**JESUS’ TEACHING ON MARRIAGE**

March 3, 2019

Matthew 19:1-12

Key Verses 19:6 “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

An ethics professor, Stanley Hauerwas, said, “We always marry the wrong person.” A philosopher Søren Kierkegaard said, “Marry, and you will regret it; don’t marry, you will also regret it; marry or don’t marry, you will regret it either way.” They said such things because many people marry for personal fulfillment and do not realize that their spouses change after marriage, and so they are greatly disappointed when their spouses do not fulfill their desires. Then why marry? Timothy Keller in his book, “The Meaning of Marriage,” says that marriage is to help each other go to the throne of God and stand together before God, seeing each other presented in glory. It is much more positive view of marriage than pessimistic view of Hauerwas and Kierkegaard. Today Jesus turns the depressing topic of divorce into the meaning of marriage and teaches us that whether marry or not marry, we should live for the sake of his kingdom.

**First**, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (1-3) Look at verse 3. The Pharisees, out of their jealousy, tested Jesus with the question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” These Pharisees did not come to find answers; they came to test Jesus. They wanted to draw Jesus into a trap and discredit him. To do so, they tried to make use of a controversy about divorce. This controversy was rooted in Deuteronomy 24:1. It says, “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.” The controversy centered on the definition of “something indecent.” The conservative school under Rabbi Shammai defined something indecent as adultery. The liberal school under Rabbi Hillel widened the definition considerably. They said that if a wife spoke disrespectfully to the husband’s parents in his presence, he could divorce her. They even said that if she burned his dinner, he could divorce her. This was divorce for “any and every reason.” As might be expected, Hillel’s view was more popular. It still seems more popular. Today a man would divorce his wife if she becomes old and is no longer attractive. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that divorce for any reason, except marital unfaithfulness, was wrong (Mt 5:31-32). The Pharisees must have known this and hoped to exploit it politically. More than that, they wanted to accuse Jesus of contradicting the law of Moses.

Even though the Pharisees asked this question to Jesus in order to trap him, their question only exposed their inner thought world. The Pharisees were religious leaders. As religious leaders, they should be a good example to others by having happy families in God. Instead, they were thinking about divorce, believing that divorce is optional. They were terrible sinners before God because they were willing to break their covenant with God and with the wives of their youth. In Malachi 2:13-15, God did not accept the offerings of the priests. They asked, “Why?” Then God answered, “It is because you have broken faith with the wife of your youth, the wife of your marriage covenant.” God warned them not to break faith with the wife of their youth, saying “I hate divorce.”

**Second,** “They are no longer two, but one.” (4-6) Look at verses 4-6 “‘Haven’t you read,’ he replied, ‘that at the beginning the Creator “made them male and female,” and said, “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.’” In his divine wisdom, Jesus answered their question by asking a question. He questioned, “Haven’t you studied Genesis?” Jesus takes them to the very beginning on how God established a beautiful family in paradise. Jesus also said, “...and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” When we study Genesis, we learn that Eve came from one of Adam’s ribs. Therefore, they were, in actuality, one. We may ask, “Why didn’t God make a woman separately out of the dust of the ground?” But God made a woman from Adam’s rib in order to demonstrate that they are one. Here being one flesh means physical, emotional, and spiritual union in God. Becoming one flesh means a lifelong commitment to one another. It means to have a joint bank account in practical sense. It means to have the same goals, priorities in order to expand the kingdom of God on earth.

But in reality, two becoming one seems to be absolutely impossible. It is because each person’s character and nature are different. Most couples find that they are completely different, not just 10 or 20% different but 100% different. Their differences seem to be irreconcilable or incompatible. Then they think that they married a wrong person. But that is not true. If we read Genesis 1, we find the expression, “according to their kinds.” God made vegetables according to their kinds. God made birds of the air according to their kinds. God made animals according to their kinds. Each animal is different from one another. Likewise, God made men and women according to their kinds. Some men insist that women should think and act more like men. Some women expect men to think and act more like women. But men are men; women are women. They are supposed to be different.

When we observe a couple, the husband and wife are very different and opposite in their characters and views of the world and people. When we prayerfully think about why they are so different, we find that it is God’s wisdom and perfect providence. If two persons are just the same kind, then there is no harmony or universal beauty in their relationship. Moreover, if a husband and a wife are not different, the world is boring. But because they are different, they have many stories to tell and there is ample reason to love and forgive each other. Two to become one takes a little time. But when two different persons become one, they can work together better than alone. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up.” When two different persons become one in God, they can love their children and all peoples of all nations. A family is a basic unit of the society. Therefore, when families are happy, our fellowships and our nation can be happy. When we learn how to build up and maintain happy families in God, we can grow to be responsible for our fellowships and nation. Thus St. Paul said marriage is a profound mystery. (Eph 5:32) Verse 6 says, “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” This is God’s imperative. In this verse we learn that divorce is not an option. God instituted marriage. Marriage is not just meeting together by chance. God ordained marriage. God blessed marriage. Marriage is the focal point of God’s creation, established by God’s absolute and perfect providence. If anyone divorces, his relationship with God is automatically broken. What is more, their children’s hearts are broken and they don’t grow up as normal human beings. Charlton Heston and his wife married for 64 years until Charlton Heston died. It was very rare for Hollywood movie stars. Someone asked her, “Have you considered divorce?” She said, “Never. But I did consider murdering him.”

