

## **JESUS TEACHES ABOUT MARRIAGE (SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2010)**

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**SCRIPTURE READING:** DEUT. 24:1-4; MATTHEW 19:1-12

### **INTRODUCTION**

Who is to blame for the spread of the sodomite agenda including the legalization of the abomination of so-called same sex marriage in several states in our nation? There are a number of guilty parties. Yes, there is a very powerful and radical, well-organized and well-funded, movement of sodomite organizations that never stop in trying to shape public opinion and change laws. But the blame for this tsunami of perversion doesn't simply rest on the perverts themselves. They have only been successful because as God's people we have failed in the difficult duty given to us. The conservative movement is also to blame. Before the sodomite movement became the force that it is today, an equally great scourge was poured out on our nation through the breakdown of the family through adultery and divorce. The sodomite movement gained steam in large part because the family was being destroyed. The divorce rate in America rose to its highest rate starting in the 1960's through the 1990's. Out of this tremendous breakdown of the family has come the rise of the sodomite movement. The destruction of the family has brought the scourge of other perversions. It has given the perverts the ammunition they have needed to continue their war on what remains of the family and the institution of marriage.

If there will be any victory over the forces of perversion, then there must first be serious reform and repentance when it comes to the modern practice of divorce. The words of Jesus Christ must be heard, embraced, and obeyed.

We will be looking at the opening verses of Matthew 19 today. It is a familiar passage and also a challenging passage. May the Lord be given glory as we seek to submit ourselves again to the truth of His Word.

We will look at verses 1-12 in three parts. First, we will consider the context and background of this passage as given in verses 1-3. Second, Jesus establishes the true foundation of marriage and refutes the Pharisees in verses 3-9. Third, Jesus recognizes that marriage is demanding and not all are called to be married, verses 10-12.

### **1. CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND, vv. 1-3**

**Matt. 19:1** Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, *that* He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. **2** And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. **3** The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?"

There are five main **discourses** or teaching sections in the book of Matthew. Verse 1 marks the end of the **fourth** of these teaching sections. Verse 1 also marks the end of

Jesus' ministry in Galilee. He would return to Galilee after His resurrection, otherwise the rest of Matthew is focused on the journey to Jerusalem and His coming suffering, death, and resurrection.

Verse 1 indicates that Jesus came to the region of Judea that was beyond the Jordan, that is, east of the Jordan River. Technically this area east of the Jordan was called Perea. But Matthew is not in error. One commentator notes that Jesus like most of the pilgrims from Galilee on their way to Jerusalem, crossed the Jordan River on his way south in order to avoid going through Samaria.<sup>1</sup> Matthew therefore identifies this area as Judea.

This particular location is important for the rest of this account, because in this area of Israel, Jesus was now in the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas. Why is this important? Who is Herod Antipas? Herod Antipas was the one who put John the Baptist to death after John rebuked Herod for his lawless marriage to Herodias, who had been his brother's wife. The Pharisees who came to test Jesus were not looking for instruction from our Lord. This account is at least the ninth time the Pharisees questioned, accused, or were looking to entrap Jesus. No doubt in raising the issue of marriage, they were hoping that somehow Jesus might say the wrong thing and suffer the same end as John the Baptist.<sup>2</sup>

Recall that Jesus called the generation of his day an evil and **adulterous** generation.<sup>3</sup> I don't think Jesus was simply speaking figuratively. I don't know that any statistics are available from the time of Jesus, but the institution of marriage was also under attack because of false doctrine and the evil of men.

Do you remember the names of two famous Rabbis, **Hillel** and **Shammai**? The majority of Jewish men followed the teachings of Rabbi **Hillel** that divorce was allowable for almost any imaginable reason a man could give. Alfred Edersheim in his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* gives the example of two rabbis who proclaimed their wish to be married for a day and then divorced in exercise of their supposed rights.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, those who followed Rabbi Shammai believe that gross indecency was the only proper grounds for divorce.<sup>5</sup>

It would seem from the discussion, that Jesus' disciples were closer to the opinion of Rabbi Hillel, that a man had a right to divorce his wife for almost any reason. Remember almost all marriages were arranged by parents. The bride and groom did not get to know each other until after the marriage. It only made sense if a man then had the right to divorce his wife if he didn't really find that things were working out so well. This might be a bit simplistic, but this is part of the background of this passage.<sup>6</sup>

Before moving to the rest of this passage, we should not miss verse 2. Jesus was focused on going to Jerusalem to face His time of supreme testing and service. Jesus was not too busy

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<sup>1</sup> Hagner, 543.

