

MATTHEW 19: 1-15

PEANUT BUTTER AND DIVORCE

My mother ran track in high school. In order to increase her ability to run long distances without breathing through her mouth, her coach made her run with a mouthful of peanut butter... more on that later.

For the past two weeks, we have studied about what it means to become as a little child. That is, taking on the lowest station in the social ladder and seeking to be a servant who does what they are required to do. Last week we learned about forgiveness – the unlimited forgiveness we have through the blood of Jesus as well as how we are to give that forgiveness to others. These are important lessons to learn in their own right, but their importance is even magnified when we get to the passage we have this Sunday. This passage deals with every pastor's nightmare – divorce.

Statistics show that divorce has been on the increase in a dramatic way for the past few decades. The numbers are almost the same inside the church as they are outside the church. That was true even before the “no-fault” divorce came to be. And since then, getting a divorce has become easier which makes it that much more attractive to some.

If you have been through a divorce or are contemplating one, please don't get antsy. There is no condemnation here. We are simply dealing with what we have in front of us as we go through the book of Matthew. That is what we do here. We can't pick and choose. There is no place for “cafeteria Christianity” in the life of a believer. We must take in all of God's Word. And we must then apply it to our lives. That being said, I believe we can relieve some people's anxiety by the end of this study.

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.

- What sayings?
- Why is He departing and what route is He taking? (To Jerusalem for the Passover. Through Perea and then crossed over to Jericho. Why that way?)
- What is the significance of this area? Why, most likely are the Pharisees attacking Him here? Why is this hot button issue being addressed in this area? Because it was in area that John the Baptist ministered and then verbally attacked Antipas concerning his divorce. John was also imprisoned and executed in this region.

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?"

- This is the first question Jesus was asked. His answer leads to a second question. The Pharisees are testing Jesus, attempting to entrap Him due to the location with John and this very divisive issue.
- The back-story of the debate. Shammai and Hillel. Polarized opinions between conservative and liberal theologians of the day. Most men tended to lean towards Hillel, not surprisingly.

Among the Jews of that day, marriage was a sacred duty. If a man was unmarried after the age of 20 – except to concentrate on the study of the law – he was guilty of breaking God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply.” According to Barclay, they said that by not having children he killed his own descendants, and had lessened the glory of God on earth.

ii. In theory, the Jews of that day had a high ideal of marriage. Yet they had a low view of women. “The Jews had very low views of women...A wife was bought, regarded as property, used as a household drudge, and dismissed at pleasure.” (Bruce) Today, men also have a low view of women; tragically, *women also have a low view of women*, and often reject the idea that women should be different than men in any way.

iii. Their low view of women meant that their high ideal of marriage was constantly compromised, and those compromises were made into law, as with the thinking of Rabbi Hillel. Under the thinking of Hillel, “a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner, if she spun, or went with unbound hair, or spoke to men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence, or if she was a brawling woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba even went the length of saying...that a man could divorce his

wife if he found a woman whom he liked better and considered more beautiful.”
(Barclay)

- So in their question, the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to side with one teaching or the other. If He agreed with the lax school of Rabbi Hillel, it was clear that Jesus did not take the Law of Moses seriously. If He agreed with the strict school of Rabbi Shammai, then Jesus might become unpopular with the multitude, who generally liked access to an easy divorce. The religious leaders had reason to believe they had caught Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.
- Divorce is still a hot button issue today. There is a great deal of shame attached to it. It is in most cases a fairly public thing. And there are always many people affected by it even if there are just a handful of people directly involved in it.
- Their question is straightforward and simple. Jesus could have answered with a simple yes or no. But instead He did something else. He went further back in time, to paradise, before the fall.

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.”

