

Mark 10:2-16

When I lived and served as a vicar in Reno, Nevada, there was a little wedding chapel down the street from our church. It was the destination wedding location you might see in a B movie: theme rooms such as the Roman Room or the Space Astronaut Room, parking right in front of your door, clean sheets, and yes—HBO. Marriage is big business in the state of Nevada, especially in Las Vegas. You can get married at the drop of a hat, and just as quickly people often get divorces. From a human viewpoint, you might think that the wedding chapels and the states of this country are creating marriages. But what Jesus tells us here in Mark shows us what's going on behind the scenes. Government does have a place in the regulation of marriage because God has placed this institution over us. But Jesus gives us a much more profound message about who creates marriage and who decides what marriage looks like: **God Makes Marriages For Life! 1. So as spouses, the one flesh reality stands, 2. So as children, he wants us in his hands.**

### 1. So as spouses, the one flesh reality stands

Have you ever experienced a teachable moment? A teachable moment is one of those times in life when someone asks a tough question and everybody in the room stops to listen. Things get real quiet and people want to hear the answer. I imagine that's the situation we see in our lesson. The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" The Pharisees may have been testing Jesus, but the people and his disciples no doubt were wondering about the answer to this tough question!

What made this question one of the tough ones? What made it a teachable moment? In Jesus' day there were two schools of thought on the subject of divorce. One school of Jewish teachers, the school of Hillel, taught that you could get a divorce for any reason, as long as your wife "found no favor in your eyes". The reason for divorce could be anything from a burnt meal to the fact that you found someone better looking. The second school of teachers, the school of Shammai, said there needs to be something morally indecent about your wife to divorce her. Maybe she has a problem with her prayer life or gets angry quickly or does not take good care of the kids. The Pharisees, and the people no doubt, wanted to know: Who's right, Jesus?

We might be 2,000 years removed from the schools of Hillel and Shammai, but the confusion about divorce still exists. There are those today who feel people can get divorced for any reason under the sun. "If it feels good, do what's right for you!" they say. But others don't like such a lax attitude. You need a good reason to get divorced. Maybe you are feeling neglected or have grown apart. Maybe everything is just getting more and more difficult and things are spiraling down the tubes. Then it's okay to get a divorce. Who's right, Jesus?

The Pharisees needed to see the foundation of God's Word. Jesus asked, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." Moses did allow divorces in the Old Testament laws. The Pharisees understood the "how" to getting a divorce, but they didn't understand the "why". Why did God allow divorce among his Old Testament people? Did God actually approve of divorce? They thought he must be okay with it, because it happened all the time. But NO. God allowed divorce because their hearts were hard. They were so filled with sin that God established a way for society to continue operating. God never wanted divorce, and he still doesn't. **God makes marriages for life!**

So Jesus takes us back to creation, back before sin and Satan destroyed God's perfect paradise, back before our sinful nature, that recalcitrant recluse, wrought havoc on the world. Jesus points out now, not what Moses allowed, but what God created. First he reminds us that God created male and female human beings. In his great love for us God created two beings who correspond to one another perfectly. He created two beings who are different and yet fit together in his plan of love. He made the burly brawn and the delicate beauty. He made the strong silent type and the talkative emotive type. Because of this correspondence in creation, something happens. Young man leaves father and mother and is united to his wife. They leave home. They leave and cleave to one another, making a new home. This is, in fact, God's loving creation of marriage. **God makes marriages for life!** It's a creation which makes man and woman one flesh. They are no longer two people. **The one flesh reality stands.**

Think about how the one flesh reality changes our view of marriage. Sometimes we might joke and say to a married couple, "You two must be sharing a brain!" But that's a hint of this one flesh relationship. These are not two people who walk their own path and do their own thing. This is a one flesh marriage. So whenever you look at your spouse, whether you agree all the time or not, you can say with Adam, "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh!" Whether you are a married man or married woman, this is the one flesh reality. This perspective colors everything you do. Would you hurt your own body in words or actions? Would you think your own body is impossible to love anymore? Is *divorce* from your own body something worth considering? God says No. God said through Malachi the prophet, "I hate divorce," (Malachi 2:16), because God has joined you together. Don't separate!

