

Jesus on Marriage

Matthew 19:3-12

Series: *Jesus On _____: The Only Perspective that Matters*

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

This past week, I was at a Board meeting for HCPN – Houston Church Planter’s Network. There are eight of us on this Board and it exists to see the city of Houston saturated with churches. Our desire is collaboration for the sake of multiplication.

Champion Forest is what is considered an “anchor church” in this organization because of our giving and involvement in it. We’ve helped plant over 100 churches in the Houston area since 2010.

I love being a part of this because it crosses denominational lines and we have gospel-centered churches working together to plant more gospel-centered churches, advance the Kingdom, not just advancing a church or a group of churches agenda. I also think this is a MAJOR reason God is blessing our efforts and we have cities across North America coming to us and asking us how this has all come about.

I was at our annual Board meeting this past week, and we always begin the retreat with giving an update on our life, our church our ministry – and the founder as we were preparing to give updates, spread us across the room and told us to NOT just write out what we’re dealing with or looking forward to, but as an exercise of creativity, draw it out in a picture.

Well, you are looking at the MOST uncreative person in the world...I don’t draw pictures...my mind doesn’t really work in that way, but as I thought about what I was going to share with the group, I ended up drawing a picture that I think painted for them some of what I’m facing in a personal way over the next six months are so...and here is the picture I drew! (**SHOW PIC**)

As you can see (maybe), it’s a man walking a tightrope! And I thought about this picture in preparing for this weekend’s message because truthfully, this is how I feel today.

I feel like I’m walking a tightrope because of the subject and nature of what we’re covering today in our *Jesus on* series.

The message title: **Jesus on Marriage**

Matt. 19:3-10 – “And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?”

⁴He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said,

‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” ⁷They said to him,

“Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?” ⁸He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce

your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹ And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Do you see now, why I said this about walking on a tightrope? THIS...if there EVER was one, is a very sensitive subject. And if I could be honest and transparent with you for a moment, I almost chose to leave it out of the series.

One, because we're going to have to tackle divorce in order to fully teach this text and for anyone who has ever gone through one, it's very personal and often times painful for people to think about.

I would MUCH rather talk about this in a one-on-one setting with those that it affects where I can listen and give undivided attention to your situation because truthfully, every situation is different and therefore the advice and counsel I would give to people who are facing a divorce, have gone through a divorce, or considering a divorce would be different...it would be specific to the person and the situation.

So, teaching it in a setting like this and approaching a subject like this in a broad-brush kind of way is not my favorite way to teach, but I also think to avoid it all together is not the answer either.

To just teach on (v. 3-6) is NOT fully teaching the text and does a disservice to the word of God that I will be held accountable for teaching, and it's a disservice to many that even if done in a broad-brush kind of way need to hear and wrestle with what Jesus said on this issue.

And so, here is what I'm going to ask of you as we get going today. I'm going to ask you to listen patiently to me. I'm going to unpack this text to the best of my ability in the 35-40 min and ask that you stay with me to the very end.

Secondly, I'm going to ask you to listen attentively to the Holy Spirit. Every person in here is not in the same place as it relates to the divorce issue, and I believe God, the Holy Spirit can take what we talk about today and it could be applied differently to different people in the room depending upon your specific situation, and you are going to have to listen to the Holy Spirit and discern his voice through his Word so that you can be obedient to him.

So, there is a responsibility on both our parts. I want to handle this in a sacred way and believe I have done my due diligence in studying, and my prayer all week is that I handle this today with great tenderness and grace. And you have a responsibility to listen patiently to the sermon and attentively to the Holy Spirit so we can get as much out of today as possible.

Let's begin: Jesus on marriage. And let's start by covering: **What God Designs**

God is the architect of marriage. He's got the blueprints. It's the first institution he created. Before establishing the nation of Israel...before founding the Church...God founded marriage. It was his idea.

And this is what Jesus reminds the Pharisees of when they come up and ask him this question regarding divorce. He takes them back to the very beginning.

**Matt. 19:4-6 – “He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,
⁵ and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

So, let’s just outline here the original blueprint of marriage. This is marriage as God designed it.

First, notice it’s male and female. If you’re interested at all on what we believe regarding sexuality, I really encourage you to go online to our media page and you can download either the link or the actual message notes to a sermon I did on this in a series from two years ago we called *Chasing Sanity*.

MOST of the issues we are dealing with in our culture today, if you want a biblical worldview regarding them – sexuality, transgenderism, sanctity of life and marriage – just go back to the creation account in Genesis 1. This is exactly what Jesus does.

