

Traditional Home service Sunday 3rd Oct

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty and everlasting God,
increase in us your gift of faith
that, forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your
commandments and win the crown of
everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ your
Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns
with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

PRAYER OF PENITENCE

Let us admit to God the sin which always
confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.**

We are sorry and repent.

**Have mercy on us according to your
love. Wash away our wrongdoing and
cleanse us from our sin.**

**Renew a right spirit within us
and restore us to the joy of your
salvation, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.** *cf Psalm 51*

PRAISE

Let everything be said and done in the
name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to
God through Jesus Christ. Sing psalms,
hymns and sacred songs:

Let us sing to God with thankful hearts.
Open our lips, Lord:
and we shall praise your name.

HYMN 1 (*Lord of All Hopefulness*)

READINGS - Hebrews 1.1-4; 2.5-12
Mark 10.2-16

TALK

CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth. I believe in
Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who
was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of
the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius
Pilate, was crucified, died, and was
buried; he descended to the dead. On
the third day he rose again; he ascended
into heaven, he is seated at the right
hand of the Father, and he will come to
judge the living and the dead. I believe in
the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness
of sins, the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

*Spend some time praying for our nation,
our community and our families.*

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your
name, your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven. Give us
today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver
us from evil. For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours, now and for
ever. Amen.

HYMN 2 (*Crown Him with Many Crowns*)

CONCLUSION

The love of the Lord Jesus
draw you to himself,
the power of the Lord Jesus
strengthen you in his service,
the joy of the Lord Jesus fill your hearts;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you
always.
Amen.

HYMNS TO USE

Lord of all hopefulness,
Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever child-like,
No cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking,
And give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord,
At the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours,
And give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord,
At the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome,
Your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing,
And give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord,
At the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment,
Whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping,
And give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord,
At the end of the day.

Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem
drowns
all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless king
through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life,
who triumphed o'er the grave,
and rose victorious in the strife
for those he came to save;
his glories now we sing
who died and rose on high,
who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of love;
behold his hands and side,
rich wounds, yet visible above,
in beauty glorified;
no angels in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends their burning
eye
at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of years,
the potentate of time,
creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
All hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

Sermon - Adrian Morton
Mark 10:2-16 Jesus' teaching on divorce

One advantage of the lectionary system is that we are presented with set readings each week from which to speak from.

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So I want to tackle head Jesus' teaching on divorce this morning.

It's an important subject because I think there are still many who carry a degree of shame or condemnation because of a divorce.

And the Gospel message of course is that we needn't carry any shame or condemnation.

I also realise it is a difficult subject.

For some here you will have had first hand experience of divorce.

The trauma and pain that has caused.

And I don't know of anyone who has gone into a marriage not wanting it to be a life long commitment.

But even if you do not have first hand experience of divorce you probably know of someone, either in your family, or your friendship group that has gone through a divorce.

And often people will want to know what is the Christian's view of divorce, or what is the churches view and by inference what is therefore God's view on divorce.

Though as we know that obviously doesn't exactly follow.

Different churches will have different view points on it.

But for many people their first thoughts about God come from either how the church is acting or how their Christian friend is acting.

So its an important and difficult subject.

Turn to the Mark reading.

You may also want to have a finger in the equivalent Matthew passage.

Which is Matt 19, verse 3 onwards.

"Some pharisees came and tested him (i.e. Jesus) by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

In reply Jesus asked them a question in return. About what Moses commanded them to do.

Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send the woman away.

But Jesus said it was because their hearts were hard that Moses permitted that.

And he appealed to Genesis as the norm.

"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

So Jesus was I believe essentially saying that the norm was for a man and woman to stay together for life.

That is the ideal.

I don't think anyone today would argue with that. As I said I don't know of anyone who has gone into a marriage not wanting it to be a life long commitment.

<Although some celebrities are putting in pre-nuptial agreements which are contracts describing how their assets should be split in the event of a divorce.

These don't have any legal standing in this country.>

So Jesus stressed that the ideal was for marriage to be life long between two people, a man and a woman, only.

And that would have challenged the culture of the day.

Polygamy was allowed by most Jews in the 1st century.

Now some churches, and I think this is true of the Catholic church have taken what Jesus says here ...

what God has joined together, let man not separate."

and concluded that divorce is never, not only right, but not possible in God's eyes.

In other words, valid marriages are indissoluble.

Meaning divorce is impossible unless the marriage can be proven to have never existed

Now I don't believe that Jesus meant that here.

