

**The Memoirs of Peter
Jesus on Divorce (Part 1)
Mark 10:1-12
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*Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher
Countryside Bible Church, Southlake, Texas*

I think it begs the question to say that divorce is a real problem in America today. No one questions that. Jamie Dean in an article called “Putting Asunder” in *WORLD Magazine* writes that “During a ten-month period in 2005 an estimated 1.8 million couples got married in the United States...” [ten months 1.8 million couples married] “... according to the National Center for Health Statistics. During the same period ...” that same ten-month period 1.8 million couples got married “... nearly 800,000 couples divorced.” That’s basically a 35-45% divorce rate that would be the average over the last decade. That’s a huge divorce rate.

There are many contributing factors, but many sociologists agree that one of the main contributing factors or causes was a radical change in marriage law dating back to the 1970’s. It was during that period of time (that I believe it was in California first of all) that passed what was called “No Fault Divorce.” Marriage had been a contract which called for both parties to consent to enter that arrangement, and both parties to consent to leave that arrangement unless there were specific mitigating circumstances, but the free-wheeling Californians decided they should initiate no fault divorce where a single party could end the marriage without cause.

Imagine if it were that way with other legal contracts. You know with other legal contracts there may be a cooling off period when you first get into that contract. But once that cooling off period passes, for the most part, both parties have to agree to discontinue the contract or the covenant. Imagine if there were no fault mortgages? Some of you would like to imagine that wouldn’t you? That’s what has happened in our country. And now around this no-fault system that permeates American jurisprudence there is a system, a huge infrastructure so huge that one writer has called it the “divorce industry.” It’s a huge industry that not only supports private attorneys and all of their offices but now also a significant portion of the government’s payroll to deal with the cases the divorce cases as well as the children’s issues that come out of that as well. It’s a huge problem in our culture.

It's also an epidemic among Christians. Professor Mark Smith wrote an article this spring for *Political Science Quarterly* entitled "Religion, Divorce and the Missing Culture War in America." Smith argues that Christians have fought against a variety of moral evils in our culture including abortion, same sex marriage. But in spite of the fact that the Scripture roundly condemns divorce because divorce is so widespread among professing Christians, the Christian culture war was completely silent when it came to this problem. It's a huge problem.

By the way, let me just call a time out for a moment and sort of ride a little hobby horse which I don't do very often, but I'm going to do it right now. It is a huge problem, but at the same time I'm not so sure it's as huge a problem among Christians as we sometimes hear it is. Perhaps you've heard the statistic sort of thrown around that Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians. I don't believe that. And I think that false statistic gives Christians a kind of excuse to go ahead and pursue a divorce as if Christians do it. Where does that flawed information come from that Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians?

It can be traced back to George Barna and his organization. Under the headline "Christians Are More Likely to Experience Divorce Than Are Non-Christians" back in 1999 the Barna Research Group reported that "born-again Christians are more likely to go through a marital split than non-Christians." According to the Barna study, 27% of born-again Christians have been divorced, while 24% of those who are not born-again have been divorced. And they said, sorry to tell some of you who have Baptist backgrounds this, but they said, "the Christian denominations whose adherents have the highest likelihood of getting divorced are Baptists for 29% of all Baptists adults nationally have been divorced." [end quote] That sounds bad. And it is bad. But I want just to bring a little clarity to that before we move on and look at the text.

You have to look at the study they did. How did they define Christians? Well,

"Born-again Christians ..." (they said, and this is from their website) "... are not defined on the basis of characterizing themselves as 'born-again' but based upon their answers to two questions. The first is 'have you ever made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in your life today?' If the

respondent says, ‘yes’ then they are asked a follow-up question about life after death. One of the seven perspectives ...” that they can choose from in that question is “... ‘when I die, I will go to heaven because I’ve confessed my sins and accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior.’”

So, this is one of seven choices they’re given. If they choose that, if they answer yes to the first question, select this statement as their belief about their own salvation, then Barna calls them born-again Christians.