The sad thing is that sin and Satan have many lies for us to fall into. You've probably heard them and maybe in weakness you've thought them yourself: "It's not a healthy situation for me personally; I need out of this marriage." "We're not being good parents for the kids with all this fighting. We'd be better off as friends." "I just don't love her like I used to." The Pharisees aren't the only ones who suffer from hard hearts. We too display this hardness of heart when we fall into the world's thinking. No matter how many people say it, divorce is not a good thing. God can certainly bring good from sinful decisions, but that doesn't take away the wrong that's been done. Only Christ takes away sin. Run to him for forgiveness for your sinful thoughts and actions—inside and outside of marriage. Whether you are married or not, seek his face that his love might shine upon you. Ask him to shape your thoughts and attitudes, even when you're not struggling with divorce!

The God who makes marriage for life is the same God who promises to be with you all your life. When marriages are on the rocks, go to your loving God. Christ Jesus established your marriage and bought both of your souls with his own precious blood. He has secured heaven for you. Do you think that healing your marriage is outside of his power? Do you imagine that he doesn't care about fixing your relationship? He does. He loves you. Ask God to heal your divisions wherever you are in life. Read God's Word and pray with your spouse. Come be strengthened in Bible class. Talk with your pastors. Seek God's help and lean not on your own understanding! Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God. Powerful enough to heal hurts in marriages, and wise enough to know divorce is not God's answer for you. In our distress, certain situations seem impossible. But with God all things are possible because **God makes marriages for life!**

## 2. So as children, he wants us in his hands.

One of the reasons God makes marriages on earth is so that we might experience, God willing, the gift of children. By his grace, God allows parents to be partners with Him in the creative process. He decides to let us experience the love the Father showers on us, by making us mothers and fathers who shower love on children. Parents have a special responsibility to show love to their children. Jesus also wants us to remember that we all are God's children. **So as children, he wants us in his hands.**

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." It's hard to imagine, but the disciples were actually scolding people for bringing their children to Jesus. They probably imagined Jesus' time was better spent with adults or maybe they were just tired of all the crowds, but rebuking parents for bringing children to have Jesus touch and bless them seems extreme. And so Jesus says, "Let them come! Don't put road blocks in their way!"

Let me describe a situation: God allows man and woman to bring new life into the world. He blesses a family with the gift of a child. And that one flesh reality now has a new life to care for and to teach about Jesus. But there are so many thoughts and worries going through the minds of parents, especially new parents. "Will she be healthy? How do I protect him from the Swine Flu? Am I doing something wrong? I don't know how to raise a child. What if I don't have good discipline? What if I'm not smart enough to help with homework? I don't want my child to suffer because of my faults." Yet in the midst of all these cares and worries, we hear the calm, loving voice of Jesus: "Let the little child come to me. I will take care of her. I will watch over her." And so, Christian parents bring babies and children to Baptism. This is the means of grace God has established for little children to come to Him. Here something special happens. God acts. God rips that baby from the hands of the devil, and takes him or her into the waiting arms of Jesus. **Jesus wants us in his hands** for this life and forever in heaven. So he washes away sin, just as he did this morning with Ruth and Tony. He washed away all the sins they would ever commit, and he brought them into his family. Let the little children come because he wants to take hold of us!

Congregations, too, have the command from Jesus: "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them." Each one of us must ask: Am I hindering the children? Do I encourage and lead children to know Jesus, either in Sunday school or elsewhere? Is our ministry to children suffering because I don't think our school ministry is worth supporting financially? Is raising our school's tuition helping or hurting our ministry to little children? These are questions we must wrestle with because Jesus tells us children have a place in his kingdom. But simply acknowledging that won't change our hearts. *Nothing will change until we see that Jesus wants all of us in his hands*, too. Just as he took up the little children and blessed them, so he grabs hold of you and blesses you. No matter how old or big you are, Jesus holds you closely to himself with love and care. Only when we see Jesus taking us in his hands will we care about him taking hold of our children. Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me." You and I are Jesus' little children. Trust your Savior as a little child. To such as these, who trust simply and completely in Jesus, to such as these the kingdom of heaven belongs.

With all those wedding chapel marriages in Nevada, I don't know how many people actually contemplated God's family plan. But I do know **God makes marriages for life**, even in wedding chapels. May that open our eyes to the one flesh reality and the beautiful Savior who wants us in his hands. AMEN.