

The title may make us wince at thoughts of messiness and pain around those issues

- All of us are touched by broken sexuality and family relationships... all need grace

Verses 1-2

- Verse 1 is a huge deal
 - Jesus has left Galilee (Not to return until after the Resurrection)
 - He is on the way to Jerusalem (via Judea) (e.g. The Cross) (**Matthew 16:21**, NIV)
 - The final leg of the long journey of God's love in the Incarnate Christ has begun
 - Because He loves you...
- That frames this entire section and I want you to keep it in mind and we will revisit it at the end

Verse 3

- Pharisees are **testing** Jesus in the sense of trying to determine His fidelity to God's Law
- They are bringing up what was a hot debate of the day—Acceptable reasons for divorce
 - Part of what the Pharisees are trying to do is turn people against Jesus
 - Culture was so sharply divided on this issue that no matter how Jesus answered he will upset and alienate a lot of people
- Two Camps
 - Rabbinical debates¹ around **Deuteronomy 24:1**, NASB
 - One said (Majority view) (Rabbinical school of Hillel): You could divorce for any reason
 - "**Found some indecency in her**" = burnt meal, bad hair style, talking to other me on the street, speaking disrespectfully of the in-laws
 - Later Rabbi Akiba interpreted² "**she finds no favor in his eyes**" to include "**if you found a woman more beautiful**"
 - The other (Minority view) (Rabbinical school of Shammai): You could not divorce for such reasons but you should divorce in the case of adultery
 - = "**Found some indecency in her**"
- The Pharisees present Jesus with the majority view (again to **test** him—will He go along with popular opinion?)

Verse 4-6

- "**Haven't you read...**"
 - This phrase is enormously important and should shape our entire Christian lives
 - The normal sort of Jewish/Rabbinical debate response would have been to refer to another Rabbinical Father as a source of authority (cf. Shammai)
 - Jesus does not do that—He appeals to **Scripture as the authority** (and to **Genesis 1** and **2** at that)
 - **Genesis 1:27** and **Genesis 2:24**, NASB
 - = The Biblical foundations for marriage
 - One **man** and one **woman**
 - **United** = **Cleave** = glued or cemented
 - = **verse 6** = **God has joined**
 - In a covenant relationship
 - A man and a woman cemented together by God in a covenant rel.
 - The Biblical view of marriage
- Jesus' response, in essence, is: **No. No divorce.** (Not meant to be an option) (... **let no one separate**)

Verses 7-8

- The Pharisees return to **Deuteronomy 24:1**, NASB
 - They ask, "**Why then did Moses command...**"
 - Jesus corrects them, "**Moses permitted...**" **not commanded**
 - And goes right back to **Genesis**, creation, **God's design and intent** ("**from the beginning**")
- What was happening in **Deuteronomy 24:1**, NASB was a **concession** not a **command**
 - "**Because your hearts were hard**" = They were not upholding God's **intent** (**hard** = sinful)

¹ For an account of the discussion in the schools see Talmud, *Gif.* 90a

- Moses gave the Law to **regulate** the common practice, not approve of (**Genesis** stands)
- Put some parameters on it and provided the woman with rights the culture at the time did not
- The Word of God **instituted** marriage—it did not institute divorce (our **hard hearts** did)

Jesus gives us the correct interpretation of the Deuteronomy text in **verse 9**

- This is the only **exception Jesus provides** to the Genesis directive of life-long covenant
- There is one other exception in Scripture (**1 Corinthians 7:15**, NLT)

This means that Jesus rejects the vast majority of reasons for divorce today: incompatibility, irreconcilable differences, financial problems, life trauma, “falling out of love,” etc, etc

- Divorce is only **permissible** for adultery (or abandonment by an unbelieving spouse)

But (very importantly), Jesus does not necessarily side with the minority view outright³

- Whereas they **required** divorce for adultery, Jesus only **allowed** it (concession not command)
- Jesus leaves the door open for forgiveness and reconciliation (marriages to be saved even if the worst)
 - **Jesus always calls us to walk through that door of forgiveness and reconciliation whenever possible**
 - **Adultery** should not automatically mean divorce
 - Even though there are biblical grounds for divorce, the **goal is always reconciliation** where possible

What about when reconciliation does not happen and divorce happens? Can a Christian remarry then?

- In the right circumstances, **yes**
- The exception clause given by Jesus (“**except in the case of sexual immortality**”) applies to both divorce and remarriage
- **It is the validity of the divorce that establishes eligibility for remarriage**
 - Here’s the key principle: If divorce occurs on biblical grounds, the innocent party is free to remarry
 - What about the guilty party? Jesus does not clarify that in this passage.
 - But we see this in **1 Corinthians 7:10-11**, NLT
 - That would seem to suggest that the guilty party (in this case adulterer) must either remain single or be reconciled

That is a very high standard (High view of marriage with Scripture as the full and final authority)

- Look at how the disciples handle it in **verse 10**
- And Jesus says in **verse 11**...

