

**November 2, 2003
Pentecost 20**

"Jesus' Plan for the Family"

MARK 10: 2-16

Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"³ "What did Moses command you?" he replied.⁴ They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."⁵ "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one.⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this.¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them.¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.¹⁵ I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

This past week I had an opportunity to spend some time with my daughter while attending a pastor's conference in Tucson. On Monday night we went out to eat at small Vietnamese restaurant. We were the only people present at first, so we got to know the Vietnamese lady who waited on us and also owned the restaurant. She kept telling my daughter how privileged she was to have her daddy with her, because she did not know the American father who was responsible for her conception during the war in Vietnam. Born with red hair instead of black she was rejected by her own people, even her mother, and grew up in an orphanage run by nuns. This woman was missing something very important to her, the love of family, with a mom and dad who were close to each other and close to their kids.

In a survey taken of 5th and 6th grade kids, the question was asked, "What makes you sad?" The top three things are: 1) My parents divorcing. 2) My parents arguing. 3) My parents not spending enough time with me. Kids crave to be close to the parents. They would much rather see mom and dad kissing by the kitchen sink than go to Disney Land or Magic Mountain.

A major concern in our country and also in our churches is the decline and disintegration of the family. This morning we want to have the Holy Spirit bless us as we speak on **"Jesus' Plan for the Family."**

1) Jesus wants everyone to follow his plan for marriage

The Pharisees had a tough question for Jesus about divorce and marriage. They asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" Those who followed Rabbi Shammai

said the only reason for divorcing a woman was moral indecency and adultery. The other group, the school of Hillel, said that if a woman did not please a man he could divorce her. Burn the broccoli, make a bad cup of coffee, put on a few pounds and she was out the door. Sounds a lot like what we have going on today, doesn't it?

Jesus knew this was a loaded question. He does not fall into the trap of quoting from rabbis the way an attorney today might quote from various court opinions to prove his case. Jesus takes the Pharisees back to the Old Testament and asks them to listen to what Moses told them about divorce and marriage. Those guys were sharp. They pointed to words of Moses in Deuteronomy 24 that spoke about writing a certificate or statement of divorce. The Pharisees had used this portion of Scripture to justify divorcing a woman if she did not please him.

Jesus explains to them why Moses had to do this. "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law." The certificate of divorce was a legal document announcing publicly to others that a divorce had taken place. Just as the parking ticket tells me that I have parked illegally, the bill of divorce was a public announcement telling others how God's law had been broken by people who had hardened hearts and did not want to do his will. The enormous breakdown of the home and family life still finds its root and source in hearts that are hardened against what God tells us in his word about marriage and family.

Jesus used this twisting of Scripture to go deeper into the truth about marriage and family in Genesis 2. What an example Jesus gives us on how to handle questions that come up about how we should live our lives as Christians. Get back to the Word. He said, "But at the beginning 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."

By going back into Genesis 2 we realize that God created people as male and female. He made them with differences necessary for reproduction and psychological differences that need to be understood and carefully studied by each sex. Spiritually men and women are one Christ, but physically and emotionally they are different, because God made them that way. Male and female was not the product of millions of years of evolution.

God also wanted a man and woman joined together, not just in reproduction, but in the love they had for each other. Adam joyfully proclaimed, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Where people understand and put into practice what God says about marriage in Genesis 2, then there will be families that stay together and experience the love and joy that God intended for families to have. Kids love to see their moms and dads joined at the hip, bone to bone, and flesh to flesh.

Jesus adds his own words to the clear words of Genesis 2 when he says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." King James Version translates this "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." The Greek word used here for joining together is used also for two oxen being yoked together. What happens when you glue two pieces of paper together, and then rip them apart? Both pieces are torn. Who gets torn the worst? It's the kids. When two people are put into the harness of marriage, they do not have the right to go out of the harness. If they grasp how they are stuck together for life, bone to bone and flesh to flesh, they will learn to make the best of it. With the desire

to make the best of it and commit to each other, comes love and romance unlike anything that ever occurred when two people first said, "I love you."

Jesus adds more to the subject of divorce and marriage when he is alone with his disciples in a house. "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." In the book of Matthew Jesus adds the thought "except for marital unfaithfulness." Marital unfaithfulness. What is that? It means having sexual relations with someone who is not your husband or wife. When that happens, the bond is broken. Some may choose to leave when this happens, and others may try to forgive and forget with the help that only the Lord can give. The Lord our God sums up his feelings towards divorce with three words when he says in Malachi, "I hate divorce."

"Jesus loves the little children. All the children of the world. Yellow, black and white, They are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." The Jesus who loves kids does not want children to suffer in homes that are broken by divorce and marital unfaithfulness. He does not want men and woman sleeping together without marriage and producing babies. He does not want men living with men or women with women trying to pretend like they are married. He wants us to work hard at our marriages every day. He wants women to respect their husbands, even when they aren't very good at understanding their personal needs. He wants men to love their wives as much as Christ loved the church, and love them with understanding. He wants grandmas and grandpas to be role models to their grand kids because God's ways are always the best ways. He wants our young people to save their ultimate and intimate hugs and kisses for their future husband and wife. That means stay pure until married.

2) He wants the kids to come to him

How much does Jesus love children? We are told in our text, "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them." The people wanted the children to receive a blessing from Jesus. This portion of Scripture has been called the Magna Charta, or the Bill of Rights for kids. Artists love to paint this scene of children gathering around Jesus, with a wiggly little guy resting in Jesus arms. Matthew's account says that Jesus placed his hand on them and prayed for them. Jesus even gave us the blessing of Holy Baptism that was intended for "all nations," all people, not just the adults and older kids.

When Jesus saw the way the disciples told the parents not to bother him, he was indignant. He told them in short crisp commands. "Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." The disciples had good intentions. They wanted to protect Jesus from bothersome children. Jesus stepped in to protect the kids from bumbling adults who failed to see how important kids are to the kingdom of God. Jesus wants moms and dads sitting in church with their children, worshipping together and thanking the Lord for all his blessings. Jesus wants mom and dads turning off the television to pray with kids and read the Bible to them before they fall asleep at night, or after a meal together. Bumbling adults often fail to see the big picture of how important it is to lead the little children to the Savior's waiting arms.

Jesus plan for the family involves bringing kids into his kingdom. He told his disciples, "I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter into it." Then it says, "He took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them." What are the qualities of little kids that we want to see in our lives? Little kids trust the people taking care of them as is shown on the front of the bulletin cover. That's the kind of faith and trust in his Word that Jesus wants to see in our lives. Only in Jesus do we find the forgiveness and cleansing for all the times we have failed in our marriages, failed to obey our parents, failed to treat each other with love and kindness and respect. The little ones are curious. If you ever walked with a little children, you know there are a lot of stops along the way, and you need to be patient as they examine every little bug that crosses their path. That's the kind of curiosity Jesus wants to see in us, every time we pick up the Bible to read. Children learn to obey and trust what parents say about crossing streets and not touch hot pans. What a lesson they give us for trusting that God's ways are the best ways.

The little girl in the bulletin picture has the hand of a daddy or mommy holding hers. She is ready to conquer the world, or at least dig in the sand with her little shovel. The Vietnamese lady we met in the restaurant did not have that privilege in her life. There was no daddy and no mommy to hold her hand and take her to have fun at the beach. As I paid the bill for an excellent meal, she said one more time to my daughter, "Be thankful for the daddy that loves you." I looked at her and said, "No matter what has happened in your life, Jesus loves you." She could not control the tears that filled her eyes. Even when kids have a bad home life, Jesus still loves them. Amen.