

Matthew
Jesus' Teaching On Divorce & Remarriage (Part 1)
Matthew 5:31-32
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Today, in our ongoing study of Matthew's Gospel, and of course we find ourselves in “The Sermon on the Mount” as we're working our way through his Gospel, we come to “Jesus' Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage.” Now it's been nearly fifteen years since I have come across a passage, on a Sunday morning, that deals with this difficult, and frankly, hotly debated issue, even among professing believers. So I plan to take the next three weeks to work through this issue at length because it profoundly affects every one of us.

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau statistics, of those who are over 20 in the United States, some 30 to 31 percent have never married. Now that's a shocking statistic because in 1960, those over 20 who had not married were 15 percent, half of today's number. But among those who have been married, who are over 20, and have at some point been married, 34 percent of women and 33 percent of men have been divorced at some time in their adult lives. That means that 1 in 3 of those in the U.S. who, at some point were married, have been divorced. Now commonly, adults have married only once; 48 percent of men, 52 percent of women have only been married once if they've been married. About 12 percent of men and 13 percent of women have been married twice, while 3 percent of men and 4 percent of women have been married 3 or more times. Now again, keep in mind, some 30 to 31 percent have never married, but of those who have married, over 30 percent, right at a third, 1 in 3, have ended a marriage in divorce. So you can see, then, that divorce is a huge issue in our culture.

But it's also a huge issue in our own lives and families. Some of you know this issue of divorce all too personally. Perhaps your parents were divorced. Maybe you have gone through a difficult

divorce yourself. But even if there's no divorce in your immediate family, sociologists tell us that some 80 percent of us, in this room this morning, have dealt with the realities of divorce either in our extended families or in our close friends. So we should care about this crucial issue because we are, frankly, all impacted by it.

But we should also care what the Bible teaches about divorce and remarriage because, as we will see today, it matters to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're a Christian, this matters to Him and, therefore, it should matter to you. Sadly, our Lord's teaching on divorce and remarriage has been terribly misinterpreted, particularly in the modern era, and abused. So over the next couple of weeks, I want us to consider what Jesus actually taught about divorce and remarriage.

Now let me set the context again for you since it's been a couple of weeks since we've been in Matthew's Gospel. After describing, in the Beatitudes, the character of those in His spiritual kingdom, Jesus begins the body of His sermon by showing that His disciples are committed to obeying the Scripture, and to obeying it in a much more profound way than the scribes and Pharisees because His disciples are committed to obeying the Scriptures, not merely externally, but from the heart. Now, our Lord uses six illustrations in the rest of chapter 5 to make this point. And in each of these illustrations, He confronts the scribes' misunderstanding of the Scripture and their incomplete obedience, and then He provides His own authoritative interpretation.

So far, we've examined two of His illustrations. In verses 21 to 26, we learned that we must not break the Sixth Commandment against murder by tolerating anger, either in our hearts or in our words or in our actions. In verses 27 to 30, we learned that we must not break the Seventh Commandment against adultery by tolerating lust in our hearts.

Now, today we come to Jesus' third illustration of this comprehensive obedience of His disciples. He continues to apply the command against adultery, but this time not about lust, rather He closes a huge loophole in the first century concerning the issue of divorce and remarriage. Let's read it together. Matthew, chapter 5, verse 31. These are the words of our Lord:

“It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE’; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for *the* reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Now let me give you the summary of what we're going to discover in these verses, and then over the next couple of weeks, we'll unfold it together. Here's the summary, and this is the key phrase, “Without biblical grounds, divorce and remarriage violate the Seventh Commandment against adultery.” So, as Jesus' disciples, we must be fully committed to our marriage covenant. That's the point of these verses. Here Jesus explains that we can actually break the Seventh Commandment against adultery, not only by sexual intercourse with someone outside of marriage, not only by sexual lust in the heart, but also by divorce and remarriage without biblical grounds. Now in these verses, Jesus provides several authoritative observations about Scripture's teaching on divorce and remarriage. Today, I just want to consider His first observation.

