of Sorokin's book was the radical proliferation of divorce and the breakup of the American home between 1910 and 1947. He pointed out that in 1910, 10% of U.S. marriages ended in divorce, but that number rose to 25% by 1948.

Sorokin speaking as a historian of culture said that no civilization can long survive when ¼ of its marriage units are disintegrating.

- I wonder what Mr. Sorokin would have to say about the state of American Society if he were alive today?

Looking back, the divorce rate actually reached its peak in 1980 and has decreased since that time. (BUT, that's not necessarily good news) Fewer couples are divorcing today because fewer couples are actually getting married.

Presently:

- Only 26% of Millennials are married (those born 1980 - 2000)
- Only 36% of Gen X are married (born 1960 - 1980)
- 48% of Baby Boomers are married. (Born 1946 - 1960)

The tragic failures of marriages in the older generation has caused the younger generation to stay away from marriage, they simply chose to live together.

In 1960 10% of those entering into marriage lived together before their wedding day.

In 2010 65% of couples entering into marriage lived together.

- Why am I sharing all of these statistics with you this morning?

Opening up the Gospel of Mark Ch 10 we are immediately confronted with the subject of divorce.

Mark records another assault by the Pharisees against the Lord Jesus.

This time they try to discredit him in the eyes of the people by questioning his conservative view of marriage and divorce.

- Now, I want to be very sensitive this morning to those who have personally endured the pain and hardship of divorce, especially those of you who are presently separated.
- I want you to know that you are constantly on my mind and in my prayers.
- It was not my choice to raise this topic today; our systematic study of the Bible has landed us here in Mark 10. But I also believe you are here by the sovereign grace of our loving God to hear this message.
- PRAY: Lord I ask that you would provide understanding through your unchanging Word and comfort by your abiding Holy Spirit, (heal the hurting, embrace the abandoned)

There are three parts in the unfolding of Jesus' discussion on the subject of divorce.

- Location (Where this debate takes place)
- Concession (Moses' concession to regulate divorce which was out of control)
- Intention (God's good intention for marriage)

LOCATION:

Mark 10:1 And he (Jesus) left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. 2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

SLIDE #6

- Jesus and his Disciples have left the region of Galilee traveling south into the region of Judea but at this particular time Mark tells us that they are “beyond the Jordan” in the region known as Perea and I will tell you why this is important in a minute:
- The first thing that I want you to see is the MOTIVE of the Pharisees. They approached Jesus in order to TEST him.
- The word translated “TEST” is a word that speaks of tempting someone with the goal of uncovering or exposing evil. So this is really a trap.
 - Mark uses this word for “Test” 4 times in his Gospel. Three of those times the word is used to describe the Pharisee’s assault on Jesus. One time it is used of the temptation of Jesus by Satan.

I can see two possibilities of WHY the Pharisees chose to “TEST” Jesus on the subject of divorce here in Perea:

FIRST: The location that these Pharisees chose for this debate on the subject of marriage is a location that was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. (Why does that matter?)

- Herod Antipas had divorced his wife and run away with his Brother Philip’s wife Herodias who was actually a close relative. So Antipas was guilty of two crimes: adultery and incest.
- You may remember that John the Baptist was a very vocal opponent of Herod’s adulterous relationship with Herodias.
- We know from Matthew 14 and Mark 6 that after some prompting by Herodias, Antipas had John the Baptist killed.
- We also know from previous chapters that the Pharisees desperately wanted Jesus out of the way. If they can pit Jesus against Antipas, maybe, just maybe Jesus would meet the same demise as John the Baptist.
- That is why the location for the Pharisees question is important.

SECONDLY: The general populace, especially the men appreciated the Pharisees liberal stand on divorce. BY pressing Jesus on the issue, forcing him to reiterate his stand on the permanence of marriage they were sure that the people would turn against him.

