

# The Heart of Marriage

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] All right. We're working through Mark's Gospel and today as you saw in Mark 10, it's a passage about divorce and marriage.

Marriage and divorce are controversial subjects, yeah, in our day and they were controversial we see in Jesus's day. There's a controversy here. There's a big claim that Jesus is making, which is really the center of this passage.

And he's really just simply saying the Bible, God gets to say what marriage is and what marriage is for. And so some of you today are married.

Some of you today are not married. No matter where you are in life, whether you're married or not married, whether you want to be married or you don't, it's very helpful to think about the meaning of marriage because the Bible actually makes this enormous claim that the meaning of marriage is also the meaning of world history.

And so it's really important to think about it no matter what your relationship status is at the moment in life. So let's think about it together. We're going to look at the problem with marriage and then the heart of marriage and then lastly the power we need for it.

[ 1 : 1 1 ] So the problem with it, the heart of it and the power we need to sustain good marriage. So first, the problem with marriage. Now let me just say what the problem is up front.

It's right here in the Pharisees question, but the problem is this for them and for us. The problem is that we approach marriage as human beings with a posture of self-interest and self-centeredness. That's the problem, self-centeredness. And that's both instinctive to humanity and it's also something that we're taught by the culture all around us. Now that's what happens right here in this passage.

You can see in verse one and two, Jesus is in the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan, and he's teaching and it says it was as custom to preach.

But Mark doesn't give us a single word at all about what Jesus was preaching about. Mark takes us straight to the Q and A time. So Mark likes the Q and A and he takes us straight to the Q and A and at the beginning of the Q and A, the Pharisees come up with the first question and the first question they ask is, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

[ 2 : 2 0 ] They say that they're in verse two. Now there is an implication in this question. There's a lot of background to this question. There's a reason why they're the first one to lift their hands in the Q and A and ask this question.

And it's because in the first century, there was an oral tradition that had developed and that oral tradition would later be written down in a book called the Mishnah.

The Mishnah is a book that catalogs Jewish oral teaching from the time and the Mishnah has a lot of text about divorce. And in it, there was a rabbi named Hillel who said the only time you can get a divorce is if he said a woman commits adultery.

And then there was another rabbi, Rabbi Hillel who said, sorry, the first one was Shamiah. The second one, Rabbi Hillel says that you can get a divorce if your wife spoils a dish.

So he says if your wife cooks a bad meal, they read this very seriously, that is grounds for divorce. All right. Thirdly, Rabbi Akiba says you can get a divorce if you find another fairer than she.

[ 3 : 3 1 ] That's what the Mishnah says. Okay, so there was a right, a left and even further left on this. There was one who said only adultery, one who said, well, a burnt dinner.

And then there was one who said, just if you just want to get out and pursue somebody else, then that's fairer game. Now you see the implication and the question. We have a parallel passage in Matthew 19 verse three, and they say it like this, is it lawful to get a divorce for any reason at all?

That's what they're asking. It's not just, does Moses, does the law allow for divorce? They're saying, can we get a divorce for any reason whatsoever, including a burnt dinner?

That's the actual implication of the question. Now you may notice that this is entirely from the perspective of men. That's the way they frame it. That's the way the rabbis had talked about it. It's a culture where women depended on men almost exclusively for their livelihood. And the Pharisees, some of the Pharisees at least are asking this because they want to guarantee that men can do what they want.

[ 4 : 37 ] Men can get out if they want to get out, and they can live the way they want and do what they want. And they're looking for the Bible and for this rabbi Jesus to justify that picture.

You see? So it's a test. It's not only a test, it's also a trap. Here's the trap. This is the region of King Herod. And if you were with us last semester, you'll remember that Herod had gotten a divorce and he had married his brother's wife Herodius, and it was a big mess.

And part of that mess was that Herod had had his brother killed to ensure that this divorce worked out and had married, and he had divorced his own wife and then married Herodius.

And now you'll remember that what happened was John the Baptist protested, and he got his head cut off for that. And so here's the trap. They're in the region of Herod.

And the Pharisees are doing... This is a two birds, one stone situation. Can we get Jesus to justify divorce no matter what so the men of our city can be free to do whatever they want?