So let's talk for a few moments then about “The Corruption of the Old Testament Teaching on Divorce and Remarriage,” the corruption of the Old Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage. Jesus wants us to understand what was being taught in the first century. So, He first explains, then in verse 31, “What the Scribes Taught,” what the teachers of first century

Judaism, the Pharisees and the scribes, what they had to say about the Old Testament's teaching on this crucial issue. We find this in verse 31, “It was said, ‘WHOEVER SENDS HIS WIFE AWAY, LET HIM GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE.’” Now you'll notice that most of that verse is in all capitals in our Bible. That says that this is a quote from the Old Testament. But stay tuned because it's not exactly what it seems. Now, Jesus is quoting here the scribes, and they had reduced what the Old Testament teaches about divorce and remarriage to this simple statement. But like we've seen in Jesus' other examples, they quoted the Scripture, but they quoted it in a way that actually perverted its meaning. And that's what they do here. The quote in verse 31 is their own unique combination of two phrases that they pieced together from Deuteronomy 24.

Now this brief statement is what they believed about divorce and remarriage; we'll see that. But we can see their view even more clearly, what they taught and believed about divorce and remarriage, we can see it more clearly in an exchange that happened with Jesus about a year after “The Sermon on the Mount.” So I want us to turn to one of those passages. The conversation that I'm talking about is recorded in two places in the Gospels. In Mark, chapter 10, but also Matthew records it in chapter 19. So turn over to Matthew 19. Now in coming to Matthew 19, we have now skipped ahead a year from Jesus' “Sermon on the Mount,” and the passage, our primary passage that we've begun to study. So this passage, Matthew 19, happens when Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. It's about a week or two before His death, a year after “The Sermon on the Mount.” It happened when He was in Perea. Perea is the region that's on the east side of the Jordan River near the north end of the Dead Sea. And as I said, it happened while He was traveling to Jerusalem for His final Passover, for his death and resurrection. Now notice what Matthew writes in verse 1 of Matthew 19, “When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan (This is Perea,

north end of the Dead Sea, on the other side of the Jordan.); and large crowds followed Him and He healed them there.” So, as Jesus is traveling for His last Passover, moving toward His death on Friday of the Passion Week, as He is coming down with the pilgrims from Galilee, He is performing many miracles along the way. But Mark 10 tells us that the focus of His ministry on this occasion was His teaching. Mark 10:1 says, “according to His custom, He once more *began* to teach them.” He began to teach the crowds. Now who are these crowds? Well they're crowds of residents from that area where He is teaching, and also the crowds that came with Him from Galilee for the feast.

Now notice what happens as He's healing and teaching, they are on their way to the Passover. Verse 2, “*Some* Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Now to understand why they raised this issue of divorce, why they would even ask this question, we've got to go to one other passage. Let me give you context; we're doing some time travel. Matthew 5 is “The Sermon on the Mount;” Matthew 19 is a year later, just before His death. But we're going to flip to Luke 16, keep your finger in Matthew 19; we're going to go to Luke 16, which is four or five months before Matthew 19. So it's right in between “The Sermon on the Mount” and Matthew 19. So look at Luke 16. Here, it's late November, early December, before His death in April. Jesus went to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication, what we call ‘Hanukkah.’ And while He was there, He had several run-ins with the Pharisees. Luke records the most notable of them here. He confronted the Pharisees, and notice what He says to them, Luke 16:14:

Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He (Jesus) said to them, “You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly

esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God. The Law and the Prophets *were proclaimed* until John; since that time, the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail.”

So He makes the same point. Now with the Pharisees, what does He pick on? Look at the next verse. Seemingly out of the blue, in verse 18, Jesus says to the Pharisees, “Everyone who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries one who is divorced from a husband commits adultery.” That happened in November or December.

