

Introduction

I am going to start out this morning with a question for the married couples. And the question is, "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 10 being extremely satisfied, how would you rate your marriage?" (Repeat) I want you to think seriously about this question this morning. Now I am not going to ask for a show of hands, but I would imagine that in this room, the responses cover the spectrum from miserable and extremely dissatisfied on the one end to exhilarated and extremely satisfied on the other. Wherever you are today, it is my hope that you are moving in a good direction in your marriage, getting stronger, getting closer, and experiencing joy. There are a number of important principles in God's word that equip us for building satisfying marriages, but none more foundational than what we are going to look at today.

Some of you are not married, but that does not mean that you can check out. Even if you are not married, it is important that you understand the nature of marriage. The Bible says marriage is to be held in honor by all. And if you belong to Christ, marriage is part of your life. The church is the bride of Jesus. So let's look carefully at Matthew 5:31-32.

[Read Text and Pray]

God is serious about marriage. We have placed a lot of emphasis on God's principles for marriage in the past year. Last year this time I was teaching a Wednesday evening series on manhood and womanhood which underscored how serious he is. Meanwhile we find ourselves in the midst of a society which does not take marriage seriously. Our culture resists God on every level, especially in regard to his design for marriage. For God, one man and one woman for life is the standard. And we need to reiterate this biblical view.

God defines what is right and he commands what is right. And what he commands is not only right, it is what is best for human beings. What is best for human beings is not only what is best for their health; it is also

what is best for our happiness. When human beings disobey God, it is because we listen to the temptations of the devil, his demons, the world, and the flesh. Now is the devil happy? Did the devil invent happiness? The devil is miserable; his intent is but to steal, kill, and destroy. He does not tempt you in order to maximize your joy but to steal it. Now don't get me wrong. He knows what drives you, so he promises you happiness. He promises you pure delight. But he is lying. He is the father of lies. Every sin is an offense to God. Every sin breaks God's law. Every sin is committed with the thought that it will bring happiness. But it actually brings misery. We live in a miserable world. People are pretending to be happy, but they are miserable.

Last week many of us were standing on the west side of HWY 100 with our signs. They say, "Abortion kills children;" and "Adoption is the Loving Option;" and "Jesus Heals and Forgives." Not a word being spoken with our lips, just upheld signs. And folks, not a ton, but some, reacted with anger. A number used their fingers to display their displeasure. Some used their voices. As such they displayed that they were clearly miserable.

As we look at what Jesus says about marriage and divorce this morning, I want you to keep a couple things in the front of your mind. First, bear in mind the fact that what God commands is right. To disobey is to sin against God. It is to do what is wrong. It is to violate the glorious God who created us. Second, remember the fact that what God commands is for our good. Many are the consequences of sinful behavior. To violate God's commands is to invite him to judge us. Finally, bear in mind that what God commands is for our own happiness. The world, the flesh, and the devil scream emphatically that it is not so. We listen to them at our own peril and to our own misery.

It is obvious in our world when you look around, there is much misery. People are drowning in misery and they want to pull as many down with them as they can. We all want to know why a 64 year old man would study and plan and invest in an arsenal to murder scores of people and injure hundreds. I do not know if we will ever get a clear handle on it, but this much I am sure of: he was separated from God; bent on disobeying God; he was unhappy; and he wanted to spread his misery around.

Marriage is one of the casualties of a sinful, selfish pursuit of happiness down the path paved by Satan. It is true today, and it was true in the days of Jesus' fleshly presence in the world as well. I have no doubt that the devil attacks the church through attacking the marriages of us who make it up. If he can bring us down in this area, he can do real damage. But it is not just harm to two people. When a marriage is wrecked, the effects spread to the entire family, and church family, and it is an abomination to God. As I pointed out last week, God is the author of marriage. It is His institution. It was in his mind from the time he said, "Let there be light." In Genesis 2, God brings to the man the human he made from him, the one who is like him and yet complimentary to him. He presents her to the man. The man rejoices and God institutes marriage with these words: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they two shall become one flesh."

Marriage is God's idea, God's institution, God's provision, and God's gift for enjoyment to those who are married. As the writer in Hebrews says: "Let marriage be held in honor AMONG ALL." And the concern Jesus has here in correcting the false teaching of the day is to hold marriage in honor. Jesus is addressing the devaluation of the marriage covenant that was being promoted by the scribes and Pharisees. As we turn our attention to the text I want you to see . . .