[ 5 : 43 ] On the one hand. On the other hand, maybe if he goes the other way, Herod is going to chop his head off too. So it's a trap. It's a test and a trap.

The problem underneath the question is that what Jesus does with us is he shows that this is not about divorce at all. The real issue is that the Pharisees do not understand the nature of marriage. That's what they've missed. They've come and they've asked the wrong question. They started the wrong way. They don't understand the nature of marriage. What marriage is for? And you can see that because in the first century, the way they think about marriage is that marriage exists for benefits, particularly in their mind, benefits for the men.

So they're thinking of marriage as a relationship in which you can extend your family lineage, have sons and daughters, but particularly they desire sons to carry on the name.

And they want marriage to improve their station in life. And once you get those things, or if you don't get those things, you need to ensure that you're able to walk.

[ 6 : 52 ] And so they have an economic market mindset for how marriage works. I come to get, not to give. I come to get the benefits from this person. And if they don't provide them for me, I'll go.

Now we look at that especially because it's so male-centric, their perspective, and we say, wow, how terrible.

And let me ask you, modern person, what has changed? What has changed? The modern world, the city of Edinburgh and the culture all around us says almost, almost the exact same thing about marriage.

There are really two views of marriage in the modern West. One is the idealist pessimist view. And in the idealist pessimist view, it says, you know, if I'm going to get married, it's only because I fell in love.

I found my soulmate. I found the one, the one person. And, you know, that's the idealism of it. I fell in love. You know, I fell in love like I fell in a hole.

[ 7 : 59 ] And the pessimist side of it is, but I also know that probably in three to four years, I'm going to fall out of love. And when that happens, I need to be able to know that both parties, we get until we don't.

And when we don't get any more, we can move on. That's the idealist pessimist view. It's the soulmate view. The idealist is Disney-fied, and yet at the same time, it's incredibly pessimistic because it knows that eventually you're going to fall out of love as well.

And they're right about that. The second view is the less idealist, but more practical benefit approach. This is the one that's a tale, the tale is all this time, same as the Pharisees.

I come to marriage to get benefits, improvements to my life. And so it says, you know, here's the extreme view. Marry, you know, marry somebody that's 99 years old with millions of pounds.

That's the extreme version of it. But it's just an extreme version of the same view that says, I'm looking for somebody in life that benefits me.

[ 9 : 03 ] You know, I'm looking for somebody in life that improves my station. So this person raises my economic profile. They're probably going to make a lot of money. This person brings me into a new circle of friendship.

I can expand my relational capital with this person that I'm pursuing. This person provides sexual fulfillment. And that's why I want to get married. You know, it's a marketplace mentality that says, I'm looking for a spouse because I'm looking for these certain benefits.

And so I go to the marketplace and I treat it like a market. And I say, I'm looking for a good person with good prospects, with good looks that can make me happy, self-actualization.

Now that means that the essence of marriage in the Pharisees' mind and the essence of marriage in the modern mind is very, very similar. And that's that basically marriage is just a contract.

It's a contract. It's the same kind of contract that you have in any marketplace exchange. And in a contract, it's two parties and they come and it's a negotiation. And they say, you know, if you can give me what I want at the right price, then I'm in.

[ 10 : 11 ] And if there comes a time where I can't get what I need from you and want from you, the price isn't right anymore than the contract's ripped apart. It's broken. Right? That's the modern view of marriage and it's actually the ancient view of marriage.

And that tells us that it's not only our culture that teaches us that, though it's worse than ever, but it's just human instinct. You see, the great problem of marriage is self-centeredness.

And it's approaching marriage with a self-centered view that I'm here to get, not to give. It's a contract mentality and it's been around forever. It's been around as long as sin since Genesis 3. Right? And it's right here. You can take it even a step further. People will say, you know, it's not just a pre-nump mentality and economic mentality. It's the mentality, why get married at all in the modern world?

Why do I need a piece of paper to say to somebody, I love you? Right? That's the mentality. In other words, you know, exactly. We can have mutual benefits. We can share.

[ 11 : 13 ] We can be in love. And then when we fall out of love, why complicate it and make it even harder with the legal piece of paper? Right? It's a market mentality and economic mentality.

Now what Jesus is going to do here is say that you Pharisees, you human, you miss the beauty of marriage in the question because you miss the difficulty and the pain of marriage.