Let me just tell you what these born-again Christians quote unquote said. Using this survey Barna concluded in 2001 that 41% of Americans are born-again Christians. In surveying these born-again Christians Barna found some things you would expect. Eighty-five percent believe the Bible is totally accurate. Seventy-six percent believe they need to tell other people about the gospel. Ninety-eight percent say their faith is important to them. Sixty percent have read from their Bible in the past week, and 61[%] attended church in the past week. At the same time this same group of born-again Christians also said 45% believe that Satan is not a living being but a symbol of evil. Thirty-four percent believe that if a person’s good enough, they can earn a place in heaven. You tell me Christian or not? Twenty-eight percent agree that while He lived on earth, Jesus committed sins like other people. Fifteen percent of born-again Christians claim that after He was crucified and died, Jesus Christ did not return to life physically; no bodily resurrection. Twenty-six percent believe that it doesn’t matter what faith you follow because they all teach the same lessons.

I think his definition of born-again Christian and mine would be different. And I think the Scripture’s would be different. If you start with a flawed definition of what it means to be a Christian, the data about Christians and their divorce rate is going to be flawed as well. So, I don’t buy those statistics. I do think it’s bad. I just don’t think it’s as bad as this sort of generally shared statistic paints it out to be. Nevertheless, I think, as Al Mohler has referred to it, divorce is quote “the scandal of the evangelical conscience.” But that’s not because the Scripture isn’t clear. It’s not because our Lord isn’t clear. He is absolutely crystal clear.

And tonight, we come to a passage in Mark 10 in which our Lord addresses this issue very directly. Let's look at Mark 10. Let me read for you the paragraph. Mark 10 beginning in verse 1.

Getting up, He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds gathered around Him again, and according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them.

Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and *began* to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "MOSES PERMITTED A MAN TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND *her* AWAY." But Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, *God* MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE. FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH so they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate."

In the house the disciples *began* questioning Him about this again. And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery."

In this passage Jesus unfolds the divine mind about divorce and remarriage. This isn't what I have created; this isn't what our church has created; this isn't what historic Protestantism has created. This is what Jesus taught. Our job, our mission tonight (and the next time we have to study this passage together) is to unfold what Jesus said and then to do it, to embrace it. If we were to reduce Jesus' perspective here to a simple sentence, it would be something like this: God hates divorce and will not allow it among His people with only two exceptions. God hates divorce and will not allow it among His people with only two exceptions. Obviously the two exceptions are not in this text. We'll look at them. But there are two in the teaching of Jesus.

Now, Jesus' teaching (as we unfold this passage and begin to look through it), Jesus' teaching on the issue of divorce springs from a surprising question about marriage and divorce. It's surprising because of the context. Both the historical context as well as the cultural context from which this question springs. Now, let me just warn you, this is the first time, in my seven plus years here now that I've been here, that we've come to a text on divorce. I've never taught on this before, so I'm going to take my time. We're just going to get started tonight. But I think that's important because you need to understand the times in which Jesus lived and ministered and where this question comes from. And I think by the time we're done tonight, you'll understand why it's important for you to understand that.

Let's look first at the historical context. You see this in beginning in verse 1. "Getting up He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. Crowds gathered round Him again and according to His custom He once more began to teach them." Now to begin to put this chapter in its context, you have to understand that a *lot* happened between the last verse of Mark 9 and the first verse of Mark 10. In fact, a lot of time passes between those two verses. At the end of Mark 9 we're about six months out from the crucifixion which I believe was in April of 30 A.D. So, we're about six months away from the crucifixion at the end of Mark 9. When we begin Mark 10 verse 1, we are now just a couple of weeks from Jesus' death. So, Mark is missing several months of our Lord's life and ministry. In the white space, if you will, between Mark 9 and Mark 10 you can insert John 7 - 11. You can also insert Luke 10 -18:14 or nearly a third of Luke's gospel. You can also insert (as we just learned) five and a half months. All of that happens between the last verse of Mark 9 and the first verse of Mark 10.

