

Reeks: Verwaarloosde Insig oor Verhoudings

Titel: *Marriage & Divorce*

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Good morning, friends, it's good to be with you again. It's always a privilege. I'm going to invite you to get that little leaflet out of your brochure as we look at our theme for today, which is a difficult theme: marriage and divorce, and I'm going to read two passages from the New Testament, words that Jesus speaks, and I'm sure that as I read them to you, you are so happy you don't have to preach on them today, but you will pray for me, I know, and I depend a lot on your prayer as I preach.

So let me read to you words by the One that we follow, Jesus Christ, and I read from Matthew 5, it's part of the sermon on the mount, and he said these words: it has been said... it has been said, this is something that happened under the Mosaic Law, that anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce, that's all that's required, but I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

And then we move to another encounter in Matthew 19. I'm going to read the first nine verses. When Jesus had finished saying these things He left Galilee and He went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. 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?"

Haven't you read, He replied, that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female and said: 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 flesh?. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate. Why then, they asked, did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away? That was the practice of that day.

Jesus replied: Moses permitted... permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard, but it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery. And so we thank Jesus for those difficult words, and we ask for the help of His Spirit, that His Spirit will be with us and help us to share this morning in a way that will be helpful. Amen. When I sat down this week to prepare for today my mind went back to an incident that happened in my own life when I was in grade 11. I think I must have been about 15... 14, 15 years of age, and I was staying at home from school, and... I couldn't remember the reason. I don't know if I... it was a duvet day for me, I don't know if it was... kind of I was trying to miss an exam, I don't know if I was sick, but I was at home alone, and I decided to do something which I shouldn't do, which I shouldn't have done.

I started to look through the cupboards of my parents, my mum and my dad, and as I was looking through the cupboards I came across two certificates, and I discovered for the first time that both my parents had gone through a divorce, and that for some reason they had never been able to tell me, and you can imagine the shock.

I didn't know what to do, and you won't believe this, but for almost three years I carried that information in my heart and I couldn't bring myself to talk about it with my mum and with my dad, and it was only in my early 20s that I was able to go to my mum and dad and say to them, you know, can you tell me the story. Can you tell me the story?

It's not an easy thing to talk about divorce. It's not an easy thing, and yet, friends, we really need to talk about divorce. We must talk about it. Jesus speaks about it. We need to speak about it, and that's what we are going to speak about today.

I know that, as I speak here today, that there are many of us here, sitting here today, who have been through the deep, deep anguish of a divorce experience, and I know that those of us who have not been through a divorce will never fully understand the pain and the heartache of what it's like to go through that experience.

I don't know how many times someone who's been divorced has said to me, Trevor, it's worse than losing someone through death. I don't know how many times I've said that... heard that, the pain, the guilt, the shame. Someone came to me a few weeks ago and said these words to me... can you just feel the anguish? This person came to me at church and said I've just been through a divorce. Am I still acceptable to God?

Can you feel the pain, the spiritual pain? Am I still acceptable to God? I know that as I speak today there are a number of folk who are struggling in their marriage, I know that, struggling to find their way, your way into the future, not too sure what route you've got to take or need to take, and maybe this is the last kind of sermon you want to hear, and you just want to run for it. Just stay for a moment.

I know that there may be young people here who still feel a sadness about the divorce of their parents. Debbie, the person I'm married to, and I, we meet regularly with a group: eight couples in their 30s. We meet for... we have supper together, and then we talk for three hours. It's a group of 16 young people in their 30s. I call them young people.

Ten of those young people, of those 16, come from homes which have experienced divorce, and as we shared our life stories almost every one of them began to tear up, began to cry, as they spoke about the divorce of their parents that happened five, ten, 15, 20 years ago, the pain, the sadness, the heartache still close to the surface.

I know that almost every one of us here today relates to people who've been through the pain. How do we relate warmly, helpfully, creatively? We're touching on something that is profoundly deep and profoundly painful, and it's against this backdrop today that I want us to explore the very difficult words of Jesus. I don't want us to duck and dive. I want us to allow Christ to engage us and to speak to us, and I want to say very quickly what I'm not going to do this morning.

I cannot - and I want to put this out there - I cannot cover all the biblical teaching on marriage and divorce from Genesis to Revelation. I can't do that this morning, and some of you are happy that I can't do that. I can't do that. I can only specifically focus on the words that are before us, but I will try do that with an awareness of what is said in the rest of Scripture.

But let me also tell you what I'm not going to be doing this morning, and this may disappoint some of you: I'm not going to be laying down any rules or regulations or laws in concrete. I'm not going to be doing that. I don't believe Jesus did it, and I will try show you that. I don't believe Jesus was into rules, into regulations.

