

“Marriage & The Good Life” Matthew 5:31-32, 19:1-12 Shane Hatfield 5/8/22

If you’ve got a Bible, turn to Matthew 5. We’re going to continue our study of the Sermon on the Mount. We’re going to look at Matthew 5:31-32 and then there’s another section where Jesus teaches on the same topic, it’s in Matthew 19, so we’re going to read 31-32 and then we’re going to skip over to 19 and read verses 1-12, so you may want to go ahead and find chapter 19 because we’ll jump over there. The title of the sermon this morning is “Marriage, Divorce, Singleness & The Good Life.” I know this topic is important but also sensitive so we’ll try to handle it with caution and with care as we dive into it, and I really do hope that you will see that Jesus’ words are true and good and helpful in all of these areas. So, hear the word of the Lord from Matthew 5 and Matthew 19.

“<sup>31</sup> “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Now, let’s skip to chapter 19.

“<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

<sup>3</sup> And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” <sup>4</sup> He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother

and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” <sup>7</sup> They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her

away?” <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” <sup>11</sup> But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. <sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

The word of God is sweeter than the honey of the honeycomb. Let’s give our attention to it this morning.

“Into the Wild” was a book written by John Krakow about a man named Chris McCandless. In the late 1990s, Chris McCandless graduated from college and he decided that he was going to cut ties with his friends, his family, his community, he was going to cut ties with all of his life as he knew it, and he was going to set out on a new adventure to live life totally free of relationships. He was going to trek across the United States. He was going to go to the wilderness, and he was going to live alone. So, that’s what he did. He burned his ID and all of his things and he literally set out walking across the United States. He even changed his name to Alexander Supertramp. That’s what he called himself. He made friends all along the way, but he lost those friendships quickly because he was moving. He worked hard. He got everything he needed to travel, and he made it all the way to Alaska where he achieved his dream of living alone. He found a bus out in the wilderness and he lived there all by himself, and that lasted four

months, and then four months later a hunter found him dead of starvation in the bus by himself. In his journal where he had taken notes and recorded things throughout his travels, one of his last recorded sayings was “Happiness is only real when shared.” You see, Chris McCandless tried to find the good life on his own. He tried to find the good life apart from relationships. What he found, unfortunately, is that the good life cannot be found apart from relationships.

In fact, relationships are an integral, inescapable part of the good life. We experience the good life through our relationships with friends, family members, and community. The most basic unit of the community is the family, and the most basic unit of the family is the marriage. Marriage is inescapable. There has never been a society in the history of the world that has not had a concept of marriage. Yet, research tells us that 50% of all marriages end in divorce, and that the majority of children will grow up without both parents in their homes. Despite technological advances that make it easier and easier to meet people and connect with people all over the world, singleness and loneliness are still rampant. How do we deal with this? Some people say we need to return to the traditional values of marriage. Some people say we need to make divorce easier, and some people say we need to just throw out marriage altogether, that’s it’s just too antiquated.

So, what I want you to see this morning as we look at this passage that is challenging and difficult, because marriage and family are challenging and difficult, what I want you to see is that regardless of your relationship status, whether or not you are married or divorced or single, Jesus offers you the good life of the good kingdom. The good life of the good kingdom is offered to you regardless of your relationship status, that it is a good gift that Jesus gives us by His grace. So, what we’re going to look at is three things in this passage: the restoration of marriage, the reality of divorce, and the gift of singleness.

So, what happens here is the Pharisees ask Jesus about divorce and He responds by restoring a Biblical view of marriage. That’s the first thing that we see. They ask Him this question about divorce, and He answers, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female”? Jesus is getting at the purpose of marriage. The purpose of marriage is friendship! Right? When God created the heavens and the earth, He said everything was good. And then He created mankind, male and female in His image, and it says, “In our image.” Our is plural! That’s because God existed eternally as one God but as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There’s unity and diversity in the Trinity! So, when He created the universe, He created it with unity and diversity. When He created mankind, He created it with unity and diversity. So, God made male and females different. There are different sexes with different anatomies, with different gifts and talents, with different roles and responsibilities, all the way down to the DNA. Literally every single cell in a man’s body is different than every single cell in a woman’s body. That unity and diversity is good and beautiful. The thing that was not good was that man was alone! If you look at Genesis 2 and it says that everything was good, but that it was not good for man to be alone, so God made a helper fit for him. God made Eve from Adam. That means that men and women were created to complement each other, and they were created for companionship, or friendship. The purpose of the first marriage was to give Adam a friend, a companion to do life with.