By the way, if you want to see how this sort of plays out (I've recommended it to you before, but I'll recommend it to you again.) there's a great resource that I enjoy using often. It's called *The Harmony of the Gospels* by Gundry and Thomas. *A Harmony of the Gospels*. Essentially it lays out the gospels, all four of them, in chronological order; and where there are parallel passages, it puts them side by side where you can compare them; and then it gives you sort of a flow of the life of Jesus Christ. Very well researched, very clear and very helpful. And you can sort of read through it and unfold some of this from there if you'd like to do that. But if you want without

getting that book to see it just read Mark 9 then read John 7 - 11 and Luke 10 - 18:14, and you'll get the picture of what happens.

Now, during those five and half silent months in Mark's gospel, Jesus has traveled to Jerusalem three times. He's traveled there for two Jewish feasts and a third time on an important mission. The first time He went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles or, Booths as it's called. And this is recorded in John's gospel. This would have been in November of 29 A.D.

He returned again to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah as we call it today in December of 29 A.D.

The third visit to the Jerusalem area was just over the hill from Jerusalem a couple of miles in Bethany, and He went there according to John 11 to raise Lazarus from the dead. This would have been around February, just a few weeks, now six weeks or so before His crucifixion; so, in February of 30 A.D. As a result of Jesus' miracle, you remember with the raising of Lazarus, the Sanhedrin had convened a formal session to decide what to do about Jesus. You can read about that. We studied it a year or so ago in John 11:45 and following.

As Mark 10 begins all of that has happened, and Jesus is headed for the final Passover. He is headed to the Feast of Passover in 30 A.D. the feast at which He will be murdered. So, He is actually on His way to Jerusalem. So, Mark writes in verse 1, "Getting up He went up from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan." Now, the last place Mark had Jesus and His disciples was in Galilee back in 9:33. But here in Mark 1 we read that they're going to leave Galilee and head to the region beyond the Jordan that's on the east side of the Jordan river and eventually to Judea and to Jerusalem.

Matthew puts it this way in the parallel account in his gospel. "When Jesus had finished these words ..." (Matthew 19:1) "... He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan." Five and half months after 9:33 Jesus and His disciples traveled to Galilee again. And here's how it happened. Look at John 11. Stay with me. I'm about to bring it all together. John 11:53, this was the decision of the Sanhedrin after Jesus raised Lazarus from the

dead some six weeks before Passover. Verse 53, “From that day they planned together to kill Him.” So, verse 54

Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there He stayed with ...[His] disciples.

Now the Passover of the Jews was near....

It would have been about February when He raised Lazarus from the dead. The Sanhedrin said we’re going to arrest Him; we’re going to find some pretext for arresting Him, and we’re going to kill Him. The verdict’s already rendered. It’s going to be a classic railroad job on Jesus. It’s decided, it’s done before they ever arrest Him before they ever hear the first witness. Jesus somehow finds out about this. He either knew by divine omniscience or by a report from Nicodemus or one of the others (there were two followers of His there); He somehow knew about this.

So, after the raising of Lazarus around February Jesus went to a town called Ephraim. It’s called Ephraim here. It’s about 13 miles north of Jerusalem, very close to Jerusalem. And He waited there with the disciples for several weeks. When the time for the Passover came Jesus did something very unusual. I hope you can see this.

Ok if you can follow my arrow here, He was staying in Ephraim. There’s Jerusalem you see on the map. He was staying in Ephraim some 13 miles north. He’s going to Jerusalem for the Passover. Now, what’s the shortest distance between two points? The 13 miles, right? Thirteen miles back down to Jerusalem.