He is quoting verbatim in (v. 4-6), Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:24. And he states that marriage from the beginning is between one man and one woman. In a word, we could say: **Marriage is exclusive**

It’s one man and one woman AND that’s it! The man leaves – this word is a deliberate abandonment...it’s also translated as “forsake” – he and she leaves father and his mother and they “cleave” or “holds fast” to one another.

The words “hold fast” here mean to “unite”! It’s the idea of being glued together...cemented together! And get this...it’s NOT something the man and woman do, it’s something done to them!

In other words, marriage is not only God’s idea, but he’s the one behind the actions taking place here. How else do the two become one?

This is something ONLY God can do. THIS is VERY important to understand because it’s also something that only God can UNDO. We’ll get to this momentarily.

So, we can say that marriage is exclusive. We can also say: **Marriage is sacred**

Again, this is God’s idea and he’s the one uniting two people together and making them one. To become “one flesh” is not just the act of physical intimacy, it is the intermingling of spirit and soul. This is one of the reasons the covenant of marriage is so important the Lord – it involves him!

I won't go too far down this trail, but marriage is uniquely spiritual. It's divine...at least from God's perspective it is. In a way, it mirrors the Godhead...the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – there is a three in oneness there.

So too with marriage. God lives in us and unites us, and we become one flesh, UNITED together with him. I highlight this to emphasize how important the marriage covenant is to God. It's NOT to be taken lightly and/or be entered into flippantly.

Illus. The Golden Bachelor - It's not a TV Show where we put a Bachelor on with a bunch of bachelorettes and have a contest for who can win the rose!

By the way, did you see the news that came out Friday? The Golden Bachelor met his bride on the show last Fall. He was 72, she was 70 – they met, fell in love on the show, were married in January and announced Friday they are getting a divorce! The rose wilted fast!

Marriage is not – and again, we are looking at these subjects from the perspective of Jesus – the series is *Jesus on ___: The Only Perspective That Matters*. And the perspective of Jesus is, marriage is not flippant...it's holy...it's sacred.

Lastly, Jesus will share his viewpoint on marriage and that is that: **Marriage is permanent**

Again, this is his design...this is his ideal. AND this verse...at least (v. 6b) – Jesus adds his commentary and because we are talking about Jesus's point of view on marriage, don't miss it!

Matt. 19:6b – “...What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

This is what God designs. A marriage that is exclusive, sacred, and permanent. It's his idea and he has the rights to it...it's his intellectual property.

But listen...as is ALWAYS the case, what God designs, Satan wants to destroy. What God desires, Satan wants to distort. What God unites, Satan wants to separate and divide. This is his modus operandi.

And so, before moving into the next section of this sermon, let's just acknowledge and talk very quickly about HOW Satan attempts to destroy that which God designs, and it's not that hard to see!

Satan is not that complicated in his schemes. He's been running the same play since the Garden of Eden. And the primary way the Enemy works to destroy what God designs is THROUGH our thinking. Because faulty thinking leads to faulty living.

What Satan wants is to get in between our ears. He knows what happens in the mind, plays out in time, and so, he works overtime:

- to cloud our judgment...

- to get us living off our emotions and feelings rather than truth...
- to distract us from spending time with him and having our minds (the warning of Rom. 12:2) conform to the pattern of this world...

So much so that we begin to think less and less about what God wants, what honors him, what makes him happy and more and more about what we want and what makes us happy.

Trace the rebellion of man all the way back, and it begins with Satan targeting the mind. He puts a question mark, where God has put a period. He did this in the Garden when he said to Eve via the serpent, "Did God really say?"

If you want to know how Satan destroys and distorts, it starts with him playing in our mind...tinkling with our thinking. Look at it in the terms in which we just discussed.

Jesus says, "Marriage is exclusive." What does Satan say? Exclusive? (question mark?) One man and one woman? That's so old school...it's just about being in love. That was just the culture back then, that's not relevant for us living today. Question mark.

Jesus says, "Marriage is sacred." What does Satan say? Nothing sacred about it. It's just two people who come together that have fallen in love and if they fall out of love – hey, get a "no fault divorce". Sacred? Question mark.

Jesus says, "Marriage is permanent." What does Satan say? He says, "Don't give me this covenant stuff...this is contractual. For life?! Maybe...if they hold up on their end of this, I'll hold up on mine. But, the moment, I don't think I'm getting what I need out of this, I'm out!" Question mark.

And it's with this thinking...it's getting access to our mind, where Satan does his best work as it relates to destroying what God designs.

