

**Mark 10:1-12 “Let no-one separate”**  
**CCH Sermon Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2022**

v9.

According to figures released by the Office for National Statistics just over a week ago, the number of divorces in our country rose by nearly 10% last year, with commentators suggesting that the Covid lockdowns put many marriages under immense strain<sup>1</sup>.

While fewer and fewer are getting married these days, nevertheless around 1 in 3 marriages end in divorce. It's not just an issue which is “out there”, this is something that is intensely personal for many of us here today.

All of our lives will have been affected by divorce in some way, for some very acutely through ~~our~~<sup>their</sup> own experience ~~of it~~<sup>s</sup>, or perhaps for others one step removed through the lives of friends or siblings or parents or (in my case) grandparents. This week I've been reading the testimonies of Christians who have gone through divorce<sup>2</sup> ~~this week~~, and it's given me an insight into ~~how difficult~~<sup>the agony</sup> this whole process can be on so many levels. And I sincerely hope that what is shared today will bring healing and not further pain. It would be easier to avoid this topic, but it's next in the Bible!

I've written to everyone in our church who I know has experienced divorce close hand and all the lifegroup leaders explaining how I hope that church today, and our discussions in lifegroups next week, will be “safe places” where we can discuss these things in a context of love and care and not shame or exacerbated pain, so let's pray again for God's help as we listen carefully to what Jesus is saying.

**PRAY**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11381983/Divorce-rate-jumps-eight-year-high-lockdown-strongest-relationships-test.html>

We've got 2 main points today, but first I think the **geography lesson** in v1 is surprisingly helpful in framing the context for our sermon today.

It looks like ~~another~~<sup>a</sup> random satnav moment. Actually, these geographical notes are really helpful, first, because they show that Mark really knew ancient Palestine- he's writing history and not myth or fable about real events in real places.

But more importantly what's the trajectory here? v1. After Caesarea Philippi in the far north where Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah in chapter 8, and after a lengthy time teaching the disciples in Galilee in chapter 9- possibly several months in Peter's house in Capernaum we are heading south into Judea. We are “on the way” with Jesus- the title of our series. But where ultimately is he heading?

He's heading for Jerusalem and to the cross.

*Remember that* as we study this passage. Jesus is going to raise high standards for his disciples. He does that again and again in this section as he calls us to pick up our crosses. But all the time he is heading to die for us. He is the King, but he is the Servant King who lays down his life for his disciples. He's ministering to those who get things wrong.

All of us here are failures in our relationships. Whether we are single, married or divorced today, none of us have loved God like we should, and none of us can point at any kind of speck in a brother or sister's eye without a big log in our own.

But wonderfully Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, where he allowed his life to be taken instead of yours for your sin. His body to be broken and his blood shed instead of yours. It's hugely appropriate that on Remembrance day of all days at today's service we will take bread and wine to remember the cross and feed on Christ afresh in our hearts for forgiveness.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/church-after-divorce/> and <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/shame-divorce/>

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We have 2 points, the wrong thinking of the Pharisees, and then the right thinking of Jesus, the Servant King. And then three attitudes to finish with.

### **1) THE VIEW OF THE PHARISEES- Marriage is disposable v2-5**

v2 Well like in chapter 8 we know that these religious leaders aren't approaching Jesus with an open mind. They are here to catch Jesus out. And they've chosen the topic of divorce as their spring-loaded trap of choice.

The question under "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" v2

I love how Jesus takes it straight back to the Bible. Though Jesus was God, he still had a really high view of the Bible as the place to go to discover God's truth. It's the same place for us to go for God's truth on all matters of conduct. v3

Well they reply with a Bible quote, but they choose a very convenient text. Their view of divorce was that you could divorce your wife for "any and every reason" - that's a technical phrase that was used in the courts. We might call it "any fault divorce".

In their mind marriage was disposable. Like an old phone to be discarded when a newer model comes along. You could call it "any fault divorce".

If you are in any doubt, here's a quote from one school of Jewish thinking from this time... "The school of Hillel says, *'if the wife cooks her husband's food ill by over-salting it or over-roasting it, she is to be put away'*". See JCRyle Expository thoughts p144.

So they turn to Deut 24:1 to back up their permissive view v4.

Yes that is what Moses is talking about in Deuteronomy 24:1, you can look it up, but Jesus is about to show this is not the go-to text for God's thinking on marriage, as it was based on an exception or a concession, a special allowance that was needed because of sin v5 because of the

hardness of heart. In fact if you read it, it's about not going back to a previous marriage after a second one has ended.

In other words God through Moses gave a "best of a bad situation" law. It was what we might call a "retrieval ethic" that protected women in certain complex situations, but it was never the ideal, and it's certainly not a justification for easy divorce. Come back to me if you need.

Before we look at Jesus' response and the Bible texts he goes to, it's just worth pausing for a minute on how similar much of today's culture is regarding divorce. Marriage is disposable.