"let man not separate" does not mean "It's not possible to separate".

Rather "It is possible to separate but you should not."

The verb is 'imperative mood'.

Sometimes it can have a strong sense of 'Don't!' And sometimes more of a 'Please, don't do it!' But it can never mean, "You cannot".

Jesus wasn't saying that divorce *could not* happen but that it *shouldn't* happen.

So again, Jesus was stressing that the ideal was for marriage to be life long between two people only.

Jesus went on though and talked to his disciples further about this issue.

And he says in verse 11:

"Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Which on the face of it seems clear that Jesus is now saying that divorce is permitted, but only if one of the partners commits adultery.

Before we look in detail at this it is helpful to try and get some background understanding to marriage and divorce in the ancient world.

Because as I hope to show, I believe there are several Biblical reasons, not just adultery, for when divorce is permitted.

BACKGROUND

The world of Ancient middle East was fairly barbaric, including laws for marriage and divorce.

The culture was patriarchal, so that men, and it was just men, could simply walk out on a women.

But if they chose could come back and 'reclaim' both their wife and children.

So the situation wasn't at all fair on women.

The law Moses gave, the Mosaic law, was fairer in all sort of ways but especially for marriage/ divorce.

Moses required that husbands write a certificate of divorce for his wife and hand it to her.

This meant the woman could safely remarry without worrying that the husband could come back and 'reclaim' her.

Deut 24:1 ... *he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house.*

So whilst God never thought divorce a good idea and he designed marriage to last forever, the Mosaic law reduced the amount of suffering particularly for the woman.

That Deut text also gives one Biblical reason for divorce.

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate

of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,"

The meaning 'something indecent about her' is most likely referring to sexual immorality (i.e. adultery).

So adultery is one reason for divorce in the Ancient world.

But there are other Biblical reasons.

In Exodus 21:10-11 it says this:

"If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

Whilst the context is polygamy and a man who has married a slave woman, the principles can be extracted and applied to all marriages.

This text is saying that the husband must provide for his 1st wife that required for a marriage, i.e. the 3 things of food, clothing and conjugal love.

If not then the 1st wife has a right to get divorced. She is free to go.

So the OT recognised 4 grounds for divorce:

The first three are neglect of food, clothing and conjugal love, and the fourth is committing adultery.

These four obligations were the same as the vows exchanged by couples in Jewish marriages.

They promised to feed, clothe exchange conjugal love and be faithful to each other.

The man agreed to provide food and cloth.

The woman agreed to cook and sew.

They both agreed to share conjugal love and be faithful.

Note: conjugal love is wider than sexual intercourse and can describe physical affection.

The principles behind these details was that each partner had to supply material support (food and clothing) and also physical affection.

So where there was abuse or neglect of these things in a marriage, these were grounds for divorce.

And either the man or the woman, whoever was the victim, could enact a divorce.

If your partner broke his or her marriage vows, i.e. the promise to feed, clothe & exchange conjugal love and be faithful to each other, you could choose to divorce them.

So again to be clear, the OT recognised 4 grounds for divorce:

The first three are neglect of food, clothing and conjugal love, and the fourth is committing adultery.

<P>

It's worth dwelling at this point that God was a divorcee.

God divorced Israel because it had broken the vows.

So in Jer 3:8

'Judah saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce.'

The 'God hates divorce' verse in Malachi is put into this context.

Why does God hate divorce?

Because he knows the personal pain that results from it.

It is the breaking of the marriage vows, which result in divorce that God hates.

The person, who breaks the marriage vows ends the marriage.

Not the innocent person who decides to end the broken contract by enacting a divorce.

Now these reasons for divorce, neglect of food, clothing, conjugal love and adultery.

These reasons were still in use until about AD70. But they were very rarely used when Jesus was preaching.

By the time of Jesus, what was happening was this.

Various Rabbis' or teachers' who would take the OT laws and apply their own interpretation of them.

And each of these Rabbi's would have their own following.

In the case of marriage and divorce, by the end of the 1st century a new groundless divorce had grown in popularity.

It was invented by Rabbi Hillel and was called the 'Any cause' divorce.

Rabbi Hillel reasoned that in Deut 24.1, i.e.

"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,"

the phrase '*something indecent about her*' Hillel interpreted that as referring to both sexual immorality (i.e. adultery) and for 'any cause'.

So Hillel and his followers reasoned only men (cos' that is what is referred to in Deut 24) could initiate an 'any cause' divorce and it could be used for any *cause*.