In other words, when you look across the Bible at what marriage is, you learn that ever since sin entered the world that marriage exists in some sense to break you, to break you.

Not to fulfill all your greatest dreams, but actually to break you down in a way. And what I mean by that is that marriage is so much more glorious than the Pharisees and the modern mind wants to admit because of how difficult it really is.

And the idea in the Bible is that marriage is not meant to primarily lift up your circumstances to make you temporarily happy, but to show you self-centeredness in order to make you godly, that you could have the possibility in such a deep relationship that you would be cut to the heart of your self-centeredness so that you could become holy, so that you could become godly.

[ 12 : 33 ] See, it's completely flipped on its head. That's the actual beauty of marriage. Now if you've been married for any amount of time, you know that this has got to be the heart of it because three months in after the honeymoon, you're standing in the kitchen and you realize that you've argued about the same thing every single week over the first three months of your marriage.

And then in 10 years, you're standing in the kitchen and you realize you've argued about the same thing every single month for the last 10 years of your marriage. And in the first three months, you've looked at your spouse and you said, you know, you're selfish.

And your spouse looked at you and said, you're selfish. And he said, no, you're more selfish than me. And they say, no, you're more selfish than me. And you realize that you're both selfish, you're both self-centered, and it keeps happening over and over and over again.

And in the midst of those arguments, in the midst of those depths, the beauty of marriage is meant to say, don't you see that this exists to expose? It exists to change you. It exists to make you great in a way you might could have never been.

You could have never seen who you really were deep down in your heart, your self-centeredness.

You see, the great enemy of marriage is self-centeredness, but the path to becoming a true, the path to putting on the character of true godliness is cutting right through that self-centeredness.

[13:56] And marriage can really do that. It can really help with that. Now Jesus here, and we'll move on, shows this. He cuts through the trap by pointing out to them the law.

He knows that they're thinking about the law. And so he takes them straight to Deuteronomy 24. In Deuteronomy 24, Moses permits divorce. In Deuteronomy 24, he says divorce is permitted on the grounds of adultery.

Christians have looked across the Bible for centuries and said that the Bible permits divorce and sometimes divorce is necessary on the grounds of adultery, abandonment, and abuse.

And each situation has to be really carefully thought about and discerned. But he goes to the law and he says, what did Moses say? He says, okay, you've read the law. Why are you asking me this question?

In other words, he's trying to get them to see that they've come to him and asked him the wrong question exactly. The first question they came to ask is, how can I get out of marriage?

[14:55] How can I end this thing as fast as possible if I want to? And he goes to the law to say first, you already know the conditions of divorce, but that's not why you're asking it.

You see? One commentator says, it's a bit like saying, I want to learn to fly a plane. And starting out with the instructor and say, okay, first teach me the best way to crash.

What's the safest possible way to crash this thing? That's question number one. That's the wrong approach. That's the wrong approach. That's exactly the opposite. And he said, that's what you've done. You've come to me and asked, how can I get out of this as fast as possible?

And instead, you should have come to me and said, what is marriage? What is it for? And so he takes them point to away from the law.

He takes them away from the law and he takes them straight back to Genesis chapter one and two. So you see that verse five, he says, Moses allowed divorce because of your hardness of heart.

[15:56] Sometimes divorce is necessary, but then he says, but from the beginning of creation. So he says, actually, if you want to know what marriage is, you've got to get out of the Torah, the law, and step back before the law and look at Genesis chapter one and two.

And so that's what he does. And he gives us three very brief things that marriage is, what it's for. And you can see it first in verse six. He says here in verse six, first, marriage is from the beginning. Just from the beginning, meaning marriage is a pre-sin, pre-fall, pre-evil institution that God created, not man, not humanity.

So in other words, he's trying to say, look, modern person, marriage is not something that a bunch of Neanderthals in a cave came up with and said, you know, how can we advance society?

Well, why don't we create this monogamous union? No, no. Marriage exists because God made it. So that's the first thing he says. It's from the beginning. And that means that God gets to define it.

[17:05] It's no mere custom. It's no mere culture. It's something that's given prior to all sin, meaning God gets the prerogative and getting to say what it is. That's the first thing he does. The second thing he does is he moves from there in Sezem verse six.