He in fact said Himself, you know this, Matthew 5:20, unless you're righteousness goes beyond the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, beyond laws, beyond regulations, you'll never experience the reality of the life of God and the Kingdom, but what I am going to do is this: I'm going to offer you a few invitations, whether you're married, whether you're divorced, whether you're young, whether your old, I'm going to offer you a few invitations that come out of the words that Jesus speaks, and as I offer these invitations to you, maybe you want to ask God: God, which is the invitation that I need to begin to explore, and the first invitation that I just want to put out there this morning is this: it's an invitation from Jesus to see marriage as a covenant, to see marriage as a covenant.

Look at these words that He speaks in Matthew 19, right at the beginning. He says haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and He said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother, be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh, that's a very intimate term, so they are no longer two, but one, therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate, and you... don't you, as you read those words, you get this picture of marriage as covenant.

It's more than a legal agreement. It's more than a legal contract. It is a covenant that we enter into of profound faithfulness, of deep intimacy, and of permanent commitment. Now, that jars with the culture today, doesn't it? We don't live in a commitment friendly culture. We don't. We are bombarded, every day, by messages that undermine this.

I love the story of the guy, have you heard it? I don't know if I've shared this with you or not. He rocks up at... I don't know if he came to Mosaic or not, but he rocks up at his wedding: 16 women, 16. The priest says you can't get married to 16, it's just one. He says no, 16. The priest says no, you're just allowed one. He says no, it's in the marriage services: four better, four worse, four richer, and four poorer.

Hey, we like many options, hey, but there is... there's like a hidden message in our culture: you can get out of this if you want to, huh? I was reading the Saturday Star the other day. They... you will know, some of you who read the Saturday Star, there's a... is it Verve, it's a lifestyle section, the middle page article, full page, how to have an affair. How's that, hey, and so the invitation is for those of us who are not married, for those of us who are married, for those of us who are single: see marriage as a covenant, as a covenant, a lifelong covenant.

This is God's dream, God's ideal, and therefore, and I'm going to say this very quickly, the best basis for getting married, those of you who are not married, the best basis for getting married is not romantic love. It's important, but it's not the best basis. Romantic feelings, you know, come and go. It's nice when they're there, and it's lovely to have moments that are kind of candlelight and roses, lovely, I love them, but it's not a good basis for marriage. Sexual attraction: critical, critical, but it's not the best basis.

The best basis, if marriage is a covenant, the best basis for marriage is I enter this because I have a deep regard for my own wellbeing and the wellbeing of my partner, and I believe that together we can advance God's Kingdom together, the best basis, the best basis, so that's the first invitation. It's an invitation to see marriage in covenantal terms, and not only contractual terms.

Second invitation: it's an... and now I get nervous as I stand here, it's an invitation to see divorce as a last ditch solution to a destructive relationship. It's an invitation to see divorce as a last... as a last ditch solution to an utterly destructive relationship.

Look at these words that Jesus speaks, and let's look at them carefully: He goes on to say why then they asked, did Moses command, because this was the practice of the day, and I'm going to talk about this a little bit, why then, they asked, did Moses command that a man just give his wife a certificate of a divorce and send her away? That is what happened in those days.

Jesus replied: Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard, Jesus wants to protect women from hard hearted men, but it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. Now, I'm going to ask for those words to stay there for a moment, just for a moment. I want us to just... I want us just to look at those words.

Now, there are two ways, I speak carefully, there are two ways in which we can interpret this passage, two ways. The one way can lead to tragedy, heartache, destruction. There's another way of reading these words that can lead to life, to life. Here's the first option, and it's the way that many folk read these words. It is to turn Jesus' words into a concrete rule, regulation, and law, in other words to say that the only reason that one can get divorced, the only reason: this is the law, it's in concrete, it's regulation, is for sexual unfaithfulness.

So what do I do as a pastor when you come to me, or someone comes to me who's in a destructive relationship, and the person comes to me and says these words: I'm abused, mentally and physically. I am beaten up on a regular basis. My kids are abused and punished by my partner in my... my partner is into addiction that is messing up my life. Do I then just say to this person who is being abused day after day after day, you've got to stay in the marriage because there's no evidence of sexual unfaithfulness? Would Jesus want me to say that? That interpretation has led to absolute heartbreak, and in some cases terrible tragedy, often the case of suicide. There's another way of interpreting these words, a way of interpreting these words that is faithful to the context in which they were first spoken. When Jesus speaks these words, please hear me, when Jesus speaks these words He is protesting the divorce practices of that day.

It was so easy to get a divorce in that day, and you get a hint of that at the beginning. All you had to do, if you were a Jewish male and you didn't want to be married, all you had to do was this: you called two witnesses together, two witnesses, your two neighbours. You just say quickly come, and I give your wife a certificate saying you're going to divorce her, and it could be for anything: spoiling the meal, kicking the dog, having a bit of a temper tantrum. Call my neighbours together, just give a certificate.