I. The Relaxation of the Commandment

A. By the phrase, "it was also said," Jesus is pointing to this other error of the false-teaching scribes and Pharisees that had to do with God's prohibition of committing adultery. It had specifically to do with divorce.

B. What they were telling everybody was this, "whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce." It would seem that to the spiritual leaders of Jesus' day getting married was no more serious a matter than getting a job. Find somebody who will employ you and work for them a while. If you do not like the job, you can always quit. And if the employer does not like you, he can always fire you. Just make sure you give him a pink slip on his way out the door.

That is the way things were in the day. Certainly, not everyone thought this way. Joseph is an example of one who did seem to take the covenant seriously. But there is evidence that what many of the scribes and Pharisees were advocating was the prevailing attitude of the day. Your wife burned dinner; just send her away with a certificate and you are good to go find you another one.

It was true among the Jews. Historians report that most divorces among Jews in the first century were for no particular reason. There is no reason to think it was any better in Samaria. In John 4 we know of the woman Jesus encountered there. She had 5 husbands and she wasn't married to the man she was living with. The situation was also terribly bad among the Romans, not a few of whom lived in Judea. Roman philosopher Seneca wrote that "women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married" and "women dated the years by the names of their husbands."

C. The attitude of the scribes and Pharisees represents caving to the culture as opposed to standing on the word. The law of Moses did permit divorce and did mention a certificate. We find that in Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

The point of that text is not to condone divorce or to say that divorce is permitted so long as there is a certificate. In fact, it demonstrates that divorce and remarriage defiles. But these teachers who relaxed the law were clearly more concerned with convenience and permissiveness than what was actually spoken by the text of the scripture.

II. The Real Message of the Bible

The Old Testament scriptures are strikingly clear about marriage and divorce.

A. God established and ordained marriage at the start of creation. He built up the moment for the first bride's presentation to the first groom.

You think the moment the bride enters the room and is brought down the aisle to her husband is a moment of exhilaration for the groom? I remember well my wedding day. That moment when Melissa emerged with her Dad to be brought down the aisle to me was climactic! Just a couple

years ago I stood with my son as his bride was brought down the aisle by her father. When she entered, it was like Philip's breath had been taken away. His bottom lip began to tremble. My tears started to gush. I had to look away. That is a moment ordained by God. He did the same kind of thing when he instituted marriage. It was already in his heart to give Adam a helper, but before he did, he sent the man out into the world to name the animals. That project brought Adam to the keen awareness that something was missing for him. All the animals he named had something he didn't. For Adam there was not found a helper that was suitable for him.

Once God brought him to the awareness of what was lacking for him, he put him to sleep and made a helper fit for him. God made a woman and brought her to the man. And what did the man do? He rejoiced and gave her a name. He called her woman because she was taken out of man. He was delighted because this was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. And God said, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they two shall become one flesh." And right here in the divine pronouncement are two central aspects of the union God established.

The second one mentioned is becoming one flesh. We focused on this aspect of marriage last week. But the first aspect of marriage that God here declares is close permanency. A man shall hold fast to his wife. That is the ESV's version of the Hebrew here. The NAS says "be joined;" the NIV says "is united," and the AV says, "shall cleave." When we recently put new tile on our bathroom walls, we used just the right adhesive. We wanted the tile to be closely united to the wall in a permanent way. In marriage, God applies the adhesive. Jesus speaks of marriage in Matthew 19 as a union made by God. What God has joined together, no person is to separate. That's the way it was from the beginning way back in Genesis 2.

B. From there we see the divine sensitivity to the marriage covenant in the life of Abram. Remember the sad instances in which Abram lied about Sarah being his wife. He was afraid for his life because of Sarah's beauty. So they hid from the Egyptians that Sarah was Abram's wife. And Pharaoh brought Sarah into his house. God did not condone the lies, but he protected the marriage and sent plagues on Pharaoh and his house so that Pharaoh re-united the couple and sent them away. Basically the same thing

happened again with Abimelech, but God prevented adultery through a dream he gave Abimelech.

C. Then we have the sad, sad instance of adultery with David. The reason this is so important is because David, like Abraham is a covenant-head. The child conceived out of wedlock died. Solomon who became heir to the throne was conceived after David and Bathshebah were married.