<sup>2</sup> NET Bible note, s.v. Matthew 19:3.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 12:39; 16:4.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by R. J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law*, 410. The citation comes from Edersheim, 332.

<sup>5</sup> Reformation Study Bible, p. 1537.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World." *BSac* 135 (1978) 241-52.

to continue His ministry to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Great multitudes followed Jesus as He traveled south to Jerusalem. He did not ignore the needs of His people. He healed those who were sick.

Jesus also knew that His disciples still had many things to learn. Two times in chapters 19 and 20 you find the phrase, “the first will be last, and the last first.” Jesus had told the disciples that unless they became like little children they would have no part in the kingdom of Heaven. The disciples in chapter 19 are shown to not only need instruction on marriage but also on the place of little children. Chapter 20 shows that the disciples were still very much concerned about status. And so these chapters are **critical** in understanding how the disciples were prepared for the mission they would be given to spread the gospel to all nations. They could only do this if they had a biblical basis for marriage, the proper understanding of children, and a proper view of serving others. In God’s Providence the Pharisees were used to provide an opportunity for some of this important instruction to be given.

## **2. JESUS ESTABLISHES THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE AND REFUTES THE PHARISEES, vv. 4-9**

**Matt. 19:4** And He answered and said to them, “Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ **5** and said, “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?*” **6** So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”

**7** They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?” **8** He said to them, “Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. **9** And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.”

The Pharisees wanted Jesus to take either the side of Hillel or Shammai. Jesus refused this attempted trap. He would not argue with the Pharisees on the basis of their traditions. Rather Jesus mocked the Pharisees and responded to their test by asking them if they ever read Scripture.

And let me encourage you to handle the debates concerning marriage in a similar way. Look to Scripture. Focus on what Scripture clearly teaches as Jesus does so powerfully here. The subject of marriage and divorce in Scripture is not a simple topic. How do we handle the issue of polygamy in the OT? How do we understand and apply the instruction found in Ezra 10 where the men of Israel who had married pagan wives were to divorce them? Those who hate God’s Word will of try to confuse you with God’s Word. Yes, there are places in Scripture concerning marriage and divorce that are

challenging, but Jesus shows very clearly here the foundation for marriage. We understand that because of sin, there was much confusion even among God's people. But the confusion and sin does not mean that we need to be confused about what Scripture teaches concerning the meaning and foundation of marriage.

Consider three things from verses 4-6 concerning the foundation of marriage.

First, marriage is based on God's work of **creation**, specifically the creation of man and woman, male and female. Jesus in introducing a quotation from Genesis 1:27 speaks of the creation of man, as male and female, at the **beginning**. The word **beginning** picks up on Genesis 1:1. Its usage here may not be surprising to you, but in light of the many controversies and false teachings affecting God's people, I think its usage here is significant. There are many who some how want to merge together evolutionary theory and Scripture. They are perfectly willing to accept that the universe and earth are billions of years old, but they want also to believe that Adam and Eve were specially created and that man did not just evolve from lower animals. But here Jesus refutes this idea. He is not just talking about the beginning of Adam and Eve as male and female, but linking their creation as male and female with the beginning of all creation, not billions of years later. Adam and Eve were created on the sixth day of creation, that is at the beginning.

The words **male and female** also refute any possible idea that Adam and Eve were not specially created by God and then joined together as husband and wife. It is on this basis that Jesus establishes His teaching concerning marriage.

Erwin Lutzer at the Liberty Banquet told me that the Latin School in Chicago recognizes 5 different genders. I guess when you pay about \$27,000 per year for grades 6-12, you apparently are treated with all sorts of bizarre ideas. Jesus recognized that sometimes there are people who are born who cannot have children. But the idea that there more than two genders is one of the silliest ideas being promoted today.

Second, marriage is based on the foundation of the family. **A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife**. There is no escaping the God-given definitions of father, mother, and wife. There is no such thing as same-sex marriage anymore than you can have a round square.

Notice from verse 5 that a man leaves his father and mother. It is the man who has the greater responsibility in preparing for marriage. When a man marries, he formally leaves the authority of his father and mother. The same thing is true with a wife. Marriage establishes the basis for a new family. Every marriage like the first marriage is the beginning of something new and yet connected with the past.