It's from the beginning and, quote, God made them male and female. That's the second thing he takes from Genesis two. In other words, he's saying marriage is for men and women.

Now marriage is for a man and a woman. Now obviously, that's very important to say in our time that God made marriage for a man and a woman.

But why does Jesus say it in Mark 10? Because he was actually responding to a different problem. He was responding to the problem of the Pharisees perspective, which was a completely male-dominated perspective.

That's the way they treated it. And one scholar says it like this, that when Jesus says, don't you remember marriage is for men and women, women and men? He's saying as a sovereign creation, woman is not man's subject, but his equal.

[18:14] He's saying you're treating marriage as if women are men's subjects. But he said that's not what Genesis two said. Don't you remember, you need to get out of the law and go back before it and remember how it was from the beginning.

Marriage is meant to be for both equally. It's good for man and woman. Now here's where he brings the revolution in. And it's in verse seven. Here's the revolution to first century marriage.

He says that means that a man and a woman are to leave their parents and hold fast to one another, unite into one another. Now remember what God said? Why did God start marriage in Genesis two?

It said Adam, Adam, Adam was lonely. So one thing at the beginning of history was not good. All of creation was good. One thing was not good.

And it was that a man, a dom, Adam should be by himself, should be alone. And so immediately we learned that the meaning of marriage at the very beginning was that Adam was lonely and so God gave him a wife.

[ 19 : 16 ] And that means that the great revolution of marriage, the biblical idea, is that marriage is meant for companionship. Jesus is in a society where the male dominated perspective says marriage exists to advance my station, to give me kids, to carry on my family name.

And Jesus comes and says, you've forgotten Genesis two, actually marriage exists for friendship. And that's a revolutionary idea. He said, actually the greatest thing you can do is actually be best of friends with your wife, Pharisee.

Desire deep, deep lasting companionship with your spouse. And so immediately, no matter what the culture says, no matter what the culture says, men were made for women and women were made for men for deep lasting companionship.

So as soon as it says that Adam was lonely, we don't get a group of dudes, buddies. That's not what we get. He doesn't need his buddies, although buddies are very good.

I love buddies. No, he gets her. He gets a wife. She is to be his closest friend, his closest companion.

[ 20 : 28 ] And so there's a revolutionary idea here that a spouse is to be your dearest friend, your closest companion. And so today we can see friendship.

Friendship. Are you a Christian today looking to be married? Friendship with a Christian of the opposite sex is the most important condition.

Your physical relationship, that person's looks will not sustain your marriage. Friendship will.

Companionship. That's what marriage was made to be.

But no matter what the culture says, men were made for women and women were made for men and we're not mere individuals. We were made for one another. And so if you're looking for marriage, look for a dear Christian friend of the opposite sex.

That's one of the most important conditions. It's not the only one, but it's one of the most important.

Are you married today? Oh boy, it's hitting us all. It's hitting me, it's hitting us all.

[ 21 : 32 ] Are you cultivating deep companionship with your spouse? Are you pursuing deep friendship? Is your spouse your best friend? And that's where Jesus takes them all the way back to the beginning.

The modern person says, should we get married? Should I get married? And they ask questions like, their friend asked them a question. Well, is there chemistry between you and this person you're pursuing?

Is there chemistry? Is there magnetism? Is this the person that you think you're falling in love with? Is this really the one?

And the big miss on that is that what's happening there is you're not actually falling in love, you're falling into like. And one day you're going to say, I fell out of love, but actually just fell out of like.

You like the person, you don't love the person. That's what's actually happening in the beginning of a relationship. And what you realize then later is that the biblical idea is that love is not first a feeling.

[ 22 : 30 ] Love is not a feeling. So feelings of love will not sustain a marriage. And you realize very quickly in the marriage that you had fallen into like with this person, but you're just now learning to love this person.

I had a dear friend when I was in seminary who was 10, 15 years older than me that had been married for a long time say that 10 years in, he had just started to learn to love his spouse truly, deeply.

And he said, and they both felt that way. And that's the truth. You see, real love, the feelings of love actually follow the choice of love. When you've chosen to love, feelings come after that.