D. The first of the minor prophets is Hosea. He is a model of unconditional love in marriage. With dramatic effect, we read in this OT book of God's instruction to the prophet to be a faithful and persistent husband to a wife who abandons him and runs after other lovers. Her name was Gomer. The offense is deep but the commitment of Hosea is a beautiful representation of God's own faithful commitment to his people despite their unfaithfulness.

Hosea 3:1-3 – And the Lord said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and who is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins." So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I be to you."

E. At last we come to Malachi. Here God calls out his people. They are crying their eyes out because they see that the Lord does not have any regard for their sacrifices. And they demand to know why. Here is what he says. We read this text earlier this morning. It is Malachi 2:14-16. I am just going to sum it up. The reason is divorce. You are being faithless to your wife though you were brought together by covenant. By divorcing your wife, you hate her and cover your garment with violence. Some translations put it this way, that God hates divorce. Whether the text says it literally or not, the text certainly conveys the message that God hates divorce. As Jesus points out in Matthew 19, divorce is a human act to undo what God has put together.

F. Now God did ALLOW divorce, but he never COMMANDED it. And he allowed it not because he likes it but because of the hardness of the human heart. That's what Jesus explains in Matthew 19.

III. The Reading by Jesus of God's Law

A. If you divorce for any reason other than adultery, you cause adultery. It is understood in Jesus' comments that the divorced woman would marry another. So the man divorcing for any reason other than sexual immorality, which breaks the covenant, causes the wife to commit adultery. And the one who marries her commits adultery.

B. The point in the context of the sermon by Jesus is this. Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. They think of themselves as not breaking God's law, but that is only because they have falsely constricted its application to the outermost externals. They see murder only as literally taking someone's life, and they see adultery only as a physical act while someone is married. But the facts are that anger and insult are murder; looking with lust is adultery; and so is divorce for any reason other than sexual immorality.

These are things people do all the time. The reaction for those who get what Jesus is saying should be: Wow! Oh, no. We are in DEEP trouble. We are all breakers of God's law a million times over! Is there any hope for us? Is there any help for us? Yes there is! He is standing right in front of you! He is the one who is showing you the depth of the reaches of God's law so you will quit trusting in yourself that you are righteous and will turn to him who alone is righteous. Turn to him not to argue how righteous you are but to admit how unrighteous you are how full of iniquity and trespass are your heart and your deeds, how you hunger and thirst for righteousness. For he is the righteousness you need. He is the lamb unblemished and spotless. And he is the husband who gave himself up for his bride that he might sanctify her so he might present to himself the church in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

The clear message to sinners is to come forth. Give glory to God. Draw near to him that you may receive from him salvation full and free, eternal life without cost, everything needed to be acceptable in his sight.

C. And there is another message. It is a practical one about marriage and divorce. Do not commit adultery carries with it the prohibition of divorce for any reason other than adultery. The Bible carries with this term abandonment. And the emphasis made by God through these commands is that marriage is an indissoluble union made such by God, and we are to honor it as that.

God is not willing to let us out of a marriage covenant because our spouse is selfish. He is not willing to let us out of our marriage covenant because our romantic feelings are no longer there. "We are always fussing and fighting," is not an out. Our own misery is not an out. "I am not appreciated," will not suffice. Neither will "she does not respect me" or "he does not love me."

On the basis of what Jesus says in these verses this morning, we married couples must do the work in our marriages which honors God's institution. Do the work which strengthens your marriage and points people in the world to Christ. Husbands, LOVE your wife. Wives, love and respect your husband. Give give give give give! Serve each other. If you determine not to give until you receive, you dishonor Jesus Christ.

No one ever gave more for his spouse than Jesus. No one ever even comes close. We are all Gomer, the unfaithful wife. He is Hosea who lovingly buys back his adulterous wife and brings her home to love and to cherish.

Don't look at other couples's marriages and say I just wish I could have what they have. Listen. Good marriages have the same troubles and the same threats. When husband and wife are Christians, the difference between a good marriage and a not-so-good marriage is not incompatibility. It is not different resources. They have the same resources every other Christian has-the Bible and the Holy Spirit. They have just learned what the Bible teaches and the Spirit works. The joy is not anchored in the receiving but in the giving. Jesus "for the joy set before him endured the cross."

This is the beauty of godly marriage. In the giving there is receiving. In marriage we have the glorious opportunity to emulate Christ. And that should be our primary joy in it.