So, the first thing Jesus tells us is that the purpose of marriage is friendship. The second thing that He does is He restores the essence of marriage, which is a covenant. He does that in verses 5 and 6. He says, “<sup>5</sup> and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” A marriage takes place

when a man and a woman leave their families, they come together, and God unites them as husband and wife. The two become one flesh. That idea of one flesh is a symbolic, it's a sign of these two lives becoming one. This covenant is meant to be decisive and permanent and public. It is made through vows to God and to each other. So, a marriage is a covenant friendship that is characterized by love and by loyalty between one man, the husband, and one woman, the wife.

Now, that definition might not sound very romantic, right? It might sound a little legal, a little wooden, a little traditional, but I want you to think about this: think about the traditional marriage vows. These are the marriage vows that are in our church order, these are the vows that I use, but listen to this, ask yourself, 'Are these romantic?' "Will you have this person to be your wedded spouse? To live with them after God's commandments in the holy estate of marriage? Will you love, honor, and cherish them so long as you both shall live?" They say that to God, that's their promise that they make to God, and then to each other they promise in covenant before God and these witnesses to be their loving and faithful spouses, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as they both shall live. Notice that those promises are future oriented, and they're action oriented. The promises that we make in our vows are not about how we feel at that moment. It's sort of assumed that at that moment, at the altar, that you love this person and care for them, and you are attracted to them. If you're not, that's a bad sign. You should stop, right? It's sort of assumed at that moment that you have those feelings.

So, the vows are not about how you feel in that moment, they're about what you're promising to do in the future, and they're action oriented. When we make our vows, we're promising to love this person in actionable, tangible ways for the rest of our lives! It's those actions of love that lead to feelings of love. Parents, you know that actions of love lead to feelings of love. You do actions of love for your kids all the time, and so you love them intensely! Kids, you probably know that actions of love lead to feelings of love if you have a pet! Because you take care of that pet all the time, or you should, so your parents don't have to take care of it. As you take care of that pet, and you play with that pet, you develop this love and affection for this pet that barely understands your existence and recognizes you. Your actions of love lead to feelings of love. Well, that's what happens in a marriage. As we keep these vows, our actions of love lead to feelings of love. The Bible has a special term for spouse. The word is 'aleph,' and it means a lover and friend. As we keep these vows to each other, we develop this deep, passionate, intimate friendship. We become lovers and friends. We need Jesus to restore this view of marriage for us, just like He did for the Pharisees.

Let me ask you this if you're married, why did you get married? This is a question Shari and I often ask couples when we first start their premarital counseling, we're about to do it for Kelly and Hannah. I almost forgot your names for a second. Heads up for Kelly and Hannah, this is the first question that I'm going to ask you. Why do you want to get married? Right? The idealist says that we want to be happy together, and the Sunday school answer is 'Jesus!' And the real answer is that we want to be intimate together, but we can't say it. What Jesus is showing us is that God gave us marriage, the purpose of marriage, to glorify Him in this loving and loyal covenant friendship. That's the answer. We want to glorify God through this covenant friendship. It's this covenant friendship that makes marriage beautiful and powerful. So, think about this: even in a perfect world without sin and suffering, God knew that we needed a companion. If we needed a companion in that world, how much more do we need this companion in a world filled with sin and suffering?

Christopher Lasch in his book on marriage, described marriage as “two flawed people coming together to create a space of stability, love and consolation, a haven in a heartless world.” Isn’t that what we want? Marriage as a haven in a heartless world. I saw a great illustration of this at Shari’s grandpa’s funeral. A few years ago, Shari’s grandpa died and at the funeral his son, Peter, shared a story about Shari’s grandpa, his name was Tom. He was married to Margaret, they were married for decades and decades. I can’t remember how long but a long, long time. They had lots of kids and did lots of life together, lots of ups and downs together. Well, toward the end of their marriage, Margaret developed Alzheimer’s and it got to where at the end of their marriage, she didn’t even recognize him as her husband. But every night, when Tom would lay down, before he’d go to sleep, he’d take off his watch and he’d take off his wedding ring and he would put them on the nightstand right beside him. And every morning when he woke up, the first thing Tom would do is put on his watch and put on his wedding band. It was a symbol of love and faithfulness, love and loyalty throughout decades. That’s beautiful, and it’s powerful.