- Let’s see how Jesus responds to the test:

2. CONCESSION:

Mark 10:2 And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” 3 He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” 4 They said, “Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away.” 5 And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

IN Israel at the time of Jesus there were two schools of thought with regard to divorce. The controversy is best described by this passage in the Mishnah: (The Father’s interpretation) “The school of Shammai says: a man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written, “Because he has found an indecency in anything.” And the school of Hillel

says: He may divorce her even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, "Because he hath found in her indecency in anything." Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, "And it shall be if she find no favor in his eyes."

Shammai - held a strong line saying the only scriptural grounds for divorce was sexual immorality.

Hillel - (The popular viewpoint and the one held by the Pharisees) was that ANYTHING any irritation, anything that a man viewed as embarrassing could be grounds for divorce.

- Spinning around in such a way as to allow someone to see her ankles.
- Speaking loudly to her husband so that the neighbors could hear;
- Wearing her hair too loosely, Burning dinner,

Matthew's account of this same conversation reads this way: 19:3 **And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"**

- The popular viewpoint, even among the Pharisees was the one set forth by Hillel.

HOW does Jesus respond to their test? Vs 3 **He answered them,** (with a question) **"What did Moses command you?"**

- How are you reading the words of Moses?
- Both of the camps within Israel used the same portion of Scripture written by Moses and both of their interpretations of that scripture were inadequate.
- Jesus puts their interpretation to the test when he asks: **"What did Moses command you?"**
- The scripture He is referring to is in Deuteronomy 24: Let's look at it.

Deuteronomy 24:1 **"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, 2 and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 and the latter man hates her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter man dies, who took her to be his wife, 4 then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the LORD. And you shall not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.**

- The great debate among the Pharisees was over the word: "INDECENCY." They differed over what should be considered an indecency worthy of divorce?
- After a careful reading of the book of Deuteronomy you would find that the word "indecency" here does not signify adultery, or any of the uncleanness forbidden in Le 18:6-19; because those "indecencies" were actually punishable with death.
- There is no need to divorce someone who is dead.
- The same word translated "indecency" is used in Deut 23 in conjunction with the covering of human excrement in the camp of God's people.
- When you go to the potty make sure that you cover up what you leave behind because the Lord walks in the midst of the camp and you don't want him to see any unclean thing.
- So the uncleanness or indecency by which Israeli men sent their wives away was open to interpretation. (*immoral act* short of adultery or some unpardonable *Social behavior*)

BUT I want you to notice, in the context of Deuteronomy 24 God is NOT instituting NOR is He approving of the practice of divorce; He is actually stepping in to regulate and restrict the practice which was already taking place in the camp of Israel.

- The men were already sending their wives away. Many times with just a harsh Word. “Get Out!” (*no lawyers, no paper trail, no alimony*)
- What we have here in Deuteronomy is an expression of divine compassion protecting women and bringing an end to frivolous practices in the camp of his people.
- To protect a woman from the possibility of being stoned to death as an adulteress when she entered into another relationship, her husband must to write her a bill of divorcement. (*Paperwork to prove that she had been sent away*)
- In order to CURB the “Trial and Error” practices of frivolous divorce and remarriage. God commanded that a wife who is sent away may not return to her first husband after being married to another. (You can’t try another woman out and if it is doesn’t work take the first one back)

Jesus was trying to show the Pharisees that Moses’ words about divorce were NOT a command or even the expression of liberty that God would somehow sanction divorce.

The words of Moses were a divine concession and a holy restraint on the practice because the human heart had become despicably hardened.

5 **And Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.**

John Gill: “It was, not because it was right in its own nature, or according to the original will of God; but, because the Jews were such cruel, and hard hearted men, that if this had not been permitted, some of them, that had wives not so agreeable to them, would have used them in a very inhuman manner, if not murdered them; and therefore to prevent further, and greater mischief, Moses indulged them with such a precept;”

Jesus immediately points the Pharisees back to the pristine dignity in which God established the union of marriage and by which He created the first man and woman.