Third, Jesus speaks of the joining of a husband and wife as one flesh. The word joining is a strong word. It is not like two magnets sticking together that can easily be taken apart. No the union is more that like of gluing or welding. The point is that it is a union that can only be broken by a violent tearing away that will inevitably cause damage.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> France, 717.

I have mentioned the name Prof. Rob Gagnon, who is a seminary professor in Pittsburgh. He lectured in August here at the school on Genesis 2. I hope to make his excellent lectures available. There is much more to the idea of one flesh than I have time to explain here. Nothing else like the words of Genesis repeated here by Jesus can be found in any other cultures or religions. Only Scripture gives the true foundation for marriage.

Fourth, marriage is not just the earthly coming together of a man and woman, but is a work that God does. Marriage is not simply two people who fall in love and agree to get married. No a marriage is the work of God in joining two together as one. Therefore what God has joined, don't you try to separate! Woe to the husband or wife who would dare to attack the work of God through any type of sexual sin or through the unlawful use of divorce.

Jesus' argument up to this point is a total rejection of divorce. It is a violation of what God has created. The dispute between Shammai and Hillel over the grounds of divorce has been firmly set aside. There is simply no basis for divorce.<sup>8</sup>

But this is not the end of this text nor a discussion of marriage.

The Pharisees tried to challenge Jesus by making reference to Deuteronomy 24:1-4. How does Deuteronomy 24 fit in with Genesis 1-2? On the surface there **seems** to be a contradiction between Genesis, the words of Jesus, and Deut. 24. There is not contradiction, however. The Pharisees and others twisted and misused the teaching of the Law.

Now Deut. 24:1-4 is a very interesting passage that deserves to be studied on its own. But in summary let me mention three points that are found in Deut. 24.

First, it gave allowance for a man to divorce his wife when he found in his wife a very serious matter, some uncleanness in her, literally the nakedness of a thing. Whatever this uncleanness was, it must not have been a sin or crime worthy of the death penalty, because then other procedures would have been followed. What exactly this uncleanness is, we are not explicitly told, though other passages in the OT do give at least some idea of the seriousness of the word uncleanness. Rushdoony states, "It referred to no trifling matter, but to something ungodly, abhorrent and repellent to the covenant-keeper husband who sought guidance in the law."<sup>9</sup>

Second, though the husband was given the authority to divorce his wife, this authority was restrained by the demand that a legal document, a certificate of divorce, was to be given to her. The husband could not simply kick his wife out of the house. No, there was a procedure that needed to be followed.

Third, the purpose of this law in Deuteronomy 24, was to prevent a husband from marrying again his divorced wife, if in the meantime she was married to someone else,

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<sup>8</sup> France, 718.

<sup>9</sup> Rushdoony, 405.

and again was divorced or her second husband died. Such a marriage would be an abomination. This is the main purpose of Deuteronomy 24.

Jesus said that Deut. 24 and the allowance for divorce was due to the hardness of the hearts of God's people. The law is not the problem. The mistake was that of the Pharisees and others who used Deut. 24 as the starting point for a discussion concerning marriage and divorce.

And then in verse 9, Jesus gives a summary statement which brings together both the OT and NT on the subject of marriage and divorce.

**And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.**

Jesus' words are clear, but because of our sin and lack of clarity, they have not always been understood in the same way by sincere Christians who love the truth of God's Word.

Let me read in summary here the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 24, sections 5 and 6.

5. Adultery or fornication committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce: and, after the divorce, to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

6. Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein, a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills, and discretion, in their own case.

### **3. JESUS RECOGNIZES THAT MARRIAGE IS DEMANDING AND NOT ALL ARE CALLED TO BE MARRIED, vv. 10-12**

**Matt. 19:10** His disciples said to Him, "If such is the case of the man with *his* wife, it is better not to marry." **11** But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only *those* to whom it has been given: **12** For there are eunuchs who were born thus from *their* mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept *it*, let him accept it."

It is very revealing that the disciples found Jesus' instruction so difficult that they felt it was better even not to marry. How important it was for them to receive this instruction before they were entrusted with the spread of the gospel message. The words of Jesus in this chapter were revolutionary not only in Jewish thought but throughout the Roman Empire.

Jesus agreed with the disciples. God's demands for those who marry are very high. There have been countless people married who would have been much better off not getting married.