And listen to me...the research shows this to be true! According to Pew Research, in a document entitled: *Religious Landscape Study*, they surveyed around 25,000 Christians regarding various views about different subjects. Of those who accept homosexual marriage: 60% claimed to never read the Bible or pray.

In other words, how can we expect them to hold to what God says, when they don't read his word to get his viewpoint on things? Only 28% believe in an absolute truth...which means that 72% of them said there is no standard of absolute truth – it's all question mark thinking! This is EXACTLY where the Enemy wants us!

And check this...when asked how they arrived at their belief regarding absolute truth or homosexual marriage, 61% of them said their views come from their own thoughts and opinions.

If you're looking for a reason we are doing this series, look no further than this right here!

Because here's the deal: For Christians, Jesus's perspective is truly the ONLY perspective that should matter to us. And we can't get Jesus's perspective without getting to the scripture. The only question mark thinking for the believer should be, "What does God say about this?"

Any other thinking will be faulty thinking and will play right into Satan's hand and strategy to destroy what God has designed because as we said a moment ago faulty thinking leads to faulty living.

Do NOT minimize the attack of the Enemy on what God treasures the most! Namely, man and woman – those created in his image. He wants to eliminate any thinking regarding the uniqueness of the Imago Dei AND the uniqueness of the divine covenant that he created in marriage which is a picture of his union with his people.

If Satan is after anything, he is after these two things, and we see an all-out assault on it every single day.

Now, because of the Enemy and his attempts to destroy and distort God's ideal and design...because of the original sin, PRIDE...wanting what we want over what God wants, questioning his Word, and wondering what it is he is withholding from us...because of this, sin enters the world and as a result there is brokenness. AND this brokenness of course involves people.

Now, we've seen what God designs, but we have to ask because of the reality of the Evil one and the brokenness and sin that exists, when it comes to marriage and divorce, we have to ask and see from the scripture: **What God Allows**

This was the question that was presented to Jesus in Matthew 19...and it was meant to be a trap!

Matt. 19:3 – “**And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him** (the word “test” is also the word “tempt”...they are trying to trip him up over some nuance in the Mosaic Law) **by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?”**”

Now, in the day of Jesus, there were two schools of thought as it relates to the issue of divorce. This is VERY important. The first school of thought was from a more conservative rabbi...the other was more liberal.

And their thoughts on this centered from Moses teaching on divorce in Deuteronomy 24. Let me read it to you.

Deut. 24:1a – “**When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then 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 of his house...**”

This is the text in question. And here was the debate. What did Moses mean by the phrase “found some indecency in her”? That phrase can literally be translated as “a matter of nakedness”.

Now, the two rabbinical schools of thought...and we have their oral traditions passed down to us in what is called the Mishnah. The more conservative rabbis translated this “indecent” as sexual sin...adultery...immorality of some kind.

The more liberal rabbis felt if Moses wanted to say adultery, he could have just come out and said it, but because he didn't, men could therefore issue a divorce for ANY cause of indecent...and when I say any, I mean any!

In this school of thought, an act of indecent was to burn a meal...to “spoil a dish”...and since Moses wrote in (24:1) “she lost favor in his eyes” that means if he finds someone prettier, issue the divorce.

Now, question...speaking to a BUNCH of men in what was a first century men's world, who's opinion do you think was more popular? The more conservative or the more liberal?

Yeah...the same one that would be popular today...the more liberal one. And it's in this context that this question is issued to Jesus.

Now, just a couple of insights into how Jesus answered this question. First, he corrected what they said about Moses. Look at the original question again:

Matt. 19:3 – “And the Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?”

Jesus takes them back to the beginning...to God's original intent. He doesn't at first answer their question and so they push him on it.

Matt. 19:7 – “They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

Now, this certificate of divorce was a legal document that was given mainly to protect the woman. Remember, women were treated as property. And so, this certificate was given to help women so if they had to remarry there, was “proof” of a legal divorce if you will.

Moses in allowing certificates of divorce is trying to make a positive (for women) out of a negative (men just sending them away in a male-dominated world). And Jesus tells them this!

Matt. 19:8 – “He said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed (he didn't command – he allowed because of the hardening of sin – that hardness represents a stubbornness...it's an unrepentant spirit – because of this Moses allowed) you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning (goes once again to God's original design) it was not so.”

And then look at this...very important. In a day where there were only two schools of thought on this:

- One, you can divorce for any issue at all – any cause divorce...

- Two, you can only divorce due to immorality or adultery...