Jesus doesn’t do that. Instead, (the text tells us, particularly Luke’s gospel) that Jesus heads north from Ephraim up into Galilee, crosses over across the Jordan, joins with a band, a large crowd of Pilgrims coming from Galilee down to the Passover, and He travels down through this area on the nonSamaria side of the Jordan, the east side of the Jordan. The Jews didn’t like to travel

through Samaria, although Jesus did it occasionally. But they came down the Jordan rift where the Jordan River ran in this area of yellow here called Perea.

That's where we find Jesus in this story. He joins a large group of Galilean pilgrims heading to the feast, according to Matthew 19, and along the way down this journey, He makes Himself highly visible. He's teaching; He's working miracles; He's confronting the Jewish leaders. They travel across the Jordan down through Perea down the Jordan rift valley, and they eventually come (and we'll get there with Jesus) they eventually come down here, cross over the Jordan to Jericho and then take that treacherous road from Jericho over to Jerusalem. That's the route. Another thing that you need to understand is Mark 1 - 9 is three years and five and a half months of Jesus' earthly ministry. Mark 10 through the end of the book is a couple of weeks.

So, Jesus is now in that yellow area on the east side of the Jordan, Perea, journeying with the crowds of pilgrims to Jerusalem for His final Passover. Now look back at verse 1. "Getting up He went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan." So, He travels north from Ephraim up into Galilee, joins the crowds, and travels from Galilee down to the feast. And then verse 1 goes on to say, "Crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them." This would have been crowds both from the people that lived there in Perea.

You remember back in Mark 3, early on in Jesus' ministry, people came from this area. Notice verse 7, Mark 3:7,

Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples and a great multitude from Galilee followed and *also* from Judea and from Jerusalem and from Idumea and from beyond the Jordan....

That's Perea. That's that yellow area and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon up on the Mediterranean coast north of Israel. "A great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him."

So, the surrounding countries heard about Jesus including this area in which He now finds Himself on the east side of the Jordan river called Perea. So, there were crowds because of the residents there, but of course there would have also been crowds traveling with Him down to the Passover. Matthew tells us, in his account, that Jesus performed many miracles of healing while they were traveling down as well. But here we learn in Mark that the focus of His ministry was once again teaching the crowds. So, He's teaching. It's in that context, as Jesus journeys down with this big crowd of people, lot of bleating sheep and other animals and tons of pilgrims and going through the villages and trying to find places to stay as they travel down. It's in that context that verse 2 happens. "Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and began to question Him."

Now, to fully appreciate the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees at this point in His ministry, you don't just need to know what we've seen in Mark's gospel. You need to know in thumbnail fashion what happened between Jesus and the Pharisees between Mark 9 and Mark 10.

Remember all those chapters from John and Luke that happen between these two? Well, there was a whole lot of conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees that occurred through that time.

For example, in the September/October time period in Judea (and I'm just going to run through these real quickly), in John 7 there was a frustrated attempt to arrest Jesus at the Feast of Booths. In John 8 there was an attempt to stone Jesus for blasphemy at the same feast. In Luke 11 Jesus spoke a series of woes or pronouncements of damnation in judgement publicly while He ate a meal with a Pharisee. You can read about that in Luke 11 as well, what happened. In Luke 12 Jesus warned the crowds, the whole crowd now, all the people about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees.

Then you go to the next feast. Remember I said Jesus went to a second feast down in Judea, the Feast of Dedication or Hanukah in November/December; it didn't get any better during that time period. In John 9 there was a conflict in Jerusalem after Jesus healed the blind man. You remember, they end up throwing the blind man out of the synagogue; excommunicating him because of all that happened. In John 10 Jesus gives a parable, and He refers to the Pharisees as thieves and hirelings rather than true shepherds.

In Luke 15 Jesus extends an invitation to the Pharisees. You remember in that famous parable of the two sons. We call it the parable of the prodigal son. It's not just about the prodigal. It's about the other son as well; the son who stayed home who represents the Pharisees. The point is both sons equally needed to be reconciled to the father. Their sins were different. One was the sin of outright rebellion and licentious living. The sin of the other was self-righteous Pharisaism. In Luke 16, and this one really gets to them, Jesus confronted the Pharisees about their love of wealth. And you remember He tells the story that throws their whole system on its head because they taught if you had wealth that meant God had blessed you, and God was pleased with you.