So, how should we handle it?

- For sure, all of us in this room have been affected by failed marriages
- Some of you have (as Christians) had **unbiblical divorces and unbiblical remarriages**
 1. Neither of those is the unforgiveable sin (God’s grace is abundant)
 2. Don’t try to reverse it (Two wrongs won’t make a right)
 3. Recognize and commit to living out God’s plan for marriage (New start)

None of us should forget this: **Verse 1** told us that Jesus taught these things **on the way to the Cross**

- That frames our perception of this
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
 - = There is (1) forgiveness and (2) reconciliation to God
 - = We can forgive and be reconciled with others
 - = The truth of the Cross must be more central in marriage than our own happiness
 - = Don’t give up... don’t underestimate the power of the Cross
 - Good marriages are not problem free, rather they are grace dependent
 - Constantly being renewed by God’s grace

Our view of both Scripture and marriage has been too low

- Scripture is the full and final authority for God’s people
- Marriage is meant to be a sacred, God-formed, God glorifying, joining of a man and a woman for life
- Ultimate view of marriage (Jesus and the church; **Eph 5:31-32**, NLT) (living metaphor and mission)

³ This section and the next adapted from a sermon by Jeremy Treat from Reality LA on the same text
©2017 Britt Merrick | June 25, 2017 | Reality Carpinteria

But, marriage is not for everyone—some are meant to be single (verses 10-12; hear the word “eunuch” as “single”)

- **Verse 10** = Jesus affirms that it is a high standard and must be a gift supplied by God
- Then he goes on to contrast by mentioning those who would **not be married** in that culture
- Uses the word **eunuch**
 - A **eunuch** was a single person, although they would be single for different reasons
 - First, those **born eunuchs** are those born without sexual organs
 - Second, those who **have been made eunuchs** were most likely castrated for service in a royal court
 - Lastly, “those who **choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven**”

Jesus affirms both the sanctity of marriage and the sanctity of singleness

- **Singleness is a gift, not a curse** (1 Corinthians 7:7-9, NLT)
 - Strategic for God’s purposes
- **Singleness is not about what you lack, but what you have been given** (Isaiah 56:3-5, NLT)
 - Valuable in God’s plan
- **Your ultimate status is your status (identity) in Christ**
- **In Christ, you have a family**
 - Married and single people are part of the True Family that is more significant than all others
 - Cf. Widows and widowers, divorcees, single moms, yet to be married, etc (welcome and valued)

Two valid options for the Christian⁴

- There are two equally viable options for the Christian: **Marriage or celibacy**
 - Both are **gifts** from God to be used in **service** of God’s greater mission
 - They are gifts, not curses
 - A spouse is never a ball and chain. Singleness is never a life sentence to loneliness.
- Both have joys and both have challenges. But both are **valid options** for the Christians.

Jesus talked about marriage, divorce, remarriage, and singleness. It’s only natural then that he would address **kids**

Verses 13-15

- Not about how to raise children—it is **about the value of children** (Cnt. the **disciples**)
- **Blessing or Burden?**
 - Our culture increasingly sees children as a burden
 - Fewer women are becoming mothers, and those who do are having fewer children.
 - The nation’s birthrate today is **half what it was in 1960**, and **last year hit its lowest point ever**⁵
 - There’s nothing inherently wrong with not having kids or waiting longer, but the question is: **what is the motivation for it?**
 - Sometimes we see children as **holding us back from bigger and better things**: Building a career, making a fortune, getting established, freedom and fun... Then maybe we can have kids
 - Jesus teaches us that **they are a blessing** (by **blessing** them)
 - They are not in the way of His mission—they exemplify His mission (Cf. **Psalms 127:3**, NLT)
 - Children are a lot of work (a gift from the Lord for joy and sanctification)
 - They aren’t holding us back from bigger things—they are reminding us of the most important things (**sacrifice, service, surrender, discipleship, love**)

Jesus’ teaching on kids should affect:

- How we view children in family
- How we view children in community (Cf. Church)
- How we view children in danger (the unborn, adoption, foster care, trafficking, etc)

None of our stories match up with God’s intent (broken world with broken families)

- We all need healing and grace
- Marriage Supper of the Lamb (communion)
- Prayer: Forgiveness for self, others; or contentment in a tough situation; healing; marriage on the edge

⁴ This section adapted from a sermon by Jeremy Treat from Reality LA on the same text

⁵ <http://theweek.com/articles/642303/americas-birth-rate-now-national-emergency>