Jesus picks a school...and look at what he says in **Matt. 19:9** – “**And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality** (“porneia” – its where we get the word pornography from...it’s any illicit sexual activity outside of the confines of biblical marriage), **and marries another, commits adultery.**”

And if you have an ESV Bible, there is a footnote given that some manuscripts add: “...and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” and other manuscripts add “except for sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

So, what translation is most accurate and how can we know what Jesus is saying here? Well, you need to know that there are scholars and theologians that differ on this, but here is how your pastor looks at this...at least this is how I look at it at 8:50 on Sunday morning, April the 14th.

I think I’m right...and if you disagree, I think you are wrong.

I THINK the translation that is best and the most accepted reading of Matt. 9:19, for a number of reasons, is the last one given in the footnote.

In other words, this is how I think it should be translated...as other manuscripts do!

Matt. 19:9 – “**And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**”

I think this is the most accurate first, because of context. Again, remember who he is talking to and when he is talking! It’s a man’s world. And I think what Jesus is saying here is think about what you’re doing!

Moses didn’t give certificates of divorce so that you could just send your wife off like she is some piece of property. Any cause divorce?!

That’s the furthestest thing from Jesus’s mind because he takes us to God’s original intent on marriage twice (v. 4-6, 8b). It’s NOT “let’s see how easy it is to get out of this.” Jesus is stating that divorce should not be the first option or an easy option, but instead it should be the last resort!

Add to this context the heart of Jesus which was always for those that were oppressed...the poor...the broken in society.

What Jesus is getting at here is if you’re asking me to choose between the two schools of thought – any cause divorce or that of only due to sexual immorality, I’m telling you to take the hard way out...take the most difficult of the two BECAUSE it’s women that are getting the brunt end of this deal!”

“When you send them away, you are “MAKING” them – that’s the word Jesus uses there in this translation...it can also be translated as the word “forced” – You’re forcing them to commit adultery. How else are they going to survive except to marry someone else?

And then other men, who want out of their marriage will marry your wife that you sent away and divorced, and it will just be this marry-go-round of marriages, and by doing that the man marrying the divorced woman is committing adultery.

Listen to how theologian and commentator, **William Barclay** described the setting and background of marriage at the time of Jesus:

“There is no time in history when the marriage bond stood in greater peril of destruction than in the days when Christianity first came into this world. At the time the world was in danger of witnessing the almost total break-up of marriage and the collapse of the home.”

Jesus is fighting for marriage...he is fighting for the home. It’s why he goes back to the original design TWICE and it’s why he tells these men, you send you’re wife off for just any cause divorce, you are making her commit adultery and making anyone who marries her is committing adultery.

And we know this was a “hard saying” and that it got their attention because look at how they respond to Jesus!

Matt. 19:10 – “The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Their thought is, “If I’ve got to stay in this...if I can’t get out of this for ANY reason except for unrepentant sexual immorality, it may just be better to stay single!” And notice: Jesus doesn’t argue with their conclusion.

There is on other reason I think this interpretation we’re talking about is correct and that’s because this is the second time, Jesus has said it. Look back with me at the Sermon on the Mount.

Matt. 5:31-32 – “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’³² But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

Now, think with me on this. A male-dominated world...they can issue a divorce any time they want for any reason they want! And important to note, Matthew’s audience is Jewish, so he is dealing with the Jewish line of thought, reasoning and law.

And in Jewish culture and law women didn't have a whole lot of rights...they didn't have a whole lot of voice in matters.

And so, in this Jesus ups the stakes for what is permissible regarding divorce...it's NOT just for ANY reason. He's looking out for the sanctity of marriage (this is the original design) AND as already noted, he's looking out for the safety of women.

This is why I think we can state that if one is being abused...if you're safety is at stake, Jesus would not want you to stay in that marriage.

In Jesus specifying "except for sexual immorality", he was talking to men – "whoever divorces his wife..." If his main audience was women, I am certain he would counsel if they are getting abused to get help to ensure their safety.

It makes no sense to tell a woman to stay in a marriage where they are being hurt, abused, taken advantage of, beaten and as long as the man doesn't cheat on them physically, their bound to it! That's NOT what Jesus is teaching!

So, we've looked at:

1. What God designs...and that is a marriage that is exclusive, sacred and permanent.
2. What God allows...and he allows for divorce in cases where there is unrepentant sexual immorality, where there is abuse (there is a lot that could go into that physical, verbal, emotional and that's why you need to listen to the Holy Spirit and wise counsel concerning your specific situation. I will say if it is physical abuse, please tell someone you trust and let them help you separate as soon as you can!)

