

August 19, 2018

“The Kingdom and Marriage” Matthew 19:1-9

FCF: The cultural retreat of marriage

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Jesus has called us into kingdom community.

(magnet) We must approach our relationships - including marriage and divorce - in a whole new way.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

The institution of marriage is suffering. Here are some facts and figures ([READ quote](#)):

Consider marriage rates. In 1970, 80 percent of all adults were married. Today, it's only 52 percent. In 1960, the median age for a first marriage was 20 for women and 23 for men. Today it's 27 for women and 29 for men. Moving from marriage rates to Millennials, 25 percent of Millennials are likely to forego marriage altogether. One report says that a record share of Millennials will remain unmarried through age 40. Sam Sturgeon, president of Demographic Intelligence, says this represents a “cultural retreat from marriage.”

But does this matter? It does if we are concerned for the vulnerable and least among us - our children. Here are some non-partisan facts you can look up most anywhere ([READ quote](#)):

Children from divorced or never-married homes are more likely to die in infancy, more likely to get divorced themselves or become unwed parents later in life, more likely to live in poverty, more likely to fail in school, less likely to graduate from college and get a good job, less likely to be in good physical health, more likely to abuse drugs as teens and adults, have lower life expectancies, have higher rates of mental illness, be at greater risk of suicide and child abuse—and on and on.

With such stats and stakes, this should give us pause. What does God say to us in His Word?

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 19:1-9](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

Jesus' message was “the good news of the kingdom”. Meaning He is the long awaited Messiah, the Son of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of God come to usher in the Kingdom of God - the rule and reign of God come down from heaven to earth. His mission is to reclaim what is His and to restore this broken creation. Jesus came to make all things new, including us.

With such a mission, all of life is transformed, including our relationships. We saw in Matthew 18 its effect on the way we view ourselves, one another, our struggles with sin, the call to forgive and what that entails. This same theme of relationships in the kingdom community continues in chapter 19 where we read of the sanctity of marriage, the call to single-hood, the dignity of children, and the pointed nature of Jesus' call. All of life is effected by His coming.

Jesus has called us into kingdom community. Our text makes clear we must then approach our relationships in a whole new way - including marriage and divorce. That's a grand statement. Let me say it again. Jesus has called us into kingdom community. We must approach our relationships in a whole new way - including marriage and divorce. How so? In three ways. First, in the challenge of marriage. Second, the design for marriage. And, third, the rupture of marriage. All three make clear that we are to think of marriage and divorce in a whole new way.

I. THE CHALLENGE OF MARRIAGE

First, the challenge of marriage ([READ Matthew 19:1-3](#)). What's going on here?

A) *The Context of the Question*

1. The stage of Jesus' ministry

The context of this question is important, starting with the stage of Jesus' ministry. The time in Galilee is over. The journey to Jerusalem is beginning. Yet His teaching and healing continues.

2. The opponents of His ministry

That's the stage of His ministry. Amidst the crowds are opponents of His ministry, the Pharisees - a party within Judaism at the time committed to adhering not only to biblical standards but to traditions built up around them. They had come to "test" Jesus - not to quiz but to trap Him.

B) The Content of the Question

So, moving from the context of the question we come then to the content of the question.

1. The text in question

There was a debate between the rabbis at that time. The text in question is worth reading (**READ Deuteronomy 24:1-4**). This was case law, setting forth a situation and some regulations for it.

2. The sides of the debate

There were two sides to this debate on just what was "indecent". The school of Shammai said it was referring only to adultery. The school of Hillel said it was up to the husband's whims. This meant he could divorce his wife simply for bad cooking or because he'd found a prettier option.

What's driving all this? The age old challenges of marriage and the desire for a "plan B" if things don't go well - an escape hatch, a reserve chute. At best, it's a partial commitment.

Application:

And the question hasn't left us. "What are the grounds?" meaning "When can I get out?" The thing is that we usually think of the challenges to marriage as being our squabbles about sex, money, and in-laws. Or perhaps boredom, suffering, and sin. But the core challenge is deeper and far simpler than that. The core challenge to marriage are the hearts of the people married.

And the Bible is refreshingly honest about this. It puts the struggles on display on every page. The struggles and their source. There is no glossing over this or watering things down.

Jesus has called us into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships - including marriage and divorce - in a whole new way. Starting with the honesty see here.

II. THE DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE

That takes us from the challenge to marriage to its design (**READ Matthew 19:3-6**).

A) The Fact of a Design

1. Deeply woven

Jesus reminds us of the fact of a design, something deeply woven into the fabric. He quotes from Genesis 2, pointing to the work of the Maker - creating, fashioning, declaring what then is to be.

2. Truly set

This design is something truly set, as much as anything else in creation. Which means it cannot be ignored without consequences. It cannot be dismissed without inevitable hurt and harm.