In verse 11, Jesus stated, all cannot accept this saying. The saying cannot be Jesus' words in verse 9. The saying must be the words of the disciples in verse 10, that it is better not to marry. For some this is true. Some have been called by God not to marry.

Now the idea that singleness or a life of celibacy is a superior path over marriage is totally false. Jesus' words give no sanction to the idea that living as a monk is somehow more spiritual than marriage.<sup>10</sup>

One commentator notes that with the remarkable exception of Jesus himself, there is little evidence that mainstream Judaism contemplated the possibility of a man remaining unmarried. Marriage and children were religious duties.<sup>11</sup> But Jesus refers to the calling that some have to be eunuchs as it were for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Some have been given this as a calling. To those given such a calling, they are to embrace this and use their lives in serving Christ and His kingdom without regret.

I think it was Doug Wilson who commented that a modern example of this would be those who are called to serve the Lord in very difficult and dangerous places where having a family would be almost impossible. This is a far cry from those who want to remain single purely for their own selfish pleasures.

And for those who want to marry, but who are waiting on a godly spouse, I think the words of Jesus are given as encouragement. While you are single, make sure that you view it as a calling from God, view your singleness, as being single for the kingdom of heaven's sake. How can you best use your time of singleness in service for Christ and His kingdom?

### **CONCLUSION:**

Let me suggest several points of application in conclusion.

1. For those who are married, I think one of the greatest things for you to do in strengthening your marriage is to frequently read and study the passages in God's Word that directly speak on the subject of marriage. Yes, there are many good books. We have some very good books in our book room. There are other good books on marriage. But most importantly make sure you often are reminded of the words in Scripture. Those passages would include: Genesis 1 and 2; Song of Solomon; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40;

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<sup>10</sup> France, 726.

<sup>11</sup> France, 722.

Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 3:1-7.<sup>12</sup> What greater challenge for wives and husbands can be found than given by Paul in Ephesians 5?

**Eph. 5:22** Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

**Eph. 5:25** Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...

2. For young men who are unmarried, my challenge to you is that you focus on marriage as a goal, unless the Lord gives you a clear calling that you are not to marry. In many situations, young men who are worth marrying are more rare than Siberian tigers and Panda Bears.

Edwin Yamauchi in a paper he wrote on marriage in the ancient world stated:

Early Christians followed the Roman precedent in accepting twelve as the minimum legal age for girls and fourteen for boys. The study by Hopkins of 180 Christian inscriptions revealed that the modal age of Christian brides was from fifteen to eighteen as compared with the modal age of pagan brides which was from twelve to fifteen. Christian parents selected the groom, though the daughter had the right to refuse the groom or even to refuse to marry. According to canon law no marriage is valid without the consent of both partners.<sup>13</sup>

Prepare for marriage by seeking purity, by frequently praying and thinking about marriage, by asking that the Lord would give you a clear sense of your calling, and by seeking to make the most of your time now. Give up the vain pursuits of so many foolish young men in exchange for making the most of the time that God gives you now.

Do you know the story of Paul's nephew in Acts 23? He saved the life of Paul after he heard of a plot against Paul's life. He then risked his own life to share this information with Paul and with the Roman authorities. Compare his bold actions with whose lives are focused on waiting in line all night for the next video game to come out.

3. Young ladies who desire marriage face an incredible challenge. It may not be equal to the challenge that many Christian women faced after the Thirty Year's War when polygamy was briefly legalized because so many women were unprotected.<sup>14</sup> Let us commit to praying in a special way for the young women in our church that the Lord in His good timing might provide godly spouses for them. [We can pray that we can even establish relationships with other faithful churches not simply for this purpose but perhaps as one benefit of so doing.]

4. Let us not quit in any measure in the fierce cultural war that we are in. If we just quit in the midst of the battle, we will face an even greater judgment. But in this cultural war,

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<sup>12</sup> See also Orville J. Nave, *Nave's Topical Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Altamonte Springs: OakTree Software, 1996), s.v. Marriage.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135, no. 539 (Jul 78): 243.

<sup>14</sup> Rushdoony, 365.



we must seek not only to fight the sodomite agenda, but seek to also work in ways that will strengthen marriage and bring godly reformation to the laws which regulate divorce.

**Closing Hymn: 628**

**Benediction – Eph. 3:20-21**

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.