Now flip back to Matthew 19; this happens a few months later, about five months later, just before His death, and they ask this question. He had confronted them about their lax view of divorce in Luke 16, a few months earlier. So now five months later, in Matthew 19:3, they bring up the issue of divorce again. Why? Notice Matthew says in verse 3, “they were “testing Him.” What were they hoping to accomplish? Well, they already knew Jesus' views on the permanence of divorce. Many of them had heard “The Sermon on the Mount.” He had confronted them in the passage we just saw in Luke 16. So probably, they hoped to prove that Jesus actually disagreed with Moses and what is taught in Deuteronomy 24. They also likely hoped to undermine His popularity with Jewish men. Because Jesus is publicly teaching a strict, unpopular view of divorce and remarriage in the first century, as we'll see in a moment. So maybe they're hoping to erode His popularity with men because of what He taught about this issue. I think they may have even hoped to get Jesus arrested. Why? Because of where they ask Him this question. They ask Him this question in Perea. It's a region ruled by Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas is the very man who has John the Baptist arrested, put in prison, and eventually is executed. For what? For his confrontation of Herod's unbiblical divorce and remarriage. In

fact, Jesus, when He is asked this question and makes this answer, He is near the very city where John the Baptist is imprisoned and is eventually executed, and his head is handed on a platter, you remember. In fact, previously, a few months before this, in Luke 13:31, we read that “some Pharisees approached (Jesus), saying to Him, ‘Go away, leave here, for Herod wants to kill you.’” Now, “Maybe that's not such a bad idea,” they thought, and so they're setting Jesus up.

Now, with that in mind, notice how Matthew quotes them in verse 3, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife (And here's the key.) for any reason at all?” You see, the rabbis all agreed on the morality of divorce, but they disagreed on the grounds for divorce. They all believed that Deuteronomy 24 was sort of the definitive Old Testament teaching on divorce and remarriage, but there's a phrase in Deuteronomy 24, we're going to go there in a moment, but let me just give you the phrase. There's a phrase in Deuteronomy 24:1 on which it all hinges, and that is this, if he finds “some indecency in her.” What exactly does that mean? That was the debate. The crux of the debate was, what is that “some indecency?” Literally the Hebrew reads, “the nakedness of a thing.” That's not immediately helpful.

So there was a huge debate then over what this phrase meant, because they saw it as the crux of the legitimate reason to divorce. Now, what did they think it meant? Well, a famous passage in *The Jewish Mishnah* explains the various views in the first century. Here's the cultural context in which this question comes. Alright, here were the views:

- 1) The school of Shammai says: A man may not divorce his wife unless he has found unchastity (or marital unfaithfulness) in her (sexual unfaithfulness), for it is written, “Because he has found in her indecency in anything.”

- 2) The school of Hillel says: [He may divorce her] even if she spoiled a dish for him, for it is written, “because he has found in her indecency in anything.”
- 3) Rabbi Aqaba says: Even if he found another fairer than she, for it is written, “And it shall be if she finds no favor in his eyes.”

In other words, they each picked a phrase from Deuteronomy 24, and they said, “There you go.” The school of Hillel was the most sort of well-known liberal view, and that was that there were many legitimate reasons for divorce. A man could divorce his wife, I read it a moment ago, if she accidentally served food that had been burned. He could divorce his wife if she talked so loudly that the neighbors could hear her. I'm not making that up, true story. If she went in public with her hair down. If she spoke disrespectfully about her husband's parents in his presence. I guess there were no mother-in-law jokes in the first century Jewish culture.