On the other hand, if things went badly for you; you lived a difficult life; you had trouble; you didn't have anything, that was a sign of God's curse on you; and you were not in right relationship to God. Well, it was in that context that Jesus told the story about the rich man and Lazarus. And Jesus throws their whole system on its head, and He essentially says to them, all of you wealthy Pharisees, you think you're right with God because you're wealthy? Let me tell you you're going to end up just like this rich man. You're going to die and wake up in hell. That's what Jesus tells the Pharisees.

Well, the confrontations continue because in February, with the raising of Lazarus, Jesus confronted the entire theological system of the other group, the Sadducees, by raising Lazarus from the dead. And they taught there was no resurrection. And Jesus affirmed a future resurrection. And in that same basic context in Luke 18 Jesus makes it clear that the typical Pharisee, (remember the story told of the Pharisee and the tax gatherer who go up to the temple to pray, and He says what about the Pharisee?) He does not leave justified. He is not righteous before God whereas the tax collector is.

So, I mean there has been huge conflict. So, all of that occurred between Mark 9 and Mark 10. Now the Pharisees come to Jesus in the middle of the great crowds with a question. But it's not a sincere question. Notice Mark says verse 2, "They were testing Him." Testing Him. It's clear that they wanted to catch Jesus in some way. But what exactly are they hoping to accomplish?

Well, they probably already knew that Jesus had taught, you remember in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 about the permanence of marriage, and they probably wanted to show that by Jesus being so strong about the permanence of marriage, He was out of step with Moses' teaching. Deuteronomy 24 after all said a husband could write his wife a bill of divorcement. And they bring that up in this context. We'll look at it our next time. So, maybe they hope to show that He was out of step with Moses.

Maybe they hoped to undermine His popularity with Jewish men by showing that Jesus held to this strict view, an unpopular view, of divorce and remarriage. Because as we'll see it was completely (Jesus' view was completely) out of step with the culture. So maybe, they wanted to sort of lessen Jesus' popularity a little bit because of this view He's held. They may also have hoped to get Jesus arrested by this question. When they asked this question in the middle of the crowds where are they? They're in Perea. This is the region over which Herod Antipas ruled. Do you remember a little problem with Herod Antipas and divorce? Go back to Mark 6. This issue got Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, killed in Perea. Mark 6, and notice verse 17,

... Herod ... had sent and had John [the Baptist] arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Phillip, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

He's confronting him about the sin of both divorce and the wrongful marriage. It was a violation of God's law, and it got him killed. It's very possible that these connivers asked this question publicly hoping that Herod Antipas will hear and do the same thing to Jesus that he did to John the Baptist. Because, when Jesus answers this question, He was very near the exact city where John was held in prison and eventually executed, down in Perea where Herod Antipas' palace was, toward the northern end of the Dead Sea.

This was a real problem because at one point during the previous five months the Pharisees had actually come to Jesus in Luke 13:31 "Just at that time some Pharisees approached Jesus saying to Him, 'Go away leave here for Herod wants to kill You.'" So, this has already been a problem, and it may be they're playing off that now, now that He has done so much to anger them and

come in so much conflict with them, they want to get rid of Him. So, that's the historical context of their surprising question.

But there's an equally unusual context. Not only that historical context, but also the cultural context. And you see this in the second half of verse 2. "Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife." Now to understand this, listen to Matthew's parallel account. "Some Pharisees came up to Jesus testing Him and asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?'" Is it lawful? You see the rabbis were agreed on the possibility and availability of divorce. There really wasn't anybody in the first century saying you couldn't divorce.

