

# God's Beautiful Intention for Marriage

Mark 10:1-12

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## Introduction

Today we will continue our sermon series in Mark's Gospel.

- We have come to chapter 10.
  - Jesus is still on His way to Jerusalem, and He is continuing to instruct His disciples about His kingdom which they so little understand.
  - He has been showing them how His kingdom involves serving others, with the ultimate expression of that being His suffering and death on the cross.
    - We have seen that the twelve are having a very hard time getting their heads around that.

With the opening of Mark 10, Jesus deals with the subject of marriage and divorce.

- At first, it may seem like He has changed the subject from instruction about the radically different way we are to live in His kingdom.
  - But actually, by talking about marriage, Jesus is going to the very foundation of where service and devotion begin in a society—in marriage.

What we truly are, we are at home.

- In public, we can put on a false face, but what we are at home reveals our true character.
- The truth is, when a population is selfish at home, their public actions and decisions, though they pretend to be otherwise, will also be selfish.

So in the training of the twelve, Jesus is intent on setting forth clearly to them God's beautiful intention of marriage.

- Godliness in marriage is a fundamental aspect of greatness as a disciple in His kingdom—when it comes to being what He has called us to be.

Listen as I read today's passage to you, Mark 10:1-12.

- Pay careful attention because this is the very word of God.

**Mark 10:1-12:** Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again. The Pharisees came and asked Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?" testing Him. And He answered and said to them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted *a man* to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss *her*."

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 'and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." In the house His disciples also asked Him

again about the same *matter*. So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”

May the Lord add His blessing to the reading and to the exposition of His Word.

In the opening verse, we find that Jesus has left Galilee for the last time.

- I won't go into details, but the language, “**then He arose from there,**” is reflective of that... it has a ring of finality.
  - We know that He is going to Jerusalem to die. He has said so.
- Mark shows that Jesus is on the other side of the Jordan, probably in the area known as Perea where John the Baptist had done much of his ministry.
  - Herod Antipas, who had arrested and then beheaded John, was the tetrarch of this region.
  - Jesus was also known here, and so as often happens with Him (even though He has been focused more on private instruction of His disciples), multitudes gather to Him and, as was His custom, He teaches them.
    - And as also often happens, his opponents from the Pharisees also come on the scene.
      - They begin by testing Him with a question about marriage:
        - Mark 10:2: **The Pharisees came and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?” testing Him.**

Jesus uses this question to bring to us some excellent instruction about the way of marriage in His kingdom.

- I say that *He uses it to give us this instruction* because it is instruction that He gave on this occasion to His disciples with the intention that they would give it to the whole church, of which we are a part.
  - Always remember that when you read the Bible!
  - Jesus Christ is the Lord of what is written in the Bible, and He has brought every word to us by His Spirit who moved all the prophets and apostles and their associates to give us what is written down, right to the very words.
- For this reason, we are going to look carefully at what we ought to learn from this passage about marriage today—as those for whom this instruction was given.
  - In His providence, He has appointed me to preach this passage to you today.
  - Do not take this lightly.
    - I have prayed for each one of you in our Halifax congregation by name with regard to this passage.
    - This instruction is for you.

