

**Pentecost 20**  
**October 11, 2015**

*"Let Jesus Define Marriage and Family"*

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## **MARK 10:2-16**

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

In June of 1994 President Bill Clinton signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act which had been approved by a large majority in both houses of Congress. It stated clearly, "The word 'marriage' means only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, the word 'spouse' refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or wife." Fast forward to June 2015. The US Supreme Court by a five to four decision made it the law of the land that individual states must issue marriage licenses to same sex couples. With this ruling it redefined marriage to include marriage between same sex couples.

Before us this morning we have the words of Jesus about marriage and family. Whether you are married or single, whether you have children or don't have children, it is important for all of us to listen to what Jesus says about this basic foundation of society given to us by our God in creation. This morning we want to "**Let Jesus Define Marriage and Family.**"

### **Jesus wants us to follow his plan for marriage**

At the time of Jesus there were people who wanted to redefine marriage and write their own rules for marriage to satisfy their selfish interests. These people were the Pharisees. They came to Jesus with the question, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" One group was following the Jewish rabbis of the Shammai school who taught a man could only divorce his wife if she was indecent or unfaithful in marriage. Another group, the Hillel school was more liberal in its views. It taught a man could divorce his wife if he didn't like

his wife or they just couldn't get along. Today we have something called "no fault divorce" where two people split just because they have a hard time getting along and can't stand to be in the same house with each other.

Jesus knows the Pharisees are baiting him with a trick question. He does not take the bait. Instead he directs their attention back to what Moses said about marriage in the Old Testament. Oh how quick these legal minded Pharisees were to defend their view of marriage. "They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'" They falsely assumed that just because Moses provided for a legal document that announced a divorce he also allowed for divorce to take place if a man did not like his wife.

Jesus explains why Moses had to write those certificates of divorce. "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote this law." God's Old Testament people had hard hearts. They refused to accept what God said about marriage. They wanted to make up their own rules that said "We are free to do what we want to do when it comes to how long we want to stay married." Moses gave this law about certificates of divorce to announce publicly what people were determined to do in the hardness of their hearts. Just because the laws of our land provide legal documentation for dissolution of marriage does not mean people can violate God's laws by divorcing just because they are not getting along.

Jesus defines marriage by pointing these Pharisees and really the whole world to the correct teaching on marriage. "But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female." Do you want a definition of marriage? Then go back to the beginning of time when God created the heavens and the earth. Study any part of God's creation and then stand in awe of everything he made. Be amazed at how he created male and female. Birds and animals and fish, large creatures and small, male and female will unite together in reproduction to produce more creatures.

Man is different from the animals. See the remarkable beauty of marriage as it is recorded in Genesis two. It totally amaze us. God parades the animals in front of Adam. Adam names them. Obviously he saw the males and females. But then it says, "For Adam no suitable helper was found." God is not finished with his work of creation. There is still something special that needs to be done. "So God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man."

How does Adam react to the marriage partner the Lord has given him? "The man said, 'This is not bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman for she was taken out of the man.' Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. Adam joyfully and even poetically acknowledges that he is bonded to this woman that God has given him and she is bonded to him. Can't you see the smile on his face? Oh, yes you can. Sure you can. It was a marriage made in heaven. See Eve smile in pure joy as her beloved Adam proclaims, "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh."

Our Lord Jesus defines what marriage is when he quotes further from Genesis chapter two. "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 not man separate." The words are so clear, so simple, so beautiful. Leave the father and mother. Be united to the husband or wife. Become one flesh. The Greek word for "bond" has the thought of something being glued. Picture in your mind two boards glued together. Now see this board split in half as we might do with an axe or hatch. God does not want that for marriage. Have you ever heard of marriage described as "tying the knot?" God does not want that knot untied. In the prophet Malachi he says, "I hate divorce."

The disciples want to hear more about this important subject of marriage and divorce. Jesus said, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces another man, she commits adultery." What does a man do when he divorces his wife and it is not for marital unfaithfulness? He commits adultery against her. He makes her look like she has been unfaithful to him in marriage when the real reason for the divorce was the man's selfishness and unwillingness to commit himself to the marriage. The same is true when a woman divorces a man and there are no biblical grounds for the divorce such as unfaithfulness or desertion. She makes the man look like an adulterer even though that is not the reason for the divorce. Almost every time there is a divorce, there is suspicion that says, "I wonder who was unfaithful."

It is so easy to see how the Supreme Court has violated what God says about marriage. It is easy to see it in our society. Statistics say that 50% of the people married in 2015 will be divorced within fifteen years. But now let's take an honest look at our lives. Marriage was made in heaven, but there are times the relationship of a man and woman in marriage does not look very heavenly. What's the problem? Why is it so hard for people to invest themselves in their commitment to each other? It always brings huge dividends or blessings for the husband and wife and also for the children. It is a no-brainer. The problem is the human heart. Jeremiah says "The heart is deceitful above all things and can understand it."

Why does a marriage that starts high up here (Hold up one hand) eventually end way down here (hold down other hand). The problem lies with the human heart. Every time you hurt the other person in your marriage you make up excuses for what you are doing. You are acting just like these self-righteous Pharisees who thought they had the right understanding of things. So it starts up here as we justify not listening, justify harsh criticism, justify not loving as we should. Committing yourself to the glue of marriage requires constant effort and constant repentance, not excuses, excuses, excuses.

Thank God I have Jesus for all the times my deceitful heart has led me to not be loving and kind in my marriage as God wants me to be. Jesus made no excuses. He committed himself to going to the cross for us. Because of that commitment every sin of your imperfect marriage and mine is forgiven at the cross. The peace we find in the wounds of Jesus also provide tremendous power and strength to stop making up our own ideas of what marriage is and focus on loving each other as Christ has loved us. Jesus is the Bridegroom and we are his beloved Bride the Church. He helps us move upward to honor the commitments we have made to each other.

**Jesus wants us to follow his plan for family**

Along with the blessing of marriage comes the blessing of children. Raising children is not always easy. Think of the sorrow that came to Adam and Eve when their first born son Cain killed his brother Abel. Very few parents have ever had more grief with their children than Adam and Eve. Let's listen to what Jesus says about family.

People were bringing their little children to Jesus to touch them. How can we not notice the depth of love that Jesus has for the little children and the moms who were bringing their children to Jesus and for all of us who are part of that amazing system God has designed called family. The disciples had no patience for these moms and their kids. Jesus was indignant. This is not sinful anger similar to the anger we display in our lives. This is righteous and godly anger that says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it."

What does Jesus want for families, for little children, big children, teenagers, adults, grandparents? He wants them to have the ultimate blessing in life. He wants them in his kingdom. He wants them to see his unfailing love them. He wants them to see him shedding his blood for them on the cross and rising from the dead. Jesus then took the children in his arms and blessed them. I have to believe he did more than just put his hand on them. He smiled at them. They saw his loving face, a love unlike anything they had ever seen before. The children are privileged to hear the name of Jesus as he speaks his name to them.

A man was dying. In his last days of life he was led to put his trust in Jesus for his salvation. One night, shortly before he died, the devil made one last attempt to pull him away. He worried that his new faith in Jesus was not real and he did not have peace in Jesus. Then he remembered the video they had taken of his granddaughter standing next to the Christmas tree and singing so beautifully and sweetly and with such conviction..."Jesus loves me this I know." He woke up in the morning totally at peace, secure in the love that Jesus had for him. May Jesus take each of us up in his arms, bless us in his love, and bless our families and bless our marriages for his glory and honor. Amen.