The divorce didn't require any proof so there would be no court proceedings.

Woman even saw advantages in it because they would be able to claim the marriage inheritance, often enough to live on, whereas if it could be proved that any unfaithfulness was involved then the marriage inheritance was lost.

Joseph thought about using this kind of divorce when it became clear that Mary was pregnant.

So on one side we had Rabbi Hillel with his 'any cause' divorce..

An alternative Rabbi, Shammai disagreed with this saying Hillel had interpreted the Scriptures wrongly.

He insisted that Deut 24.1 meant nothing more than the ground of 'sexual Immorality'. Their summary was that,

'a man should not divorce his wife except he has found 'sexual immorality' in her.'

This debate raged and the terms 'except for sexual immorality' and 'any cause' became legal terms of the day and referred to the two positions of the Rabbi's.

And this was a well known debate in that day.

So in our reading when the Pharisees came to Jesus, to test him.

Jesus was being asked to speak into this debate. Would he side with Rabbi Hillel or Rabbi Shammai?

In Matthew's version of our reading, it says this:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason? (i.e. 'any cause')"

In the Mark version 'for any and every reason' is left out.

Why is that?

Well Mark was written earlier, and it was probably because everyone knew what the debate was.

They would have mentally added 'for any cause'.

<It would be like today saying 'is it lawful for an under 16 to drink?

If it were simply about drinking and under 16's were banned from drinking they would die of dehydration! But we all mentally add 'alcohol'>

Both Mark and Luke are summarising this teaching whereas Matthew, as it was written later, filled in some details as the debate was less well known.

So Jesus was being asked about his view on the debate of the day.

And not simply being asked whether divorce was lawful or not.

And that is an important distinction.

It wouldn't have made any sense anyway to ask Jesus about divorce in general, because under the law of Moses divorce was granted.

In reply, once the Pharisees got him back onto the question he said that the Deut 24.1 verse meant 'except for sexual immorality' and didn't mean for 'any cause'.

He was agreeing with Rabbi Shammai's interpretation of that particular passage.

So it was a specific answer to a specific debate and he wasn't applying a universal law about divorce in general.

(Paul in 1 Cor 7:15 allows divorce for abandonment).

To emphasise his point, Jesus went on to say (in verse 10 & 11) that if someone did divorce for 'any cause' then they were not properly divorced and if re-married they would be committing adultery.

The disciples were shocked that they couldn't divorce for 'any cause' and said:

"If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

The main (and shocking point for the Jews) was that Jesus was rejecting the 'any cause' divorce by saying that if you remarried after getting this type of divorce, the divorce wasn't valid and you were effectively still married.

Let's summarise...

There were and are 4 Biblical reasons for divorce.

3 reasons due to the neglect of food, clothing and conjugal love, or material support and physical affection.

And also adultery.

I believe Jesus affirmed these principles.

I also think Jesus was determined to tell his listeners where they had all gone wrong with regard to marriage and divorce.

Polygamy was a widespread practice. Jesus told them that monogamy was the Biblical ideal from the beginning.

He stressed that God intended marriage to be life-long and that marriage breakup was a tragedy.

Jesus also stressed that God does not want us to divorce if we can avoid it, even in the case of adultery.

His statement 'Moses allowed divorce for *hard-heartedness* would have been well understood.

It referred to how Israel had been with God. And eventually God sent her away with a divorce.

Jesus said elsewhere about the need to forgive one another.

And this applies to marriage - we should forgive a partner who sins and repents.

We should only consider divorce if they continually break their vows with hardheartedness.

i.e. If they stubbornly continue and refuse to repent

Jesus was allowing divorce, but only as a last resort, and only when a partner breaks their vows stubbornly and unrepentantly.

Conclusion:

Have some space to think this through...

If you have been a victim of divorce, the innocent partner, but have also hung on to a sense of shame and guilt.

Then it is time to lay down that sense of shame and guilt down. And receive healing for it.

If you know that you were the one that broke the vows, then restoration is available in the Lord.

As with other commandments, when we confess our sin, the Lord is faithful and will cleanse our consciousness.

There may be consequences that we still have to live with.

Whenever sin has happened, there will be consequences to work through.

But we can know complete forgiveness and restoration in the Lord.

If divorce doesn't affect you personally, then there will be opportunities to speak life and grace to those who have gone through the pain and trauma of it...

Romans 8:1 - *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For in Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set you free from the law of sin and death.*