In many people's minds outside the church (and I'm speaking predominantly outside the church, and not about anyone present today), marriage is not a permanent covenant to be entered into "til death us do part", but a new level to take your relationship to perhaps if you are already living together, and to celebrate with a wedding with your friends. If it doesn't work out, then it's sad but when two consenting adults decide that they no longer want to be married, but divorce is the exit door that has been in the back of their minds all along.

In fact, our society has an even more relaxed approach to marriage than the Pharisees. If they had what we've called "*any* fault divorce", we've actually passed laws in April this year that are "*no* fault divorce". You no longer need to give a reason why you are getting divorced, and the process is sped up from roughly 2 years to 6 months.

Now the claim is that it spares the couple hours of acrimonious wrangling about who is in the right or wrong, I get that, and we all know that in any dispute there is rarely a completely innocent party, so talking about fault doesn't feel constructive. But actually, it takes some serious brakes off the process, brakes which could give the couple time to think, discuss and possibly change their minds. Probably most of us know of couples who have been through serious difficulties, but they have been worked through and years down the line, the couple is so grateful that they stuck together and with the help of others patched things up.

And we have to ask the question whether this disposable attitude has helped society, children or marriages. Can I say this is not to heap additional blame on couples that are now divorced, but we can all see that the kind of easy divorce the Pharisees wanted was a long way from God's original intention for marriage.

Well let's look at Jesus' view of marriage-

## **2) THE TEACHING OF JESUS- Marriage is permanent v5-12**

Jesus takes the Pharisees (and us) back to the two foundational verses on sexuality and marriage and then adds a comment. The verses are found in Genesis 1 and 2, verses we actually looked at this time a year ago, do look up the sermons on our website if you'd like.

**First** Gen 1:27 v6. Despite the gender confusion that is so common today, and so deeply personal, and which we need to respond to with compassion and gentleness, each of the cells in our body is XX or XY, God delights in the differences between men and women and sex is a good gift from him. But the next quote gives sex its God given context.

**Second** Gen 2:24 v7-8a. Again, hugely counter cultural but do you see very clearly here from Jesus that sex is for heterosexual marriage- a one flesh union of husband and wife? It's part of his good and kind protection of us. Fire is great in its rightful place- in the bonfire or the log burner. But let loose in a sofa or a tower block it's hugely dangerous.

Now it may be that you struggle with all sorts of issues surrounding questions of gender and sexuality<sup>3</sup>. Your may feel your relationships history has been bumpy to say the least. Don't panic. You will be ~~heard~~ listened to and appreciated and loved in this church family. We've already said that all who turn in repentance and faith come under the cross of Jesus.

But do you see that Jesus is setting a lifelong standard for marriage that is very high and very permanent, and so different from the Pharisees' thinking of any fault divorce for frivolous reasons.

In fact, as he so often does in Mark's gospel he gives extra teaching to his disciples privately about this. v10-12. He's saying that it's not just that easy divorce is not just wrong, it's adulterous. v11-12. There is a form of divorce that may come with a piece of paper from a lawyer but ~~in God's eyes~~ it is not sanctioned by God, and so a remarriage after it consists of adultery against the original spouse. It is still a marriage, and a further divorce shouldn't be sought, but Jesus is saying divorce is wrong.

Now it's important to know that there is an exception to this in Matthew's gospel, and I raise it now because it helps us interpret this section. I've put the verses on the screen: Matt 19:8,9 and 5:31-32.

In Matthew 5 and 19 in the parallel passages on this teaching, Jesus gives grounds in which a divorce is possible and valid. When Man A marries Woman B and one of them engages in sexual immorality outside marriage, for example the man or the woman has an affair, the remaining partner is free to divorce. They are not bound to the original marriage. The original marriage bond has been ruptured, and they are free to divorce and remarry. They are not *obliged* to get a divorce, and even in these circumstances where there is sorrow and repentance, with lots of help and prayer the marriage can be rebuilt. God is a God of miracles of reconciliation. But sadly it is not always possible, and when adultery has been involved divorce is morally justified.

Paul also adds to this in 1 Corinthians 7 another situation where an unbeliever leaves a believer, and again the believing spouse is free to move on.

We've thought about Jesus' permanent view of marriage, though we've seen that **adultery** and **abandonment** can form legitimate grounds for divorce. A third "a" to mention at this stage is **abuse**. I don't within the

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.livingout.org/>

bounds of this sermon have the space to talk about all the nuances of abuse and divorce, but can I say that if anyone is experiencing domestic violence in the home, help is available. ~~Both~~ Linked to ours and the Ely Diocese safeguarding page ~~Diocese of Ely's website~~<sup>4</sup> ~~or~~ are some local resources. Domestic violence is never acceptable, and a woman (or man) in that situation needs help to get out, and all sorts of church and state interventions may be necessary.

Wow. These are heavy subjects and well done everyone for sticking with the programme so far. Emma and I will be in the music room after the service (or available on the phone) if you'd like to talk through any of the issues I've talked through so far, and we can find people to meet with you and pray with you and talk through your situations if that would be helpful. No-one should feel singled out, and those who have divorce in their stories will be treated with confidentiality, respect and care. ~~Though we can see from the passage that there may need to be mistakes in the past to acknowledge and turn from.~~

Let's move to the three attitudes to cultivate as an application of this passage.