- The fundamental issue, which the Pharisees and the other various rabbis have not addressed, is that they have not started at the beginning of the issue. They ‘ve started from the standpoint of human failure. They have come in at the end of the story. Jesus goes back beyond what the Law permitted, to what was intended at the beginning from God. Marriage is basically the only thing we have remaining from before the fall. It can be the nearest thing to Heaven or it can be the nearest thing to Hell.
- Leaving father and mother – not necessarily geographic, Jewish males commonly built an addition onto their father’s house. His priorities shifted.
- One flesh? **He who made them at the beginning “made them male and female”**: In quoting [Genesis 1:27](#), Jesus indicated first that *God* made men and women different, and that *God* joins men and women together in marriage. In this, Jesus asserts *God’s* authority over marriage; it is *God’s*

institution, not man's – so it is fair to say that His rules apply.

i. By bringing the issue back to the Scriptural foundation of marriage, Jesus makes it plain that couples must forsake their singleness (**a man shall leave his father and mother**), and come together in a **one-flesh** relationship that is both a fact (**they are...one flesh**) and a goal (**shall become one flesh**).

ii. "The law of God was not, that a man should forsake his wife whenever he had a mind to it, but that he should rather forsake his father and mother than his wife; that he should cleave unto his wife, living and dwelling with her." (Poole)

- It's not good that man should be alone. God sat Adam down and had name all the animals – a blue one and a pink one.
- **"If marriage is grounded in creation, in the way God has made us, then it cannot be reduced to a merely covenantal relationship that breaks down when the covenantal promises are broken." D.A. Carson**
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- Leave and cleave – this brings us back to peanut butter. Marriage is the most important relationship on this side Heaven! Even before children!
- Two pieces of wood glued together. You can't pull the two apart without splintering them. Intimacy was given to marriage in order help differentiate it from other relationships. And this is why Jesus gives adultery as His only reason for divorce.
- This then led the Pharisees to ask another question.

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."

- Why did Moses command? He didn't. It was permitted, not commanded.
- Because of hardness of heart. (Sin)
- **Dt. 24: 1-4**
- **"When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, 2 when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife, 3 if the latter husband detests her**

and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, 4 then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

- Only because of adultery. This breaks the intimacy of the marriage and the bond in the eyes of God.
- What uncleanness can legally cause a man to put away (divorce) his wife?
- Heb. – ervah; nakedness, specifically the pudenda. So it has a clear sexual connotation, leading to sexually immorality.
- Notice what is said in Deuteronomy about remarriage. (Marries another v.4) How they were loop-holing things.

This leads the disciples to make a statement that was characteristic of the way most men who leaned towards the more liberal idea of divorce.

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."

- Eunuchs of different types.
- Some are gifted with the gift of remaining single.
- 1 Cor. 7:32-35
- **32 But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord—how he may please the Lord. 33 But he who is married cares about the things of the world—how he may please his wife. 34 There is a difference between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world—how she may please her husband. 35 And this I say for your own profit, not that I may put a leash on you, but for what is proper, and that you may serve the Lord without distraction.**

- Origin and bad exegesis.
- “I’m only a distraction?” The distraction should be there.

13 Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” 15 And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.

I don’t believe children are mentioned here by coincidence. Children are affected by divorce, no matter what people may think. Statistics show that children who grow up in a divorced home are more likely to be divorced, themselves.

So Jesus rebuked the disciples for hindering the children and then accepted them and blessed them.

So what are we to make of this passage? Where does a divorce place us as far as our standing with God? We need to take the position of a child. We need to confess that we did not live up to God’s ideal of marriage. But at the same time, none of us have lived up to God’s ideal in anything. That is why we throw ourselves on the mercy and grace of Jesus. **Divorce is not the unpardonable sin!** The purpose of a “writing of divorce” was actually to protect the woman. That way she could remarry. And in a world where a woman had virtually no chance of holding an occupation that could support her, that was a safeguard. Otherwise she would be left to the mercy of her children or extended family.

What are those whom have been through a divorce and even remarried to do? Go back to the first marriage? Divorce their current spouse and then live as a single person? No. Paul laid a down a principle that helps with this.

1 Corinthians 7:17

17 But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the churches.

In the context, one of Paul’s ideas with this statement was a warning about trying to undo the past in regard to relationships; God tells us to repent of whatever sin is there and then move on. If you are married to your second wife after wrongfully divorcing your first wife, and become a Christian, don’t think you must now leave your second wife and go back to your first wife, trying to

undo the past. As the Lord has called you, walk in that place right now. (Guzik)

God foresaw the fact that man would fall short of His ideal and made a provision for the most vulnerable in that society. That's what His grace is! That's what His grace does!

That is why the lamb was slain before the foundation of the world!