**I. See here (first of all) how Jesus exposes our inclination to relax what God requires for marriage.**

- A. The very fact that this question is asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” exposes the fact that we find it hard to comply.
1. Our Confession that we quoted earlier points this out when it says in chapter 24, paragraph 6:
    - Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage: yet, nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the church, or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage...
    - Instead of focusing on how we can live better in our marriages, we want to know how we can get out of them.
    - Be honest, have you ever—do you ever—ask this question?
      - Either as one who is married or when you think about possibly getting married in the future?
      - I know that some of you do because I have heard you, but this is not a question you should ask.
  2. In this matter, even the Pharisees, as rigid as they were about following the letter of the law, had very low standards regarding divorce.
    - The school of Shammai was the minority position.
      - They said, as Jesus affirms elsewhere (in Matthew 5), that a man could only put away his wife because of sexual immorality...
    - But the school of Hillil, which held the majority view, said that a man could divorce her even if she spoiled supper, or if someone more beautiful came along.
  3. In every age and in every society, there is this desire to look for an easy out from a marriage we don’t like anymore.
    - The very fact that this question from the Pharisees is recorded reminds us of this.
    - And even for those that accept what God says about divorce and would never allow yourself to seriously contemplate it,
      - who among you can claim that you do not soften how God has called you to treat your spouse? That in itself is a move in the direction of divorce.
    - It is a universal problem of fallen human beings that we all share.
      - We all struggle with the sinful corruption that is in us.
- B. See how Jesus, in His wisdom, forces these Pharisees to affirm that they have no warrant to support their practice of easy divorce.
1. He asks them (verse 3), “What did Moses command you?”
    - They are forced to admit that they do not have *command*, only what they call a *permission*.
    - He says, “**What did Moses command?**” and they say, (v. 4), “**Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss her.**”
    - This is a reference to Deuteronomy 24 where Moses instructs that if a man gives his wife a certificate of divorce and she marries another man, he is not to ever try to take her back again, even if her second husband dies.

- This did not make divorce in an acceptable thing to do; it regulated it to protect women from further abuse.
2. Jesus explains in verse 5 that Moses wrote this precept “because of the hardness of your heart.”
    - He wrote it, not to say that it was okay for men to divorce their wives, but to regulate their conduct when they did divorce them—when their hearts were so hardened and stubborn that they divorced them.
    - It is like the restriction that Moses put on polygamous relationships when he said that if a man takes a second wife that he loves more the first, he must not diminish the rights of the son of his first wife who is his firstborn.
      - This restriction did not mean that men had warrant to say, “Hey, Moses said we could take a second wife and love the first one less.”
      - No, he was trying to restrain men with hard hearts from further sin.
  3. This shows us how easy it is to come up with excuses to make divorce seem acceptable.
    - Our society has gone so far that some people have altered their vows so that they say “as long as we both shall love” rather than “as long as we both shall live.” That’s not even a marriage.
    - But even those of us who might recoil at that, when we are unhappy in our marriage, we look for some justification to get out of it.
      - If you are thinking about how to get out, it is sure thing that you are not treating your spouse the way you should.
      - You should seek to find a way to do what God has called you to do better instead of looking for a way to get out.
- But when it comes to softening God’s standards, there is something even more insidious going on here.

C. What we really hate when we resist the will of God is God’s Son.

- Instead of welcoming Jesus as the one who came to bring forgiveness to us so that we can serve God—
    - we resent Him for exposing us because we don’t want to deal with our sin.
1. That is what was going on with these Pharisees when they asked this question about marriage.
    - They were not really looking for answers from Jesus so that they could learn what was pleasing to God in their lives.
    - They were trying to trap Jesus—you see how it says that they asked this question to test Him.
      - Remember, He was in the territory of Herod Antipas who had beheaded John because John had opposed his wife Herodias for divorcing his brother to marry him.
    - These Pharisees would have liked nothing better than to see Jesus brought to the same end.

- Little did they know that He was going to Jerusalem even now to die on the cross.
  - In a way, it is laughable to see them trying to find a way to trap Him when He is going for the purpose of giving Himself up to them to be crucified.
2. But in whatever ways, as sinners we all know this desire to reduce Christ.
- He makes us look bad, so we want, in various ways, to discredit Him or to twist around what He is saying...
    - Even if we are believers, we struggle with that in our flesh.
    - Surely you can see it in yourself.
  - Instead of delighting in what He has called us to do and delighting in the fact that He, as a Saviour, is there to help us do it better,
    - we push Him away, we try to reduce Him, to silence Him, because our sin makes us not even truly want to receive grace to live more fully for our husband or our wife... or to do whatever Christ would have us to do.
  - But I tell you, when God is at work in us by His Spirit, He exposes our sin in its vileness and He shows us His glory and He shows us our Saviour.
    - So that in our weak and stumbling way, we come to Him for grace to help us in our need.
    - The exposure is not to beat us up; it is to draw us in to His glorious light and to the beautiful calling that He has for us under His gracious care.

TRANS> And that brings us to the next thing I want you to see from this passage.