- **LAST POINT - Intention**

Mark 10:6 **But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’**

7 **‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,**

8 **and they shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.**

9 **What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

- Setting aside the hardness of man’s heart that is a result of sin, Jesus takes the Pharisees back to the origin of man to reveal HOW FAR they had fallen from God’s original intent for those He had created in his image.

What God has joined together, Let not man separate.”

- As crazy as it sounds and as painful as it might be for a man to literally cut himself in half, so it is that the process of divorce painfully separates the one flesh union that God created for his glory and for man’s good.

God Himself walked the first bride down the isle to her waiting bridegroom. (I stood with..)

The Bible clearly communicates the sheer DELIGHT expressed by Adam when he saw his Bride for the first time. Genesis 2:23 **Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”**

Consider the wonder of marital bliss described for us in the Song of Solomon

SOS 1: 2 <SHE> **Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine;**

2: 2 <HE> **As a lily among brambles, so is my love among the young women.**

3 <SHE> **As an apple tree among the trees of the forest, so is my beloved among the young men. With great delight I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste,**

4 **He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.**

5 **Sustain me with raisins; refresh me with apples, for I am sick with love.**

- Again and again, the Bible depicts the sheer delight, the rapturous pleasure that was intended to accompany the marital union.
- It was designed to be a glorious picture of God’s love for his own precious people.

HOW is it then that our hearts could be so hardened to move from such ecstatic delight to the bitter hatred that gushes from our mouths as marriages fall into failure?

- The RAVAGES of Original Sin wreak havoc on the image of God and the love of man.

The disciples cornered Jesus when they went into the house and asked for clarification:

Mark 10:10 **And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11 And he said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, 12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”**

- Matthew records the disciple’s response to Jesus’ tough stand on marriage:

Matthew 19: 10 **The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”**

Like the Jews of Jesus’ day, the churches of today hold differing views of the permanence of Marriage:

1. There are some who hold fast to the absolute permanence of marriage and to the words of Jesus in Mark 10:10-12. **Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her**

- They believe that the covenant of marriage must be upheld regardless of the circumstances; even if one partner is unfaithful, divorce is never an option.

2. Others look at Matthew’s version of this same conversation and see an Exemption clause:

Matthew 19: 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.”**

- Reading the narrative of Matthew it seems that Jesus establishes ONE exemption where divorce would be possible and that is sexual immorality.
- Jesus is NOT saying that divorce is mandatory when sexual immorality is present but it is possible.
- I know of many couples who have labored to express grace and forgiveness even in the case of infidelity.
- There are still other churches who find another “Exemption Clause” in 1 Corinthians 7 it is commonly called “The Abandonment Clause.”

1 Corinthians 7: 13 If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. 14 For the unbelieving husband is made holy because of his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy because of her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy. 15 But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.

Here at Harvest we believe wholeheartedly in the sanctity and permanence of the marriage covenant.

- We believe that God intended marriage to be a blessing and the marriage covenant to last a lifetime.
- But we also recognize that we are all broken and sinful people whose hearts are too easily hardened.
- Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day we run too quickly to the Exemption Clauses and harden our hearts to the Spirit of reconciliation.

We will compassionately sit with and comfort those who are wounded by an unfaithful spouse. We actively seek to reconcile broken marriages by walking husbands and wives back to the cross where grace and forgiveness abound, where Jesus makes all things new.

When there is no repentance for continual sexual immorality and when a faithful believing spouse is abandoned by an unbelieving spouse we are there to help pick up the pieces and point the wounded victims of divorce to the healing arms of Jesus.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

- Healing a broken heart is a delicate and lengthy procedure but the great physician gently and faithfully heals those who are his own.
 - Maybe you come from a broken home and you need to forgive mom and dad as Christ has forgiven you.
 - Maybe your own heart has become hardened against your spouse... You need to remember your first love, repent of your sin and redo your first works.

Any of our elders would be willing to sit down with any one of you and discuss the issues of marriage divorce and remarriage from a biblical viewpoint, BUT for today let's celebrate the glorious provision of God in the covenant of marriage. AND the beautiful picture that it portrays of Christ and His Bride.