The apocryphal book of *Ben Sira*, or *Ben Sirah*, it says this, “If she does not accept your control, divorce her and send her away.” Imel Scherer, in his multi-volume work, *The History of the Jewish People*, writes this about the first century. He says, “Divorce was relatively easy in those days, and the Pharisees and rabbis intended to keep it so.” And you can see this in a secular figure from first century Israel. Many of you have heard of or been familiar with Flavius Josephus, the historian who wrote for the Romans. Flavius Josephus is the perfect example of the first century Jewish teaching and practice on this issue of divorce and remarriage. Josephus was born, shortly after our Lord's death and resurrection, in 37/38 A.D. He was trained as a Jewish rabbi. In fact, at the age of 19, Josephus became a Pharisee. And although he wrote as a historian for the Romans, that's what he's most well-known for, he actually remained, and this is a historical view, “a generally faithful Pharisaic Jew.” He took his faith seriously, in other words. He was a Pharisee and he took his faith seriously. With that in mind, look at this quote

from his work, *The Antiquity of the Jews*. Notice what he writes, and notice how it connects with the New Testament:

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 her 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 divorce be given, she is not permitted to do so.
(IV.viii.23)

In other words, he's saying, "It doesn't matter, for any reason, he can divorce her as long as he gives her a certificate of divorce." And Josephus' own life is proof of this lax view. Josephus himself actually had four different wives in his lifetime. He was a Pharisee, a Jewish rabbi. He is the perfect example of the pervasive mindset of the Pharisees. Their view of divorce emphasized the reasons to end the marriage more than they emphasized the commitment to keep the marriage. That's the background. What I just shared with you is the background of their truncated quote of Deuteronomy 24 in our text, and their question here in Matthew 19.

Now look at Matthew 19:3 again with that in mind. Jesus answered their question, verse 3, "Is it lawful (okay) *for a man* to divorce his wife at all?" Verse 4, "And He answered and said, 'Have you not read?'" I love that! You know what Jesus says? He says, "What does the Bible say?" That should always be your first question on any issue, "What does the Bible say?" Specifically, "What does the Bible teach about marriage and divorce?" And then He tells them, verse 4, "He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He who created *them* from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE?'" That's a quote from Genesis 1, verse 27. "And said (to them, and here

comes Genesis 2:24.) ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH.’”

Now here's what's really interesting. That's, notice, those are quotations, what comes next isn't from the Old Testament; it's in lowercase letters. This is Jesus' own commentary on those passages; notice how He interprets them. “So,” Jesus says, “they (these two) are no longer two, but one flesh.” And then Jesus adds this, “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” Wow! That's a crucial statement because in it, Jesus stresses the permanence of marriage, and we're going to come back to that a bit later today and more next week. But notice their response, verse 7, “They said to Him, (Well, wait a minute, wait a minute. If man shouldn't separate, if you're saying marriage is that permanent?), ‘Why then did Moses command TO GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND HER AWAY?’” They quote Deuteronomy 24, their own sort of unique combination of it, “Moses permitted divorce.” Again, God was crystal clear about the permanence of marriage; Jesus just drove that home. He only permitted divorce for a particular reason. The Pharisees, however, chose to emphasize that exception, perhaps even making that exception a command. Notice what they say in verse 7, They said to Him, “Why then did Moses command TO GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND (And they may mean, ‘and command to.’) SEND *her* AWAY?” But regardless, this is just another example of the Pharisees missing the main point of what Jesus says in Matthew 23:24, they “strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!” Instead of grappling with Deuteronomy 24 in its context, they just turned it into a blanket permission for all divorce and remarriage. Again, look at verse 3, “Is it lawful *for a man* to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” just like Josephus said, that was their view. That's what the scribes taught.

But now let's go back and look at what Deuteronomy 24 means in context. So we've considered then “What the Scribes Taught,” let's consider “What the Old Testament Actually Taught.” Turn back with me to Deuteronomy 24; this is the debated passage. Let me read it for us and then I'll make some observations. Deuteronomy 24, verses 1 to 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 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 turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts *it* in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, *then* her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD (YHWH), and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD (YHWH) your God gives you as an inheritance.