Marriage as a covenant friendship is beautiful and powerful, but marriage as a covenant friendship is also challenging and difficult. When two sinners say, ‘I do,’ they’re committing to come together, to work through a life of sin and suffering together, to work through good days and bad days, and that is the opposite of what our sinful nature wants to do. Our sinful nature wants us to continually pursue our own desires and our own needs above our spouse’s. Like Chris McCandless, what we really want is to walk away and do our own thing, but we’ve got this person that we’re united to. Our flesh wants to pull away and do our own thing, but we’re also united to this person and so that causes us to sin against this person. That’s why forgiveness and reconciliation, or repentance, are necessary for marriage. This passage where Jesus talks about marriage in Matthew 19, I don’t think it’s any coincidence that it comes after Matthew 18. Matthew 18 has passages about forgiveness and reconciliation and then chapter 19 has the passage on marriage. It takes forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, and renewal of this covenant, to have a marriage that lasts. As we do those things, we develop a deeper friendship with our spouse.

A few years ago, I heard a story about a man whose pastor asked him, ‘Is your wife your best friend?’ And when he heard that question it hit him like a ton of bricks, he looked at his pastor and he said, ‘No.’ And his pastor said, ‘I want you to go home and talk to your wife about that.’ So, he went home, and he confessed to his wife that she was not his best friend, that he wanted to become her best friend, he wanted her to become his best friend, and he wanted to be hers, and they were open and honest with each other in that conversation. It started a journey for them of drawing near to each other in friendship. Not just being married but being friends in their marriage. It took time, but they worked on it and their marriage grew and it deepened, and it was richer.

What would it look like for you to go home to your spouse and say, ‘How can we be best friends? What would it look like for our relationship to deepen? For us to be best friends? What do I need to do to be your best friend?’ Talk about it. God’s original intent was for us to be in a covenant friendship of love and loyalty, and that’s what He does in this passage. He restores this view of marriage.

The next thing He does, is He acknowledges the reality of divorce. Look at verses 7-9. “<sup>7</sup> They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> And I say to you: whoever divorces

his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” So, much like today, there was a debate in Jesus’ day about what a lawful divorce was. You had two schools of thought. You had the conservative camp that said you can only divorce for an indecency, an extreme indecency, and that comes from a passage in the Old Testament where God says that if a man marries a woman and he finds some indecency in her, he can write her a certificate of divorce. So, you had a very conservative view of that, and you had a very lax view of it. You had people who wanted to divorce for any cause at all! We talked about that last week. If a woman’s cooking was bad, a Pharisee could write her a certificate of divorce. If his heart cooled toward her, he could write her a certificate of divorce. So, it looks like the Pharisees here had kind of taken that more liberal, or lax view of divorce as they say, ‘Can he write a certificate of divorce for anything and send her away?’

So, Jesus, He’s definitely taking the conservative approach, but what He’s also saying is that they’re missing the whole point. The point is not the certificate of divorce, but it’s about the marriage! It says, “Why then did Moses command,” there was no commandment for divorce! There was a concession. God made a concession because of sin. Divorce was not God’s original intent for marriage, but He allowed it to protect marriage, not promote divorce. So, what Jesus’ answer does is it restricts divorce to one exception, sexual immorality. Now, the word He uses here for sexual immorality is ‘pornea.’ There is a lot of debate about what pornea means here in this passage, but it’s basically a comprehensive term that includes all sexual immorality. All types of fornication, natural and unnatural forms.