It was a throwaway society. Women got divorced for hardly anything, and you can imagine the social repercussions of that, and men went from woman to woman to woman to woman to woman, and when Jesus does this and says these words He's saying that practice is just not on. It's just not on, and so there's a sense in which Jesus here lifts the bar on behalf of women in their marriages with men.

So some of you are saying, then, Trevor, but then, what is the basis for divorce, and I want to come back to my words: it's the last ditch solution to a terribly destructive relationship, and I think in our culture we sometimes make the mistake of getting out too soon, too soon, too quickly, before we have made use of all the resources that there are available, resources from God, from the Christian community, from the professional community, for the sake of the marriage.

Some of you are struggling in your marriage right now. Don't give up too quickly. There are resources available. There really are: God, the Holy Spirit, spiritual direction, healing prayer, counselling, therapy, spiritual direction, phone on Monday to the pastoral care centre here at Mosaic. Don't give up too soon.

I've often said I think there are three times in my marriage to Debbie we've come to the edge, terrible moments, not because there was anyone else involved, just because sometimes I'm difficult to live with, and three times we've needed these resources from God and Jesus and the Scriptures and prayer and people to walk with us and friends to hold us, and as I look back now on life I'm just so glad and so thankful, but there may come a moment when I have tried every possibility and I need to go for a divorce, and the basis for divorce is the same for getting married. It's for my own wellbeing, the wellbeing of another person, and so that the Kingdom of God can somehow begin to advance through our lives, the same basis.

One more invitation, I've got five more minutes, one more invitation, and the invitation is this: I don't know where you are and I don't know how you're hearing me, but I want you to see God as greater than our failure, that God never gives up on us, never.

There may be some of us sitting here who are saying you know, Trevor, I went through a divorce and it wasn't the last ditch solution. I got out too quickly. I think I even made a mistake. I fell in love with someone else and I just went with the flow, and I'm not feeling good as I sit here today. I just want to say God never gives up on us.

God is always greater than our failure, always, and God meets us in our failure and our mess with the opportunity of new beginnings and a new start. That's the God I meet in Jesus. When I see Jesus with this... with the woman at the well who had been thrown away five times, and she had gone from man to man to man, there is not one word of condemnation by Jesus, not one word.

When Jesus meets a woman caught in the act of committing adultery, what does He say? The people wanted to stone her because of rules and regulations, and Jesus says: I don't condemn you. I don't condemn you. Go now. Don't sin again. When Jesus sees the [unclear] in the tree, a corrupt man, he says, Zach, come down, I want to come to your house today. I want to have a... I want to have a meal with you. Not one word of condemnation. When Peter betrays Jesus terribly, Jesus says to him, Peter, do you love me. Peter says I love you. Jesus says feed my sheep; not one word of condemnation. This is the God we worship, and that is why remarriage is a possibility. It's part of the new beginning sometimes for some people. Jesus was against remarriage as it happened in his culture. People were just throwing away people and just moving on to the next one. Jesus was against that. He said if you do that it's committing adultery, but for some people remarriage becomes a beautiful possibility for new beginnings.

How do I end? How do I end? I came across something... I came across something this week that I'd never seen before in my life, can you believe that, in the Bible, something that's just never hit me before, and it's this: God... God knows the anguish of divorce. God knows what divorce is all about.

Look at these words from Jeremiah, just look at them, when he says I gave faithful... faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and I sent her away because of her unfaithfulness. He knows what it's like for people to be unfaithful, to reject, to betray Him, and that is why, in Malachi, look at these words: God says: I hate divorce, because God knows what it's like. He knows what it means to be rejected and betrayed and humiliated.

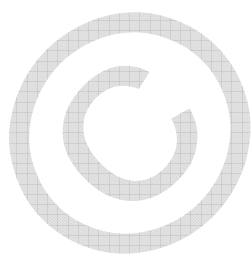
But let me say one more thing. We have divorced Him. Every one of us is a divorcee.

There is no first class or second class Christian in the Mosaic community. We have all broken our vows to God. We've all betrayed God again and again and again, and God sets up the first divorce recovery programme in history when God comes to us in Jesus Christ and dies for us in the cross so that new beginnings can be possible for every, every one of us. Will you let God heal your broken heart this morning, and maybe that healing can begin even by faith as we sing our gebed song for this morning.

Jesus, we thank You for the truth of those words that we have listened to. We thank You for the profound safety that we find in Your reality, in the reality of Your grace, of Your deep acceptance, of Your offer of new beginnings. We thank You for the profound comfort that we find in Your arms, and we know, Lord, that from that place we are able to live boldly and courageously and creatively.

Thank you, Jesus, for your words. Help us never, ever, to lock you in the prisons of law and regulations and rules. Thank You that You come to us in the power of Your Spirit today, and You invite us to become new people with You. Thank You. Amen.

And so, friends, I invite you to go with a deep sense today that we worship a God who we meet in Jesus Christ, who never ever gives up on us, never, huh, and that's why, may the wild, wild joy of Jesus be with you.



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