Now you can see immediately that that is a very complicated passage. So let me make some observations. Number one, “This passage is not primarily teaching biblical grounds for divorce.” I think you can see that right away. Secondly, “This passage doesn't really comment on the morality of divorce itself—it simply regulates a specific case.” One commentator, Lane, says this, “The intention of Deuteronomy 24 was not to make divorce acceptable, but to limit sinfulness and to control its consequences.” Another commentator, France, writes this:

Deuteronomy 24 was not intended as a statement of God's purpose for marriage, but as a regrettable but necessary means of limiting the damage when that purpose has been

abandoned. It is a provision to deal with human hard-heartedness, not a pointer to the way things ought to be.

That's exactly right.

Number three, another observation. “This passage acknowledges that divorce, in fact, would happen in the world.” In fact, at the very time Moses wrote this, there were already divorces happening, 1400 years before Christ in Israel. Leviticus 21:7 discusses whether a priest is allowed to marry a divorced woman. Numbers 30, verse 9, discusses the vows of a divorced woman. So divorces were already happening in the time of Moses, 1400 years before Jesus. This passage acknowledges that. Number four, “Deuteronomy 24 primarily, however, addresses one very specific circumstance.” In fact, this is special case law. You'll notice, and you probably saw this when I read it, you'll notice that verses 1 to 3 is the ‘if statement.’ In language we call that the ‘prothesis,’ ‘the circumstance’ that's being described. Verse 4, you'll notice, begins with the word ‘then.’ Here's the conclusion, ‘the apotheosis,’ an application of the law. So if all those things in verses 1 to 3 are met, then here's what you do in verse 4.

So, what exactly does this case law teach? Let me give you a summary of verses 1 to 4. A man may not remarry a second time a wife he had previously divorced if she had married another man after their divorce. He calls it an abomination. Now why? Why would that be wrong in the sight of God? There are several reasons that have been offered. One of them is that it was a protection for the woman. The first husband couldn't take advantage of her in some way, maybe taking her dowry, the second dowry that she had gotten. That's one possibility. Another possibility, and this is common, a common view, that the second marriage to the same man after a second marriage had taken place would be a defilement of the marriage covenant and the

sanctity of marriage. In other words, it somehow damages the sanctity of marriage. A third view, and frankly the one that I lean toward, is that this man had accused his wife of marital unfaithfulness, and that's why he divorced her. And so to turn around later and to remarry her was a defilement because he's already declared her to have been guilty of sexual sin, and yet he's going to remarry her regardless of that. But that's the circumstance addressed here.

Number five, "This passage requires, by implication, a written certificate in the case of divorce." Now that was important because it provided protection for the one who did not initiate the divorce. You see, a bill of divorce would serve three purposes. First of all, "To authenticate the end of the marriage." The marriage was done; you had it in your hand—it's over. Number two, "It protected the woman from later false accusations of abandonment or adultery." Imagine if a man divorced his wife and she wasn't unfaithful, and there was no bill of divorce. He could later vindictively claim, "I didn't give her a divorce; she left me; she has abandoned our marriage; she's committing adultery." The bill of divorce was proof that that was not true.

Number three, "The bill of divorce confirmed her freedom to remarry." *The Jewish Mishnah* says that that certificate that was given to the divorced wife included this statement, "You are free to marry any man." There's a sixth observation we can make about Deuteronomy 24, and that is, and this is key, "It really is a warning to the man not to make this divorce decision quickly because there's no going back." You better not, in a fit of anger, divorce your wife and then say, "No, I changed my mind. You know, your second husband's gone. I want you back." No, it was done. So it was a warning not to take this decision lightly.

Number seven, and this is key, this comes to where we're going to go in Matthew. "This passage leaves open the possibility that there might be a legitimate reason for divorce and remarriage." I think that's exactly what it does. I think it's saying the same thing that Jesus is going to say in

the New Testament, in Matthew 5 and Matthew 19. But did you notice what this passage, Deuteronomy 24, does not teach? It does not command a man to divorce his wife. Genesis 2 commands that marriage be permanent. Deuteronomy 24 permits divorce in certain circumstances. But it is not a blank check to divorce your spouse for any reason at all, which is what the Pharisees made it. The Pharisees were more interested in the concession for divorce in Deuteronomy 24 than the institution of marriage in Genesis 2. They enlarged God's gracious provision into a massive loophole in the marriage covenant. They magnified the exception until it blinded them to God's true perspective about marriage and divorce.