## II. See here God's beautiful intention for marriage.

A. Jesus says that from the beginning, His intention was that two become one.

1. Look at how He describes this.
  - **Mark 10:6-8: "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' <sup>7</sup> 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> 'and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh."**
  - He stresses the fact that the man and the woman become one entity.
    - He says that they leave their own families and are joined together.
    - He says that the two become one flesh so that they cease to be individuals—it is so rarely understood that He restates it...
      - "so then they are no longer two, but one flesh."
      - They lose themselves in each other.
        - Like sodium and chloride, they become something new that is neither sodium nor chloride—it is salt—inseparably blended.
2. Notice how Jesus emphasises that they are male and female that come together—they are counterparts.
  - God made male and female different so that they could blend.

- They come together not as two that are the same, but as two that are different so that they fit together as male and female—not only sexually, but in every way.
- You don't just end up a bigger person when they join, but you get something new—a family—each playing their unique part.
- The part of the male is to lead.
  - He is responsible for the new entity that is formed by their union.
  - He is to make decisions for the good of the family, not for himself as an individual, but for the entity... he is the leading part of one body.
  - He is responsible to see that the family is godly and to see that love abounds among them.
  - He is to wash them with the water of the word and to pray for them, bringing them earnestly before God.
  - He is to pour himself out for them as one who cares, and again, as one who is responsible for the whole entity that has been formed including the children that come.
- The part of the female is to blend with him.
  - Like Eve, she is to take her husband's name because now they are one family.
  - She is to submit to him as the leader and head of the new entity.
  - She is to walk in harmony with him so that she moves together with him as one body—one flesh—one entity, not as a body tearing itself apart.
  - She is to contribute to his leadership—to help him make wise decisions and then to help him in carrying out the decisions that are made.
    - She loses her own life only to find her life in him as her husband.
    - This does not diminish her personality, but brings it out in strength and beauty.

B. I urge all of you to admire this beautiful relationship that God designed.

1. Here is the place of self-giving love.
  - In this relationship, each gives himself for the other.
  - For each, the focus is not on what they are to receive, but on how they can give and on actually giving to the other.
    - What is received is gratefully received, but not demanded.
2. Paul tells us in Ephesians that the model for this relationship is Christ and the church—where Christ plays the part of the male and the church the part of the female.
  - We learn about marriage by looking at Christ and the church, and we learn about Christ and the church by looking at them in the roles of marriage.
  - Here you have Him as leader giving Himself for her—even pouring out His life on the cross to bear the punishment for her sin—
    - And you have her coming to Him to lose her life into His—to serve Him and follow Him forever as His bride—and in this way she finds her life.
3. Such beautiful unity!
  - Unity that is the longing of every heart—even those who have grown cynical because of the hardness of the world—

- This is the unity you have despaired of finding in this world.
- The unity that is found in Christ and that He wants in our marriages.

C. Aspire to live in this beautiful unity.

1. First, aspire to live in it with Christ.
  - Do not be afraid—with Him is plenteous grace.
  - He calls you to look to Him and be saved—to come to Him and to lose yourself in Him as your Lord and Saviour—as your husband.
    - He is the husband who has given Himself for us His bride and who leads us into His Father’s house where we can serve Him in beauty forever.
  - Simply give yourself over to Him—stop fighting and fall fully upon Him.
2. And then, if you are married, aspire to live in this beautiful unity with your spouse
  - God has designed this beautiful oneness for marriage.
    - If you are a man, take up your responsibility to lead in love.
    - If you are a woman, endeavour to blend yourself in with your husband in harmony.
  - You can’t do this in your own strength, but only by the grace of our wonderful Saviour Jesus Christ.
    - He came to save us from our sins—to secure our pardon and our justification, and to establish us in God’s ways—
      - And that includes the way that He has appointed for marriage.

TRANS> What a beautiful way it is where two become one.