God also allows for divorce in circumstances involving abandonment. Paul wrote a lot about this in his letter to Corinth. You can look later in (1 Cor. 7) – since we are looking at this from the perspective of Jesus and for time purposes, we're not going there, just know Jesus and Paul are not contradictory on this!

I also know that MUCH could fall into the abandonment category – i.e. abandonment physically, emotionally, spiritually. These are MAJOR issues that come up because of sin and the brokenness that comes with it, and there are no easy answers or solutions.

This is why I stated at the beginning, I'd much rather be having coffee with you and talking about this instead of preaching a broad-brush sermon.

I will tell you this, you need to look at your situation prayerfully...don't sin against your conscious...get wisdom, and when it comes to the issue of divorce, I'd just encourage you NOT minimize its importance and don't cheapen its value by looking for a way out.

Divorce is costly (physically, emotionally, financially) – no one wins in a divorce. When you take something that is glued together and try to separate it doesn't come without damage.

I remind us all though what man can't separate, God can. And while all divorce is caused by sin...not one divorce takes place where sin isn't involved - as we have seen not all divorce is sinful. God does allow for it in scripture.

Let's look finally at: **What God Desires**

Let me say this first and then we'll attempt to look at this from a few different angles: **What God desires is what God designs.**

If you are here today and single and never been married...you're a high school student or college student and marriage is in your future – what God desires is what he designs!

He wants your marriage to be what it was originally meant to be and that is exclusive, sacred and permanent.

If you are here and maybe your marriage is in a tight spot...you and your spouse are on the outs and you wonder what does God desire for me? For my marriage?

What he would desire for you is to make sure your heart is soft...NOT hard...and it can only be soft when it is cultivated with the word of God, with a spirit of humility and confession of sin.

And he would no doubt want you to work on your marriage, get the help you need...talk to a pastor or a counselor. Even if there has been adultery or abandonment, if you are still in the marriage, it's not over!

If God can resurrect a dead person, he can resurrect a dead marriage. There is HOPE, and if I didn't believe that, I'd stop preaching Jesus. There CAN be forgiveness and reconciliation IF you both want it and work towards it.

I feel like I need to say this...sometimes, when we hear about divorce, and we think, "Well, it takes two...I didn't get here alone." Sometimes!

Sometimes though it just takes one to divorce. I've seen many instances:

- where only one side wants to work...
- where only one side wants to forgive...
- where only one side wants to do what has to be done...

And as a result, the marriage breaks up and dissolves.

Listen, if you are still married, God desires for you to stay married – and it may take:

- some time to forgive...
- some time to work through issues...
- staying married may cost you some pain...

But God could be writing a beautiful story of redemption and resurrection that will help others in the future going through some of the same stuff your facing now. I know of a dozen or so couples that this is their story.

So, just know if you are going through a tough spot, you're not alone...it doesn't have to be over and I'm telling you God doesn't want it to be over.

If you are divorced, what does God desire of you? The same thing he desires for anyone – a relationship with you. He wants your divorce to lead you into a deeper intimacy and trust with him, and he desires for you to know that you are not defined by your divorce.

He doesn't label you. The world wants to label. Divorcee...Adulterer...cheater...liar...

The world labels...there are only TWO labels God sees and makes – inside of Christ and outside of Christ. So, I just want to say to those that are divorced, God sees you as you are – his son and daughter! You're not a label!

And once you have dealt with your divorce, which takes time and once you've made that decision to move forward, Paul gives us some words concerning remarriage (1 Cor. 7) and make sure whatever you do you "re-marry in the Lord..."

And if you have remarried and let's, say your divorce and remarriage is outside of the boundaries of scripture. My word to you is to be honest about it, take responsibility, bring it the Lord, and by his grace, move forward.

Divorce and remarriage even if outside the boundaries of what scripture says is NOT the unpardonable sin and you are NOT in a state of perpetual adultery.

So, don't walk in guilt! Don't let the Enemy accuse you! You are "in Christ" and there is NO condemnation for those who are "in Christ" (Rom. 8:1).

My goodness if you have trusted Christ since those decisions of divorce and/or remarriage, you are a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), the old has passed and the new has come, so the only thing that should be defining us is our present relationship with Jesus.

And I'll conclude this message by addressing those that have been divorced and remarried. What does God desire of you?

What God desires is what God designs.

Make this marriage the very best it can be, by giving it to the Lord. And let's all seek to live out God's original design because our marriage reflects the Lord, and it is our greatest tool in showing people what the covenant love of God looks like.

Will you pray with me?

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.