Now, let me just stop here and say this didn't just happen in the first century. Sadly, this happens today among professing Christians in 21st century churches. How does this happen today? Let me give you a couple of examples. This same approach that the Pharisees had happens when Christians, professing Christians, downplay the sinfulness of an unbiblical divorce or an unbiblical remarriage. A lot of Christians act like this is no big deal. Listen, do you hear what Jesus is saying in our text? Jesus says, "If it's an unbiblical divorce, if it's an unbiblical remarriage, that is if it doesn't meet the biblical grounds, it is a violation of the seventh commandment against adultery." That's what Jesus said. This is serious and we must not downplay that sinfulness. Another way this happens is when Christians are so eager to get a divorce that they twist biblical passages to excuse the decision they want to make. You want out of a marriage, and you go looking for some exit clause. You find somebody on the internet, you find some Christian author who, unlike the rest of Christian history, now adds a new reason to pursue a divorce and you go, "There it is, I found it; I got my exit clause." Listen, there are "Christian counselors," and "Christian authors" who have written books that teach that the abandonment by an unbeliever clause in 1 Corinthians 7, which is a real thing, we're going to

talk about that in the coming weeks, but they say that clause also includes emotional abandonment or emotional abuse by a professing Christian. And Christians who want out of their marriages are more than eager to adopt a new view, that nobody else has held throughout Christian history, because they want out. Listen, don't misunderstand me. Emotional abandonment, emotional abuse, those include real sins that need to be addressed; they need to be addressed in the church by counseling and even if there's unrepentance, by church discipline, but they're not biblical grounds for divorce. There are only two biblical grounds for divorce, we're going to look at them.

In Matthew 5 and Matthew 19, the first cause is sexual unfaithfulness to the marriage. And the second cause is 1 Corinthians 7, and that is a believer and an unbeliever are married, and the unbeliever wants out, abandonment by an unbeliever, those are the only two grounds the Scriptures give legitimate grounds for divorce. Again, the other problems in a marriage need to be addressed, but not by divorce. I think another way this happens in the 21st century is when Christians pursue other relationships even before their divorce is finalized and their marriage has ended—happens all the time. Somehow Christians get it in their mind, “Well, you know, I'm in the process.” Listen, you're still married to that person in the sight of God, you can't get involved with someone else—that's adultery! When Christians are overly eager to seize the first shadow of a reason to get out of their marriage when it's just too hard or it's not emotionally satisfying or whatever it might be. Listen, let me be clear, in God's goodness, He has provided two legitimate biblical grounds for divorce and remarriage. That's His kindness and His goodness. There are times when a marriage has been so violated that it cannot be recovered, and the innocent party can get out of that marriage in the case of sexual unfaithfulness and in the case of an unbeliever who wants out.

But here's the really important thing to understand; don't presume on God's grace by taking marriage lightly. There are Christians who will think and sometimes even say something like this, “Well, I'll just go ahead and get an unbiblical divorce and then just ask God for forgiveness.” Listen, God's not going to play games with you. God is not naive, and I mean this very respectfully, “God is not stupid.” He knows that that's your plan, and He doesn't take that lightly. Marriage matters to God; God created marriage with the first couple. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, performed the first marriage in Genesis 2, and this may surprise you, but He is still involved in every marriage between a man and a woman today—every marriage between a man and a woman today. Listen again to Jesus' commentary on Genesis 2 that Matthew records in chapter 19, verse 6. This is Jesus. “So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together” (what God has joined together). In other words, Jesus says, “God puts that man and that woman together in marriage in the same yoke, that is, that beautiful picture of working side by side, of sharing life together in the institution of marriage that God Himself created.” Marriage isn't a civil arrangement. It's not a human construct. God created marriage. Jesus performed the first wedding, and He's still involved, let me say it again, in every legitimate marriage. Just like He provides food for every person on this planet, He provides marriage as a gift to all of His creation. Remember, Jesus is speaking, in Matthew 19, to unbelievers, to the Pharisees, and He says “God joined you with your spouse,” and He says “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