And Jesus flips everything on its head. It's not about how you feel. It's about deep lasting friendship and companionship. That's more fundamental. Now the third thing, the last thing here that he teaches us, he says again, verse seven, the two shall become one flesh.

You shall leave your father and mother and you'll cling to your spouse, leave and cleave. That's the old way to say it. You've got to leave your parents, cleave, unite to your spouse.

[ 23 : 40 ] And so what he's saying there lastly is that marriage is a covenant. The essence of marriage is not a contract. It's not a negotiation for mutual benefit until it doesn't work anymore, but a covenant.

And in a covenant, a covenant is just this, a promise. A covenant is a promise to pursue your spouse in self-sacrifice. That's the nature of the marriage covenant, to pursue your spouse in the nature according to self-sacrifice, not self-centeredness.

It's to say, I'm here for mutual submission in order to give before I get, to give away before I get something back.

And that means simply Christian marriage. Anybody can have a great marriage, Christian or not, but a Christian marriage can be truly great. A Christian marriage can be truly great because in a Christian marriage, you can realize that the great purpose of marriage in covenant is to pursue your spouse through self-sacrifice until they reach the final perfection of godliness in the glorification of their death.

Real marriage is to pursue the holiness of your spouse until they leave this world. Christianity tells you actually the meaning of marriage all the way to the bottom.

[ 25 : 06 ] When you get that, when we get that, the moments in our marriages where we finally awaken to that or come back to that, there's something really beautiful that starts to take place, mutual self-sacrifice, mutual giving instead of getting.

And in that, what you get is your self-centeredness broken and real holiness starting to grow up in the midst of it. Now, let me move on to the final point, but let me say before that the idea then to say in the modern world, I don't need a piece of paper.

You're considering getting married, modern person, and maybe you've had the thought, I don't need a piece of paper, a legal binding piece of paper to say, I love you.

I can say I love you. I can be in love with you. We can do this without that. Let me say to truly say I love you, you really do need that piece of paper.

You really do. And the reason is because without that piece of paper, what you're really saying is today I like you.

[ 26 : 11 ] Today I like you. But tomorrow I might not. Tomorrow you won't. And you see what a wedding vow does? A wedding vow is not a promise.

Is not a promise of present love or present like. Not at all. You know, when a couple is standing up for their wedding and they make those vows to one another, everybody in the room knows they love each other right now.

They like each other right now. They're enmeshed with one another today. But what do the vows say? The vows say in plenty, today is plenty, but in want tomorrow.

In health, today we're healthy, but when sickness comes. Today I don't see your self-centeredness and you don't see mine. But it's coming.

It's coming. It's going to get exposed. You see, the vow, the marriage vow is not the promise of present love. It's the promise. It's the covenant of future love. And future love says, and I'm here today to say that I will be with you and for you and give myself away to you, even in the most trying of times, even in the days we don't like each other very much.

[ 27 : 22 ] I will love you anyway. I'll commit to you. That's why that piece of paper, marriage, is so different than mere relationship. Now thirdly and finally, how can you get the power for it?

Oh, oh boy. Where, where are we going to get the strength? Where do we get the power for this? At the very end of this passage, verses 13 to 16, there's this second little story about the children coming to Jesus.

You get married and often children can follow that. And here we have a passage about marriage and then a story about children. So first marriage, they come to Jesus, talk about marriage, then they come to Jesus with the kids, with the children.

It's very interesting how Mark set that up. And that, I think that that means that reading a little bit about children here can help you think about the power you need for marriage. And so this is very famous.

We can only spend a couple minutes on it. But the children come to Jesus and the disciples shoe them away. The Pharisees completely misunderstand the meaning of marriage.

[ 28 : 28 ] The disciples completely misunderstand the meaning of children. They say, get the children out of here. They're not important enough. And you see it's the same mindset. In the first

century, children exist to work the farm.

Children exist to be tolerated until adulthood. Children exist to carry on the family lineage. That's the mistake of the ancient mind. We have our own mistakes too.

But that's the mistake of the ancient mind. It's the same thing. Marriage exists for my benefits. Children exist for my benefits. That was the mind of the disciples. And so they say, they're not important enough yet to come to Jesus.

And Jesus says, no, no, no, no, let the children come to me. And actually you need to take on the posture of these children if you're going to really understand the kingdom.