What they disagreed about was the legitimate reasons for divorce. This had become a huge debate in the first century. They all assumed that Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was this definitive Old Testament text teaching about divorce and remarriage. In fact, I think we need to look at it. I won't go through it and explain it to you tonight. I will do that our next time. But go over to Deuteronomy 24, and just look at it with me. This is what in their minds the definitive Old Testament text about divorce and remarriage. "When a man takes a wife ..." this is Deuteronomy 24:1

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 indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, and if the latter husband ... [this sounds like a soap opera, doesn't it?] ... and if the latter husband turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house [so this is now husband number 2] or if the ... [number 2] husband dies who took her to be his wife, *then* her [first] ... husband who sent her out is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she's been defiled; for that's an abomination before the Lord, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God gives you as an inheritance.

Now the main thing I want you to see here is that the first three verses are all the “if” part of the statement and verse 4 is the “then” part of the statement. If all of that stuff in verses 1-3 happens then (here’s the punch line), verse 4 the first husband can’t remarry her. That’s what this text is teaching. Now, we’ll unfold a little bit more about that, but that’s the big picture. But what the debate was about, the sticking point in all that was going on in the first century was a phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1. You see it? “Some indecency in her.” If he finds some indecency in her. Literally the Hebrew text says, “the nakedness of a thing.” Now there’s a vague statement for you; or appears on the surface to be vague. If he finds in her the nakedness of a thing.

Now, the debate was about that phrase. What does it mean? Because they saw that as the exception. You can divorce if that is met. So, the debate is reflected in what is both a sad and at the same time humorous passage, the most famous passage from the Jewish Mishnah. You have to read this. This is classic stuff. The school of Shammai, this is one rabbi, the school of Shammai says this, “A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity in her, for it is written he has found in her indecency in anything.”

And the school of Hillel, the more liberal group, they say “He may divorce her even if she has spoiled a dish for him for it is written because he has found in her indecency in anything.” So, it was all a matter of where you put the stress. Is it on the indecency, or is it on the anything? Rabbi Akiva says, “Even if he found another fairer than she, better looking, for it is written, and it shall be if he find no favor in his eyes” beginning of verse 21. So, this was the debate.

As you can see here the sort of liberal group followed Hillel. Hillel’s followers found many possible reasons that a man may want and can legitimately seek to divorce his wife. I’m not making this up. Ok? I just want you to know that. These are in the writings legitimate reasons you can divorce, a man could divorce his wife. She accidentally served food that had been burned. There you go. Or at home she talks so loud that the neighbors can hear. If she walks around town with her hair down. If she, I love this one, if she speaks disrespectfully about her husband’s parents in his presence. I guess there were no mother-in-law jokes in the first century.

Another author writes that if she quote “If she does not accept your control”, she doesn’t submit to you, divorce her and send her away. Now what’s going on here? One of the writers of describing the history of the Jewish people. In fact, his multi volume work is called *The History of the Jewish People* writes this, “Divorce was relatively easy in those days, and the Pharisees and rabbis intended to keep it so.” They liked this, and they didn’t want anybody messing with their deal.

Now, if you want to see a little more of what this looked like, very briefly consider the Jewish historian, he became a historian for the Romans, Flavius Josephus. He’s a good source for figuring out the sort of first century Jewish teaching and practice regarding divorce and remarriage. You see Josephus was born in 37, 38 A.D. so he’s essentially a contemporary of our Lord born shortly after our Lord’s death. He was born to a priestly family in Palestine and was trained as a rabbi. At 19 Josephus became a Pharisee. And although he eventually became a historian for Rome, he generally was faithful as a Pharisaic Jew. He took his faith seriously.

And yet even though he took his faith seriously in *The Antiquities of the Jews* this is what he writes, “He that desires to be divorced from his wife for any cause whatsoever ,and many such causes happen among men, let him in writing give assurance that he will never use her as his wife anymore, for by this means she may be at liberty to marry another husband; although, before this bill of divorcement be given she is not permitted so to do.”