**Third,** the motive of divorce (7-11). Jesus told the Pharisees the meaning of a happy marriage in God based on Genesis. So they should have agreed with Jesus and thanked him for restoring the hope of establishing and maintaining a happy marriage in God. Instead, they hardened their hearts and tried one more time to test Jesus. Look at verse 7-9. “‘Why then,’ they asked, ‘did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ Jesus replied, ‘Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.’” The Pharisees asked Jesus, “Why then did Moses command?” But Jesus replied, “Moses permitted.” Moses did not command his people to divorce. Moses permitted this kind of legal procedure in order to protect women. Moses gave them the law of divorce not to promote divorce but to restrict random and uncontested divorce. When one wanted to divorce his wife, he had to go to court and produce evidence that she deserved divorce. It was not easy for anyone to receive a certificate of divorce. Shepherd Moses made the law of divorce in order to prevent random divorce, to protect women and give them a proper place in their families and society.

People explain their cause of divorce in many ways. Many actors usually state in their divorce papers, “Irreconcilable differences.” Many say, “I’m not happy in this marriage. He is not meeting my needs.” But marriage is not meant to be a vehicle in which to meet all of our material, physical, emotional and spiritual needs. Marriage is not about being happy. It is about expanding the kingdom of God through working together. It is about building a kingdom of God at home and planting the hope of the kingdom of God in our children, and in our community. True happiness comes when we learn to be proud of what we build together. But instead of working together to restore the relationship, they divorce. No matter what the reason is, at the bottom of their hearts they divorce to commit adultery. Divorce happens because there is a possibility that if he divorces he can marry another woman. Suppose his wife was the only woman in the world and there were no other women at all. He would not divorce her. Even if there are many women in the world, a husband should regard his wife as the only woman in the whole world. Even if there are many men in the world, a woman should regard her husband as the only man in the whole world. Jesus taught us clearly that the motive of divorce is to commit adultery.

Then the disciples asked Jesus a serious question. Look at verse 10. “The disciples said to him, ‘If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.’” This verse shows that the disciples were still very immature. Immature people always swing from one extreme to another. They did not understand what Jesus said about a happy marriage, but thought it was chaining together and enslavement of a husband and wife. They are very postmodern, afraid of commitment. It is like seeing the store sign, “No return policy.” What if the person changes after marriage? What if we have “irreconcilable differences”? “Should I have to endure this lifetime torture?” In their fatalistic view of marriage, they wanted to remain single. Look at verses 11,12. “Jesus replied, ‘Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven.” Some cannot marry because of physical defect. Some do not want to marry due to their fatalistic view of marriage like the disciples. Some do not want to marry in order to not take responsibility over their wives and children. But some do not marry in order to serve the work of God. Paul did not marry in order to serve the work of God. God used his wholehearted devotion as a precious factor in his world mission work. Many men want to be as great as Paul but want to get married. Jesus said, “The one who can accept this should accept it.” According to Jesus, not everyone is meant to remain single. Jesus teaches about the supreme value of the kingdom of God that surpasses all human value. We should not build our hope on marriage or family. Whether marry or not to marry, we should live for the kingdom of God. What can truly satisfy our souls? Can marriage fill the void in our souls? No. Even the best marriage cannot do that. Only God’s perfect love can fulfill the deep desire of our souls. When we develop a fulfilling love relationship with Jesus our Savior, our lives—married or single— are truly fulfilling.

What does a kingdom-centered view of marriage mean to us practically? People dream of meeting the right person to marry, assuming that marriage is primarily for personal fulfillment. There is no perfectly right person because of our self-centeredness. Our self-centeredness is “the great sin” that blinds us and makes us hurt each other (C.S. Lewis), devastating the holy sanctuary of family. Wives are hurt by their husbands’ self-centeredness, while husbands are hurt by their wives’ self-centeredness. The more intimate the relationship, the deeper the wounds. Then what is the point of marriage if we hurt each other? Marriage exists for us to work on our self-centeredness, not for our self-fulfillment. If both spouses are willing to get the “self” out of the center, marriage can be taken to a new level of love and fulfillment beyond what we could have ever imagined. It is a wonderful mission to help each other to go to the throne of God and stand together before God, seeing each other presented in glory. But if you choose to remain single for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, may God bless your decision.

In conclusion, if you struggle with our marriage, you should never ask how you can get out of the commitments you made. If you have wounds of divorce, I believe that Jesus is the compassionate healer. All of us have King Jesus who offers his grace of forgiveness and strength. When we put him at the center of our marriage, we can live out our marriage vows. May his grace and his Spirit transform our hearts and marriages. If you are single, may your singleness be ruled by a love relationship with Jesus Christ.