Now people have come to that and said, well, what does he mean? What is this childlike faith? Is it just dependence? Is it running to dad, mom and dad to ask for anything?

[ 29 : 26 ] And actually he uses a word here for babies and toddlers, not for older children. The word he uses. And that means that he's probably saying something more like, you need the condition of helplessness.

If you're going to truly come and see the power you need to enter the kingdom, the power you need for a great marriage. And you see what he's saying, something like this. If we were to put the passages together, marriage drives you over and over and over again to say, I am helpless to do anything about my self-sitterness.

And if marriage does anything, it does that. You keep coming back to the same problems you struggle with and you say, I am helpless. I can't break through my self-sitterness.

And this relationship with this person is exposing that over and over and over again. Where are you going to get the power? Where are you going to get the power to cut through that? You need to see your helplessness and run to the lap, the arms of Jesus Christ.

The power to sustain a great marriage is to run back again and again and again to Jesus Christ into his arms like a helpless child.

[ 30 : 39 ] Now let me close with this final comment. Remember the very first marriage, Genesis chapter 2, Adam married Eve. Adam had been told, Adam had been told, don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

And remember in Genesis 3 that his wife Eve reached out and she ate. And Genesis 3 says, and he, Adam, was, quote, with her.

He watched. He was next to her. He was the one who had received the instruction, do not eat. She ate, but the text gives you a subtle notice.

Adam watched it happen and he let it happen. He was the one that heard the instruction, don't eat. He was the one that let her eat when she had not heard the instruction.

That's the subtle message of the text. You see this husband, this great groom, the first groom, he let his wife fall. And as soon as God entered the Garden of Eden in cosmic justice to say, now you deserve death, you deserve to be kicked out of the Garden of Eden and you're about to be, what did he do?

[ 31 : 46 ] The very next word he speaks, she did it. Don't blame me though the text is blaming him. He was with her and the very next thing he does is says, the groom says, it's my wife's fault.

Have you done that? Have you done that to your spouse? That's what happened in the very first marriage at the beginning of history. He knew he was wrong and he blamed her.

Now there is a thread that runs through the whole Bible and it's a question. What should a great groom do for his bride? You know, what should a great groom, if Adam was really awake and he knew that the greatest cost of sin was to be kicked out of the presence of God, was to be separated from the maker, was to be inflicted with death.

And that's what they were experiencing. They were hiding behind that rock saying he did it, she did it because they were so afraid of the consequences. What would a great groom do?

He would say in the midst of the face of death and cosmic injustice, don't send her away.

[ 33 : 00 ] Take me, punish me. I was with her, I let it happen. I mistreated her in this. He would say take my life and let hers be.

That's what a great groom would do. What if? That's the question of the whole Bible. What would it look like to have a groom that would come and stand in the place of sin and death for us?

And let me tell you, what if there was a second Adam? What if there was a better husband? A better husband who was cosmically coming for all of history to save his ultimate bride.

No matter what she had done, men and women, that's you, you're the bride. There is, he has. Jesus Christ, Ephesians 5, he is the meaning of marriage. He came to show you what marriage is for. And in Ephesians 5 it says, husband and wife submit to one another as Christ came. As Christ came.

[ 33 : 56 ] He says the power for your marriage is actually to look and see that you have the groom that Adam never was, who gave himself, the groom, the spouse that you can never be. And in that you can see you're forgiven for all your self-centeredness and you have the power to look at the cross over and over and over again and find the promise of a great relationship.

Jesus Christ, the great groom, he's the real power to sustain true marriage. Let's pray. Father, we give thanks for the beauty of the gospel built right into the heart of the marriage story. And so we pray today for anybody who wants to be married and is not, who is looking at marriage, who is married or who's struggling in marriage. And in all these situations, Lord, we ask that you would come and you would speak, that you would teach us what it means ultimately, no matter what our situation is, even after marriage perhaps, that no matter what, we have the possibility of the ultimate marriage in you. So help us today to believe that gospel, that good news, that no matter what happens in our marriages, no matter what happens, Jesus, you offer us in the cross the possibility of eternal marriage, the church and the great groom.

[ 35 : 18 ] So help us to believe that today, Lord, above all things. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.