

Matthew 19:1 – 12

^{19:1} When Jesus had finished these words, he departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ² and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. ³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing him and asking, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?’ ⁴ And he answered and said, ‘Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined 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 no man separate.’ ⁷ They said to him, ‘Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?’ ⁸ He said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way.’ ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.’ ¹⁰ The disciples said to him, ‘If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.’ ¹¹ But he said to them, ‘Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.’

Historical and Cultural Background

- This begins the fifth major teaching section in Matthew’s Gospel
 - When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.7:28)
 - When Jesus had finished giving instructions... (Mt.11:1)
 - When Jesus had finished these parables... (Mt.13:53)
 - When Jesus had finished these words... (Mt.19:1)
 - When Jesus had finished all these words... (Mt.26:1)
- This section (Mt.19:1 – 26:1) has more high intensity conflicts and disputes because of location and timing. Jesus is going to the capital, Jerusalem, knowing he is going to his death. The Jewish leaders are reacting in stronger ways. And Jesus is making especially clear how he is theologically, ethically, socially, and politically different from them.
- What did Moses teach about divorce in Deuteronomy 24?
 - Rabbi Hillel had a lenient definition of divorce that really favored men. A man could divorce his wife for almost any reason.
 - Rabbi Shammai had a conservative definition of divorce. Divorce can only happen as the result of adultery. So Jesus is aligning with Shammai, in a sense.
 - Note: Dt.24:5 is an example of the inclusive male pronoun, where the Hebrew language says ‘he’ to mean ‘he or she’. The Hebrew language is like the Spanish language, where you have gendered nouns and pronouns. For economy of speech, you would just say ‘he’ to mean both genders. So even though the text refers to a man, Jewish rabbis until the 5th century BC understood that a wife could also initiate a divorce from her husband on the same grounds (Gordon Hugenberger, *Theology of the Pentateuch* class). Jesus affirms that interpretation in Mark 10:12, where he assumes women were divorcing their husbands. However, when the Greeks invaded the Middle East, the influence of Greek Hellenistic culture and its more male biased view caused a corresponding shift in Jewish culture.

Questions

1. What are our culture's (or multiple cultures') attitudes towards sex and marriage?
2. From what you can tell from the passage, what was the first century Jewish attitude towards sex?
 - a. They seem wishy-washy
 - b. They are genuinely confused about textual interpretation
3. Why does Jesus go back to Genesis 1 and 2?
 - a. To show God's original vision for marriage, before sin entered the picture. It's His 'creation order.' What is God's vision for marriage?
 - i. Monogamous: 'two become one'
 - ii. Heterosexual: 'male and female'
 - iii. Binding: 'God has joined together, let no man separate'
 - b. To show God's authority in Scripture, history, and life.
 - i. Who 'said' the phrase from Genesis 2, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife?' Not just Moses. The same person who 'made them male and female' in Genesis 1, that is, God!!
 - ii. Jesus believed the teaching of Genesis on marriage was absolutely authoritative on these points.
 - c. To show us the seriousness of sin by contrast. Sin ('hardness of heart') affects personal integrity, relationships, and therefore divorce. That's where Dt.24 comes in.
 - i. The Mosaic law regulated divorce even though it ultimately disapproved of divorce. In the same way, U.S. tax law requires that you pay taxes on things that you embezzle or steal. It doesn't mean it is encouraging embezzling or stealing. But it recognizes the fact that people do undesirable things and need to be taxed on them, too.
 - ii. It takes a vibrant relationship with God and 'softness of heart' to make marriage work.
 - d. To show us that he is bringing us back to the very challenging pre-sin condition. Jesus is removing 'hardness of heart.'
 - i. Notice that he taught about heart transformation in Mt.5 – 7.
 - ii. Jesus identified the heart as the source of human evil in Mt.15:18 – 20.
 - iii. And the source of unforgiveness in Mt.18:35.
 - iv. The disciples find this vision of marriage difficult and off-handedly affirm singleness (v.10); Jesus agrees with their affirmation of singleness for some (v.11-12).
4. How is Jesus' view of marriage inspiring and/or frightening?
5. Notice that, in this section (Mt.19 – 25), Jesus is defining what is distinctive about himself and his followers. He will talk about how he's different with regards to sex (Mt.19:1 – 12), money (Mt.19:13 – 31), and power (Mt.20). So we need to become better about defining what is distinctive about Jesus' teaching, in public, with non-Christians. How can we do that? Note: When addressing the issue of gay marriage, I would say the following things:
 - a. Politically, I think the exact definition of marriage is something that is determined by one's religious tradition, and whether 'hardness of heart' is affecting them. Therefore it's a First Amendment issue. We should be able to discuss and disagree about the definition of marriage in the public realm. In other words, we should be political pluralists. We shouldn't impose just one view.
 - i. In fact, Jesus' treatment of marriage requires that Christians not legislate it, for only those with 'softness of heart' because of faith in Jesus can live this out.
 - b. But morally, I still believe in God's vision for marriage and relationships. Why? Well, it's not just that 'the Bible tells me so.' I'm not saying that I just turn off my mind. The issue is that when I look at the Bible fairly, it doesn't appear to be written just by people, especially men. We say 'men wrote the Bible,' but if that were true, I would expect the Bible to start with Adam and Eve, and Eva, and Evelyn, and Evadne. But it doesn't. Yet is it in the interest of men to uphold monogamy as an ideal? NO! So who wrote it? There's something else: Genesis 2 says that 'a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife.' That's radical for that time. It was assumed that a woman would leave her father and mother and be joined to her husband. But a man? Even in Asian culture today, a wife joins the husband's extended family, which is run by the oldest living person. But Genesis 2 says something no ancient culture would have said: Marriage is more important than family of origin; that destroys Confucianism, the authority structure of traditional cultures, and generational honor and power. So who wrote the Bible? I