You see, from God's perspective, no human has the right to undo the permanent union that God created in marriage unless the biblical grounds are met. Listen, husband, you are not the Lord of your marriage; wife, you are not the Lord of your marriage—God is, and He intends every

marriage to be permanent. That's the divine plan, with two exceptions. That's why John Calvin called marriage "The sacred knot; it knots us together for life." John Murray writes this:

Marriage from its very nature and from the divine nature by which it is constituted is ideally indissoluble; it is not a contract of temporary convenience. It's not a union that may be dissolved at will. Divorce is contrary to the divine institution, contrary to the nature of marriage, and contrary to the divine action by which the union is affected.

(And listen to what he writes.) It is precisely here that its wickedness becomes singularly apparent. It is the sundering; it's the tearing apart by man of a union that God has constituted. Divorce is the breaking of a seal which has been engraved by the hand of God.

That's exactly what Jesus teaches in Matthew 19.

So what then are the key lessons we've learned so far? Let me just briefly rehearse them with you. Number one, "You need to embrace Jesus' view on the permanence of marriage." You know, it's interesting, in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul talks about God's revelation given to us in the Scripture, and how that revelation came to us, not just in concepts, but in (v. 13) "words that the Spirit chose." That book you have in your hand, the very words are the words of God, and the Spirit then grants us to understand them. But Paul finishes 1 Corinthians 2 with this word. He says, "We have (In this Book you hold in your hand, v. 16., we have.) the mind of Christ." You have what is important to Christ right here in this Book. He tells you how to think about everything that matters and you need to embrace His view on the permanence of marriage. We just saw it, His commentary in Matthew 19:6, couldn't be any clearer. God joined you, and nobody should separate that, unless it's for the grounds that God Himself has permitted. True

disciples of Jesus must be committed to keeping their marriage covenant and to keeping it permanently.

Number two, second lesson, “Embrace Jesus' view on the importance of marriage.” You know, it's interesting, when we went through Matthew 19, Jesus quotes Genesis 1. He says God made them “male and female,” and then He ties that to Genesis 2:24, and to “a man leaving his father and mother, and being joined to, by God, to his wife,” (Paraphrase). What's the point? The point is that God made humans male and female with the plan that most humans would marry. Now, let me hasten to say, “That doesn't make you second class, if God has gifted you for singleness, or if you're divorced, or if you're widowed, or if you're currently single, but hope to marry someday.” However, listen carefully, “It is clear, biblically and historically, that God planned for most humans to marry.” So be careful, don't undervalue singleness or those who are single, but on the other hand, don't diminish the divine plan for the importance of, and the priority of marriage in human life.

Let me talk for a moment to those of you who are younger. Listen, from 1960 to today, according to the U.S. Census, we went from 15 percent of adults who had never been married, to 30 percent. Why is that? I think there are a lot of factors. I think the mess of divorce, and no-fault divorce that came out of the 70s, created an environment where people are scared to death that their marriages are going to be like their parents' marriages. Maybe that's what motivates you, you haven't pursued marriage because you're just afraid. Listen, “God's grace can enable you to take marriage as a permanent thing.” Don't be afraid. Two believers can work it out, in most cases, until the marriage is violated in the ways that God talks about in the exceptions. So embrace the importance, the divine plan on the importance of marriage.