### **First CARE!**

There'll be a range of people listening today and online or on the recording. Some will be single, some married, some divorced (or a mix of those places).

Within those groups there will be a range of people in each category.

- Some who are happily single, others who are struggling with their singleness, or a spectrum in between.

- Some whose marriages are a great joy, some who have been facing great challenges, conflict and difficulty in their marriages, and a range in between
- and I guess a spectrum of emotions within those who are divorced due to very differing situations and circumstances surrounding their divorces (and that's a lesson for those who aren't divorced not to assume things, and not to judge).

Well for all of us we need to proceed with care.

Jesus calls us to a high standard here. Relationships are not something to muck about with. They affect the very core of our being, and more importantly, marriage reflects the commitment of love God has for his people.

He loves us with an undying unconditional unbreakable love and our relationships are to mirror that.

So take care! Those who are single need to be careful not to dash into marriage too quickly! Make sure that you have got to know the person that you are thinking about! See them on a bad day as well as a good day! ~~When~~ No-one is perfect, so don't expect to find perfection! But marriage doesn't come with an ~~easy~~ exit door, except in extreme and very non-ideal circumstances, so as the marriage service rightly puts it, it isn't to be entered into *"Marriage is a sign of unity and loyalty which all should uphold and honour. It enriches society and strengthens community. No one should enter into it lightly or selfishly but reverently and responsibly in the sight of Almighty God"* (see [here](#)).

If you are a Christian, don't entertain thoughts of marrying a non-Christian. Don't "flirt to convert" you are more likely to be pulled down than drag the other person up! And take extreme care (marrieds or unmarrieds) if you are attracted to someone who is already married or

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.elydiocese.org/safeguarding/helplines-and-contact-numbers/> points to <https://www.cambsdasv.org.uk/web> or phone Refuge on 0808 2000247.

still married. They are off limits. Have Jesus' words emblazoned on your heart "Therefore what God has joined together let no-one separate".

### **Second COMMITMENT!**

For those who *are* married. Jesus calls you to a lifelong commitment. Some days that will feel like the sunny ~~rays-skies~~ of honeymoon. Other days and seasons it will feel like the ~~grey clouds or even thunderclouds~~ storms of summer or sadly the greyness of winter. Of course it ~~is-can get messy, difficult~~ when two sinners share their bedroom, their bathroom, their ~~bank account~~ budget! But work at the marriage. The Holy Spirit is with you to grow more like Jesus! Give one another time (including a regular date night perhaps where you can give express your love one another with time, talk and touch. Guys, don't forget the first two!). Be honest. Are there aspects of your marriage to take to the repair shop!

Young marrieds, Don't leave the race at the first hurdle! Everyone has problems- seek the advice of an older couple, they'd love to help. You'd be helping them too!

And if you are really struggling. And-If you feel like you've married the wrong person, take the wonderful words of v9 as a reassurance. The person whose name is on the marriage certificate was God's idea. He has joined you together. He has given the other person with all their faults as a means of grace and help to you. Bad behaviour is never justified, but with God's help you can both grow in Christlikeness.

### **Finally we return to where we started- CLING TO THE CROSS!**

Maybe something I've said today makes you think that you have made some mistakes in the past. Join the club. Each of us will have individual stories, and we don't judge one another. Never feel that God's best is past. I love this quote on the gospel coalition, "When we see seemingly perfect families in church, we want their lives, but when we see broken families trusting the Lord, we want their God. Our story of God's

faithfulness amid shattered dreams may be the greatest witness we could ever offer", **Cling to the cross.**

Perhaps some ~~one else is -are~~ struggling with infidelity or pornography. Open up to someone at lifegroup and **Cling to the cross.**

~~Perhaps some know wrong relationships against God's ways need to be nipped in the bud early, or stopped. Yes that will feel like a crucifixion, but it will ultimately be lifegiving.~~ **Cling to the Cross.**

Perhaps you could have worked harder at a previous marriage. Perhaps you ~~slammed the door in a permanent way~~ closed a door, when you now see you should have left it open. Say sorry and **Cling to the Cross.**

Maybe you were treated appallingly, and you are the innocent party. ~~But bitterness or resentment has crept in.~~ **Cling to the cross.**

Perhaps right now in your marriage you have failed to love your spouse as you should with the kind of respectful sacrificial love that Jesus calls us to. ~~You're marriage is not on the rocks, but y~~ou've taken ~~him or her your~~ spouse for granted, perhaps through busyness, perhaps through a career, perhaps through the survival mode of bringing up little or big kids in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Turn back and ~~Well~~ **cling to the cross.**

Hear the words of the perfect spouse Jesus as he says

*"Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you"- Hebrews 13:5*

*"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many"- just across the page- Mark 10:45.*

He really does bring forgiveness, hope and new life. Let's pray.

~~And come and take bread and wine without cost.~~

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