can't just ignore it. That's not the only reason I think the Bible is remarkable. But since we're on this subject, I wanted to point to that. And again, I'm not saying that I believe things just because 'the Bible tells me so.' It's much more complicated than that: The Bible has strong evidence that it wasn't just written by men.

- c. This is hard for us to hear because we live after the European Enlightenment the sexual revolution of the 1960's and 70's.
 - i. Especially because of Rousseau, we believe 'the individual' (e.g. 'noble savage') came first chronologically, and all relationships are therefore optional social contracts to be discarded when they become burdensome. In the view of much of Western philosophy, since relationships are social constructs, you can change them as you will. This is where both Genesis and secular history flatly disagree.
 - ii. In Genesis, monogamous, heterosexual, lifelong marriage precedes the individual, for it existed in the mind of God before He even brought humanity into being. We have been created to fit into God's ideal for human marriage, not to alter it, or to reverse the order of being and place 'the individual' first. The 'creation order' comes before 'the individual.'
 - iii. The historical existence of monogamy challenges Enlightenment philosophy. Social scientists, especially those influenced by the theory of evolution, have struggled to explain why monogamy exists at all. Modern day socio-biologists are puzzled since monogamy does not serve a man's self-interest. Arguably, monogamy is somewhat disadvantageous to a woman, since it does not allow her to share the often life-threatening burden of child birthing. So why would monogamy have come about on its own? It is inexplicable from a secular Enlightenment standpoint. Yet anthropologists have noted that monogamous marriage, while not the only form of marriage, is as old as we are. Not only has it existed in historical reality, it is built into the fabric of ancient myths. For example, in the Greek myths, Zeus is married to Hera; and even when he cheats on her, this is understood to be mischievous and dangerous.
 1. Important Note: Those who subscribe to Enlightenment liberalism (the individual is supreme in principle) cannot explain history (i.e. why we see monogamy in history). Enlightenment liberalism makes for a poor theory of history.
 - iv. While it is true that the fall has corrupted humanity so that marriage is sometimes twisted into polygamous forms, or fractured by adultery, etc., this was already accounted for in Genesis 4 when Lamech took two wives. In essence, then, secular history supports the Genesis account, since it tells us that monogamous marriage is woven into our internal existence.
6. STATE: God has a vision for relationships from the creation. Relationships are not just 'social constructs' as they are in Rousseau and in our culture generally. In future sections, we'll look at other aspects of relationships and God's vision for that: with economics, power and honor, etc. Jesus is restoring us to God's original vision for relationships.
7. Break up into pairs, and pray for each other regarding:
 - a. Ways you're inspired and/or frightened about Jesus' view of marriage
 - b. Ways we can be more articulate and courageous about discussing Jesus' view of marriage in public.

Conflict and Controversy in Matthew 19 – 25

| 19:1 – 12 | 19:13 – 30 | 20:1 – 16 | 20:17 – 28 | 21:1 – 9 | 21:10 – 46 | 22:1ff. |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Region of Judea beyond the Jordan (19:1) | | | About to go up to Jerusalem (20:17) | Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives (21:1) | Jerusalem (21:10) | Jerusalem |
| Jesus debates marriage with the Pharisees | Jesus calls the young man to give up all his wealth to the poor | Jesus tells the parable of the laborers' payment | Jesus tells James and John they may not sit at his right and left hand | Jesus gets donkeys to ride into Jerusalem | Jesus debates with the leaders | Jesus debates with the leaders |
| Jesus establishes sex and marriage from God's creation ideal, not the Mosaic commands | Jesus establishes universal giving, breaks from the Mosaic land arrangement | Length of time with Jesus is not a privilege | Disciples must serve, not seek power | | Jesus argues about the role of the Temple | Jesus debates about the Law |