Number three, and I love this, “Embrace Jesus' view on the beauty and blessing of lifelong marriage.” Listen, lifelong marriage, the fact that you are bound to your spouse for life, is not a curse; it's God's blessing to you! Remember what God Himself said in Genesis 2, verse 18, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper,’” and in Hebrew, literally, “a helper who corresponds to him in every way.” Not just physically, that's obvious, but also in every way, we correspond to each other. In other words, as man and woman, we fill in the spots in each other in every sense. Ecclesiastes 9:9, “Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given you under the sun; for this is your reward in life.” From whom? From God! God, God intends marriage to be a blessing on humanity. It is one of the ways that He encourages human flourishing. Again, if you're here and you're young and haven't been married, understand that marriage is a creation of God, and it's intended to be a blessing and a benediction in your life where you have a lifelong friend. In July, Sheila and I will celebrate 40 years of marriage. For 40 years, she has been my best friend, and she is still my best friend, and more of a best friend than she ever has been. Marriage, lifelong marriage, is an incredible gift and blessing if you try to do it and do it God's way.

Number four, I know there are folks here who are sitting there uncomfortable because you've made some of these decisions. Well, here's the good news for you. “Repent and accept Jesus' offer of forgiveness and restoration if you have sinned by divorcing or remarrying without biblical grounds.” The bottom line is this, wherever you are today, whatever your circumstance, if you will repent of your sin, if you have sinned in these ways, Jesus says you've broken the commandment against adultery. How do you solve that? You simply pour out your heart to God, and you ask Him to forgive your sin, and you purpose from this moment forward, if you're

remarried, to love that spouse with all of your heart and to be everything you ought to be in that marriage. But there's forgiveness. I love, in Matthew chapter 9, Jesus has an interchange, we'll get to it, but I love this. In Matthew 9, verse 6, Jesus says this, "the Son of Man, (speaking of Himself) has authority on earth to forgive sins." He has authority to forgive your sin, whatever it is, including unbiblical divorce and remarriage. If you'll repent of that, He will—He's promised! He never turns anybody away who comes with a contrite heart.

Maybe you're here, and you have to say, "Tom, not only have I not sought His forgiveness for that, but I've never, I don't know Him; I've never come to know Him; I have never repented and believed in Him." That's the invitation for you today. If you will, where you sit, if you will humble your heart and cry out to God to forgive your sin and to make you right with Him because of the work of Jesus Christ, He will do that. In fact, I often quote to you, when we take the Lord's Table, a passage that comes later in Matthew, Matthew 26:28, Jesus took the cup, and He says, this cup "is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many (For what?) for the forgiveness of sins." The reason God can forgive your sin, including an unbiblical divorce or an unbiblical remarriage or whatever sin it is, the reason He can forgive that is because Jesus paid for that sin on the cross if you're willing to repent and believe in Him. That's my plea for you today. And if you're a believer sitting here and you say, "Tom, I have sinned against God in pursuing an unbiblical divorce or an unbiblical remarriage." Listen, you can, today, find complete, lasting forgiveness at the cross if you're willing to repent. You can be, I love the way Isaiah puts it, you can "be white as snow." Next time, Lord willing, we'll consider verse 32 and Jesus' exposition of exactly what the Scripture does teach about divorce and remarriage.

Let's pray together. Father, thank You for the time we've spent together today. Thank You for Your Word. Lord, we confess to You, we live in a broken world that doesn't understand that

marriage is something You created, and they reject the permanence that You designed into marriage. Father, don't let us, who are Your people, ever do that. Lord, help us to have the mind of Christ about divorce and remarriage. And Lord, if our marriages are a blessing, help us to thank You, to praise You, and to work hard to preserve our marriages. And Father, if our marriages are somehow short of what You intended, help us to be zealous to fix that, to get help so that marriage can be what you intended it to be, a blessing in our lives. And Father, I pray for those here who have sinned against You in this way. Lord, help them to see that You are a forgiving God. Wherever there is true repentance, You never turn away a truly repentant heart. And may they seek You that way even today. Lord, we thank You for what You have taught us in this passage, and we look forward to what You will teach us in the weeks to come. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.