So, if he wants to get rid of her, if he wants a divorce for whatever reason, just make sure that he goes through the right paperwork and gives her freedom of a piece of paper that says she’s no longer his wife. Josephus’s own testimony, his own life confirms this view. He had four, (even though he was a Pharisee, trained as a rabbi) he had four different wives through his lifetime. He mentions them in a couple of his writings. I won’t go through the first one but in his *Life of Flavius Josephus* in the second paragraph here Josephus says “I divorced my wife ...” this would have been number 2 “... as not pleased with her behavior though not ’til she had been the mother of three children. After this I married a wife who had lived at Crete. And so, it goes on.

What was happening in the first century? This is what I want you to see. The problem with the Pharisees and with the people was that they viewed marriage as a no-fault relationship, a disposable contractual arrangement. Had one author who says, “Their attitude reminds you of the guy who goes to the bank to get a loan and as soon as he’s finished signing the documents, he starts asking what are the conditions for him to get out of repaying the loan?” The rabbis and the Pharisees held to this view. But not just they.

Even the disciples of Jesus had bought into this lax view. Because when Jesus finishes explaining the permanence of marriage that we just read in Mark 10, you know what they say in Matthew’s gospel? Listen to Jesus’ 12 disciples on divorce. After He explains the permanence of marriage, they say, well, if the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it’s better not to marry. If you can’t get out of it easily like we have been, then it’s better not to marry.

Now, why do I take the time to explain this? Because I want you to see that Jesus’ teaching on divorce did not grow out of a conservative culture. His teaching, as we will see the next time we study this passage, was completely counterculture. What He had to say about divorce, He spoke in times very much like our own, no fault divorce climate. But here’s the key question. Mark finished chapter 9 you remember? Mark finished chapter 9 with one evening’s instruction to His disciples that we call “Essential Lessons for Every Disciple.” That’s where he finished Mark 9.

He picks up five and a half months later with Jesus’ teaching on divorce. Why? That doesn’t really seem to fit, does it? Why would you skip five and a half months of Jesus’ life and pick up with Jesus’ teaching on divorce? What’s the connection? The connection is this. In 9 and again here in 10 the main emphasis that Mark wants us to see is the radical difference that exists between the values of the culture in which the disciple of Jesus Christ lives and what our Lord insists of us. It’s radically different.

There’s a new perspective to those who are in the kingdom of Christ, and the demands of Jesus are pressed upon us as His disciples in every area of life including our marriages. As we go through this chapter, chapter 10, we’ll see the ingredients of life like children; the right view of children; the right view of possessions; the right view of wealth. Here’s what Mark wants us to

see. Jesus demands that we follow Him in every area of life even if it runs totally contrary to the culture in which we live.

Listen, don't ask yourself what the people around you are doing. Don't ask yourself what magazines say, what the intelligentsia of the culture say. Don't ask yourself what the people around you are telling you to do. Ask yourself if you are a follower of Jesus Christ what would Jesus have me to do? Your marriage and its permanence and its health matters to Jesus Christ. That's not something that's superfluous that's beyond your relationship to God. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, then you are a disciple in every area of life. And that includes marriage and the choices you make in responding to the problems of marriage. Next time that we have to study together, we'll look at specifically at what our Lord has to say about the culture that was all around Him in the first century.

Let's pray together.

Father, remind us that when we came to Christ; when You drew us to Him, we made a covenant. We committed ourselves to Him as Lord, as Teacher, and we as His disciples; as His learners; as His followers.

Father, forgive us for seeing salvation as some kind of fire insurance. It gets us out of hell, but still, we can live however we want. Father, remind us that we are in the school of Christ learning the lessons of life and how to respond in life from Him. And if we're going to call ourselves His disciples, Father, help us to live like it. Help us to learn from Him and to be willing as He was to be completely counterculture. Father, give us the heart of those who call Jesus Lord and mean it.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.