- Having seen that, we now come to the third thing that our Lord has for us in this passage:

**III. Hear the call of our Lord to see that you have not separated what God has joined together in marriage.**

- Embrace the horror of destroying something so noble and beautiful from God.
  - Jesus spells it out plainly for us.
- After telling us that by marriage, God joins a man and woman as one, He says:
  - Mark 10:9: **“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”**

A. It is horrendous to see how human sin can defile our marriages.

1. A sinful man will abuse the very place of leadership that God has given him.
  - a. He will be like the twelve were—wanting to have a place where they could have power over others for their own advantage.
    - Jesus’ principles are opposite those of the world.
      - In the world, people want authority so they can get others to serve them and so they can order them around to satisfy their pleasures.
      - In Jesus’ kingdom, the one in authority is the one who is to use his power for the good of those under his care.
  - b. What an ugly thing this makes of marriage.
    - There is that sinful selfish man, ordering his wife around, yelling at her when she does not please him—perhaps whining at her, using his position of strength to abuse her and exploit her.

- Having control of the bank account, he deprives his family to support his hobbies, his drinking, his gambling.
  - He is there only for himself.
  - He who is supposed to cherish and protect his bride becomes the very one she most fears.
    - Or maybe instead of that, he is simply detached and not involved... a man in the place of care and nurture who holds himself aloof, blaming fear or ignorance—a very sad state.
    - What a wretch he is... so unlike Jesus whom He is supposed to imitate.
2. And there is the sinful woman... refusing to walk in harmony with her husband...
- Criticising him, finding fault with his leadership, second guessing him, chafing under his wishes, complaining about this and that.
    - Even if he tries to lead her in worship and prayer, she resists and makes excuses and demeans him.
  - She doesn't even think about trying to conform to his ways—instead she goes her own way, sometimes choosing the way that is most defiant.
    - She refuses to look after the house—she only wants to advance her own agenda, to follow her own comfort and pleasure.
    - She knows nothing about blending with her husband as one—and everyone in the community knows about his faults.
3. Sadly, it is rare to see beautiful marriages.
- It is rare to see marriages that function in that way that God intends.
- B. Our society is pretty much done with marriage.
- There has been a downward progression in which we have cast it off.
1. This began by rejecting marriage as God appointed it where men lead and women submit to them.
- Now the norm, even for professing Christians, is a marriage where leadership is shared 50-50.
    - The man does not take the responsibility for ordering his house, and the woman does not blend her life with his.
    - Instead, they remain as separate individuals—each doing their own thing and living like roommates who share the bills and some of the tasks,
      - but never live where what one does really affects what the other does.
        - Essentially, they live separate lives, each governing themselves.
  - When marriage is done this way, the pair might be nice to each other and they might enjoy having sex with each other,
    - But they don't really live together as one—they don't even know how to blend their lives.
    - When Christians embrace this model, it is hard for them to even understand why it would matter if they married an unbeliever as long as it was someone they could get along with—so they often do marry unbelievers.



- It is rare to see marriages today that are much better than this, and this is a rejection of what God intended for marriage.
  - It is a separation of what God has joined together—not literally, but spiritually.
  - When marriage is like this, it is not surprising to see it degrade into the next level of ruin.
- 2. The next level is what we might call marriages that are only temporary.
  - These are marriages that end in divorce.
    - a. Divorce may be defined as a man or a woman *officially* separating what God has joined together... literally breaking it apart.
      - This is what Jesus is talking about in our text—divorce.
      - When you no longer even stay together, but move on to other relationships.
    - b. Jesus says that the one who breaks up the marriage and marries another commits adultery.
      - Look at verse 10-12: **In the house His disciples also asked Him again about the same matter. <sup>11</sup> So He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. <sup>12</sup> And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”**
      - Because this is so, when either a man or a woman commits adultery or refuses to live in their marriage (desertion),
        - the elders of the church are to call that one to repentance, and if they refuse, they are to be put out of the church and regarded as an unbeliever.
          - Such a person cannot be considered a Christian because they refuse to keep their marriage vows.
        - Then the believer is free to remarry in the Lord.
    - c. Divorce has become so common that some no longer even think of marriage as a permanent relationship.
      - I mentioned before how some of even changed their marriage vows to suit what marriage has actually become...
        - Instead promising fidelity for “as long we both shall live,” they promise it “for as long as we both shall love.”
      - Marriage in a divorce culture like ours is little more than that—
        - Even if they don’t change the vows, that is their view... they figure that if they are no longer happy in their marriage, they can end it.
      - This is a sad part of a culture that puts personal happiness above the commandments of God.
        - If God’s commandments don’t make me happy, I am free to break them, even it means breaking my marriage vows or murdering my unborn children when they interfere with my life.
        - Many are even starting to celebrate divorce and abortion as the triumph of self—the god of self.