B) The Features of the Design

Jesus reminds them of the fact of design. And He presses them on its features.

1. Not a contract

For starters, marriage is not a contract, a commitment conditioned on the actions of another.

2. But a covenant

God did not make marriage to be a contract but a covenant. It is to be a permanent, exclusive, and comprehensive bond. Between a man and a woman. Same sex partners cannot be married in the biblical sense. Even if the courts want to redefine marriage and say that they can. God made marriage to be a permanent, exclusive, comprehensive bond between a man and a woman.

That is His design for marriage. And that is what Jesus is clearly speaking to here.

Illustration:

He is calling us back to the map. We need maps. Yes, GPS is great. It's hands free and continually updated. But there's nothing like having the lay of the land set out in front of you. This is the map for marriage - needed from the very start and all along the way when we get lost.

Application:

Of course, to speak of marriage and "the fact of a design" and "the features of the design" will bring charges of arrogance and bigotry. Which can be true. But not always necessarily so.

We do need to own that this is a faith position and an exclusive truth claim. At the same time, we have to say that everyone makes such claims. Everyone is. Which means the debate is not if we are making such claims but what they are and what leads to human flourishing. Think with me. If it's possible we live in the creation of a Creator (and are part of it ourselves), then we desperately need to heed the manual He has provided. Here we have it. Jesus is showing us.

I mentioned earlier the need for honesty. Here we see the need for clarity. To say that need not be hateful but can be truly helpful. For Jesus has called us into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships - including marriage and divorce - in a whole new way.

III. THE RUPTURE OF MARRIAGE

But that takes us to the third point, the rupture of marriage ([READ Matthew 19:7-9](#)).

A) Mistaken Interpretations

1. Demonstrated by the Pharisees

The Pharisees were demonstrating mistaken interpretations of that Deuteronomy text. They were seeking loopholes and so heard Moses encouraging and commanding divorce in certain cases.

2. Corrected by Jesus

And so Jesus gives a corrective, showing their reading was wrong. Moses had merely permitted divorce. And the reason was the depravity of our hearts. Which meant this had to be regulated.

B) Allowable Exceptions

And, to clarify and press things home, Jesus then speaks to the allowable exceptions.

1. Sexual immorality

The one He speaks explicitly to here is *porneia*, sexual immorality - a broad term that includes a number of sins besides adultery, depending on the context, all of which break the covenant.

2. Desertion

The Apostle Paul, an authorized spokesman for Jesus, speaks also in 1 Corinthians 7 to cases of desertion. This too is an allowable ground for divorce. The common point between the two being “a radical breach of marital trough”. Which, yes, would have to include cases of abuse.

This is Jesus’ teaching on the rupture of marriage, the breaking down of the bond.

Application:

We’ve spoken of honesty and clarity. Now we see some sanity injected as well. But let me add this. This is not saying that those who initiated and pursued an unbiblical divorce cannot be forgiven. Nor is it saying that those in a subsequent marriage cannot be fulfilled. But it does rule out certain myths and tales about marriage and when divorce is permissible before God.

Here are five. First, “the love has gone out.” This assumes it can’t return and feelings are a sure foundation. Second, “it’s best for the children.” This is rarely true and a false choice - stay in or hurt them without considering the possibility of change. Third, “God led me to it.” But God does not speak with a forked tongue. Fourth, “a loving God would not want me to suffer.” Are you sure? This assumes He cares more for our happiness than holiness. Fifth, “God forgives.” This is the worst of all for it presumes on His love and mercy. These are all myths.

We need honesty, clarity, and sanity. Jesus has called us into kingdom community. We must then approach our relationships - including marriage and divorce - in a whole new way.

CONCLUSION:

Back to the honesty, clarity, and sanity. There’s one more thing - humility. Every couple falls short in some way here. Every single one. So it’s vital we consider who is speaking here. Even as Jesus was saying this, in just a few weeks, He would be brutally killed and beautifully raised to forgive the guilt of our sin and to break its power. The resurrected Jesus, our mighty matchless Savior, is ever for us and ever with us. Which means we are ever able to begin again.

Think of the new beginnings of each day at just the physical level. What can we know about each new morning? Let me give you two examples. Your night’s sleep is not wasted time but a restorative process. Those four sleep cycles have profound benefits to both the body and the brain. That’s one example. The other is the movement of the Earth. While you were lying in your bed for those eight hours, you have travelled over 532,000 miles through the solar system. All of which means that, upon your waking, you are a new person in a new place. Every day.

All of that is true just at the physical level. Now consider this. If you are a Christian, the power that made all of that and raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you. He has forgiven you of sin’s guilt. And He has broken its power. A new person in a new place. Jesus commands and enables, instructs and equips. So take heart. He has called us into kingdom community. We must approach our relationships in a whole new way - including marriage and divorce.

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