So, the question is, why sexual immorality? Why is sexual immorality so serious that Jesus grants an exception to divorce in that situation? Well, think about what we said originally. What is a marriage covenant? It’s when two people become one flesh. So, what sexual immorality does, it severs that one flesh commitment you have made with your spouse. It is a violent cutting of that covenant. It severs it. In the Old Testament, if someone committed sexual immorality, then the consequence of that was death, so what the New Testament seems to be implying is that when that offense is committed, there is a metaphorical death. In that situation, the innocent party is released from that marriage and they are free to remarry. So, there’s definitely adultery. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul includes abandonment by an unbelieving spouse. He says if you are married to an unbelieving spouse and they abandon you, then you are free to remarry. It seems like he’s extending Jesus’ teaching here to include this abandonment. Abandonment is such a violent severing of the marriage covenant, that the innocent party is free to remarry. In our denomination, and our church, has applied that also to abuse, that if abuse takes place in a marriage then that is such a violent violation of the marriage covenant that the innocent spouse is free to divorce and remarry without sin. So, those are the three grounds we believe for Biblical divorce: adultery, abandonment, and abuse.

But what I really want to get at here as we talk about this is just the heart of why God did this. First of all, why would God restrict divorce? He restricts divorce because He loves us. He cares for us. He knows that marriage unites two people in one flesh, and divorce is an amputation. It’s a violent cutting away of that covenant. Divorce is not like taking off your shoe, it’s like having your foot cut off. Divorce should never be your first, second, or third choice in your marriage when it gets hard. Divorce does irreparable harm to everyone in it. First, you need to pursue forgiveness and reconciliation. We need to exhaust every available opportunity for forgiveness and reconciliation before we go to divorce.

I’ve not been divorced, so I don’t know what it feels like, so I didn’t feel like I could stand up here and talk to you about what it felt like to be divorced, because I’ve never been

divorced. That's like somebody who's not a parent telling people what it's like being a parent. It's a bad idea. Just letting you know that. If you don't have kids, don't start telling people what it's like to parent. So, what I did this week is I talked to a few people in our congregation who have been through divorces, of which we have several, and they all talked about the pain of their divorce. Some were divorced for Biblical reasons, some were divorced from unbiblical reasons, but they all just talked about how it was painful, it was hard, and how they're still struggling with the consequences of their divorces today. Research shows that the children of divorced families will struggle with the consequences of divorce for years to come. God knows that and He loves us, so He restricts divorce to the very direst of situations.

An unbiblical divorce is not the path to the good life. In his book on marriage, Tim Keller tells a story about a woman who had an affair that led to a divorce. And of course, she thought this affair was going to last and it was going to be wonderful, and it didn't. Shortly after her divorce, the affair ended, and she was left alone. As she struggled through the pain and chaos of her own marriage, she saw her parents who were married and had been married for decades, and she said that the fleeting passion of her divorce was nothing compared to the love and devotion her parents had through years of marriage. If you're in a hard marriage, divorce is not the pathway to the good life. That better person that you want to be married to, that better marriage that you want to have, that is with your spouse. We love you, we care for you, and we want to help you walk through a hard marriage if you have one. We'll get you counseling. We'll get you the help that you need. But it is not the path to the good life. But, if you go through a divorce, Biblical or unbiblical, even if you go through an unbiblical divorce, that is not the unpardonable sin. That is not going to keep you out of the good life. You do not have a scarlet D stamped on your head that you're going to wear for the rest of your life. Repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation, church discipline, all those things will need to take place, but there can be restoration of your soul to the body of Christ, and Jesus.

God restricts divorce because He loves us, but He also allows divorce because He loves us. Divorce is a protection. Divorce protects a vulnerable spouse from abuse. It protects an abandoned spouse from neglect. It protects a faithful spouse from an unfaithful spouse. Every divorce is an amputation, but sometimes an amputation is necessary to save a life. In 2003, there was a man named Aron Ralston. He was mountaineering through Utah and as he was mountaineering a boulder fell on top of him and pinned him to the ground. He laid there for two days suffering, and after two days he realized that if he didn't free himself, he was going to die. So, with his free hand he pulled out his pocketknife, and he cut his own arm off with his pocketknife, tied it with a tourniquet, walked out of the mountains and lived. That's a bad man right there! I don't think I could do that. The point is that amputation was necessary to save his life. Sometimes, a divorce is necessary to save life. That amputation is necessary.