- It is all too easy for us to offer sacrifices at this altar of personal happiness.
- But there is an even further degradation that comes after this.
3. We simply forget about marriage—we abandon it completely even in its temporary form.
    - a. And why not? If it doesn't mean anything, why not just sleep around with whoever you want whenever you want?
      - You can totally do what you want—same sex, multiple partners—anything goes.
      - Then you don't have any ties or any legal fees—you can just be free—free from responsibility to anyone else.
    - What a lonely place the sin of our society has brought us to.
      - Yes... you are untied from anyone—free indeed like an deserted island.
    - b. And how are we getting along with this arrangement?
      - Men are getting increasingly lazy and irresponsible—when they don't serve a family, they often just play video games or drink, or hang out at the bars.
      - Women are increasingly full of anxiety or struggling with depression—because they really don't have a place to belong.
      - Children have a similar fate—they don't know what it is to live in a loving family that looks out for each other—they only know a world where it is everyone for themselves.
      - There is mistrust between the sexes, gender confusion (because we don't see men and women functioning in their roles), unhappiness, rampant sexual immorality, sexually transmitted diseases, pornography, rape, incest, child molestation (who can say no to self?), anger, suicide, irresponsible behaviour, indifference to the needs of others... the list goes on and on.
      - And loneliness—no one to look after, no one to look after you.
- C. People of God, you are the ones who are supposed to live in marriage the way God designed it!
1. On your part, see that you strengthen rather than tear apart your marriage.
    - Really, think about this... what are you doing that is driving your spouse away and what you doing that is drawing them in?
    - What are you doing that is separating you and what are you doing that is drawing you together?
    - You are not to separate what God has joined together—those angry words those neglected duties—whatever it is.
  2. On your part, see that you promote real marriage in the wider culture.
    - Sexual immorality and pornography destroy the family as God instituted it.
      - It is the opposite of giving yourself to another.
      - When you engage in it, you join those who are overthrowing marriage.

- Hard views of God's authority and disrespect of those authorities that He has put in your life contributes to the destruction of marriage in the culture.
    - Our society thinks that authority is the problem, but the problem is sinful authority.
    - Living at peace under authority promotes unity and peace.
  - Speaking ill of marriage also contributes to its destruction.
    - Why not rather tell people what marriage is supposed to look like?
  - Stirring up strife by letting your friend speak ill of their spouse to you contributes to the destruction of marriage.
    - You need to rather encourage those are married to love their spouse and to do what they can to make their marriage better.
3. Brothers and sisters, we are in great need of Christ's help!
- Do you see that?
  - We need to cry out to Him that He would restore our marriages in the church!
    - Not just so we would be happier—but so that our gracious God will be glorified.
  - Do you want to be a powerful witness for Christ?
    - Do you want your children to see what your relationship with Christ looks like?
    - Then start showing them as a husband or a wife what that relationship looks like in marriage.
      - Even if your spouse is not where they ought to be—you can still do your part—in fact, your light can shine in a unique way when you are doing your part and your spouse is not.
      - David's life shone more when Saul, his king, was abusing him than it did when Saul was honouring him...
        - So the spirit of a woman who is not anxious but quietly serves a disobedient husband (like David served Saul) is said to be very precious in the sight of the Lord.
      - Likewise, a man like Hosea who continues to love an unfaithful wife shows the unrelenting commitment of the Lord to us.
        - So don't make excuses that you can't honour God because of the spouse He gave you. That is not true.
        - And all the better if both you and your spouse will walk with Christ together.
    - That is really what it is all about—walking with Christ.
      - He is our Saviour, and when we put ourselves in His hands that we may have His grace to live in our marriages for God,
        - He will be with us.