Even Jesus acknowledges that there are times when divorce is acceptable because of the extreme sinfulness and hardness of our hearts. Even God, in the Old Testament, calls Himself a divorcee because of the way that Israel has betrayed Him. Divorcees can experience the good life. We need to surround them before, during, and after, and God can even use that time, God can use their challenges, not just to make them bitter, but to make them beautiful. As I was talking with one person who is divorced, and had gone through multiple divorces, they had just read a book on suffering whenever they found out that their spouse had cheated on them, and in that moment, they remembered a line from the book that suffering can either make you bitter or beautiful. So, they fell on their knees and they prayed that God would use their suffering to make them beautiful, and that's what it has done. They've been able to heal and grow and forgive and

change and become a beautiful part of the body of Christ. Jesus restores our view of marriage, Jesus acknowledges the reality of divorce, and Jesus gives the gift of singleness.

So, the disciples were so surprised by what Jesus said, they were like, 'Wait a minute. if what you're saying is true, maybe it's better if we don't marry! Maybe it's better if we stay single!' And Jesus didn't disagree with them! That tells you how hard and challenging marriage is! Jesus knew it! But He says that this singleness is a gift. He says that some have been eunuchs from birth, some would be made eunuchs, and some would choose to be eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom. A eunuch was somebody who was incapable of having children either by force or by birth. They would be chaste, and they would be unmarried. So, in this teaching, Jesus is saying that singleness is a legitimate calling in His kingdom. Singleness is a legitimate calling in the Christian life. If you're single, you're unmarried, you are not a second-class citizen in Jesus' kingdom. The good life is available to you regardless of your relationship status on Facebook or Instagram. It's a calling. It's not only a calling, but it's a gift that can be received. All of us experience singleness for some season in our life. For some, it's a short season, and for some it's a long time. No matter how long it is, we need to use our singleness to love God and to serve Him.

Whenever I was in college, I had a pastor who was single. He had been single his entire life, and he would be single until the day he died. He passed away a few years ago. But all he did with his singleness was pastor a church, lead a youth group, lead about a dozen FCA groups around the city of Tulsa, serve as a sideline reporter for a football team, mentor athletes, and mentor coaches. With all of his free time, he pastored thousands and thousands of people and led countless people to Christ. That's how we use our singleness to love and serve God. So, if you're single, if you're unmarried, find ways to serve your church and serve your community, develop multi-generational relationships, develop healthy relationships with male and female, date wisely, practice chastity, and whether or not you're single for a season, or you're single for a life, we want the church to be your family. We want the church to be a place where you feel loved and accepted.

A few years ago, Shari and I had a friend who went through a divorce, and it was a very terrible time for her. She was cheated on by her spouse several times, and so she had no choice but to divorce him. As she was going through the divorce, the church loved her, cared for her, surrounded her, and she let them surround her! At the end of her divorce, once it was finalized, people kept asking her, 'Are you going to move back home to live with your family?' Because her family lived someplace else, and she said, 'Why would I move? My family is the church.' We want our church to be that kind of place for people who are single, whether they're divorced or not. We want the church to be a family. Because regardless of our relationship status, the good life is available for all of us, whether you're married, divorced, or single.

Through the person and work of Jesus, you can have the good life. Jesus is a faithful spouse to sinners and tax collectors, to scribes and Pharisees, to divorcees and married people, to singles. God is gracious and kind to us, despite all of our sins. The good life, thankfully, does not go to the self-righteous and the proud and the boastful and the pure, but rather the good life goes to the poor, the repentant, and the humble who cry out to God for grace and mercy. God graciously forgives them of their sins and cleanses them. As we grow in the grace and forgiveness of the gospel, we experience His faithfulness, and we extend faithful love and loyalty to those around us.

There's a beautiful picture of this in the Scriptures. It's in the book of Hosea. God tells the prophet Hosea, 'I want you to marry this adulterous woman and take her as your wife,' and

over and over again in their marriage she leaves him, she cheats on him with another, and repeatedly, God says, 'I want you to take her back. I want you to take her back. I want you to take her back.' Because Hosea's marriage to Gomer was a picture of God's marriage to His people, and of Christ's marriage to the church. Though we are unfaithful, Christ is faithful. He loves us. He accepts us, and He takes us back. It says in Hosea 2:19-20, "I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord." The Lord is our faithful spouse. He takes us even when we're unfaithful. So, let's go to Him and pray and ask that He would do that now.