

RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

Mark 10:1-16

Key Verse, 15:

“Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

This is not a message about determining when divorce is permissible. That requires much more than one Bible study or message. If you are married and thinking about divorce, you need to get professional marital counseling and much prayer support. Very few marriages cannot be saved. I am currently in a counseling class on Divorce and Remarriage. I will share some helpful things I have learned. But this message is not about who has the right to divorce and who doesn't. Let's listen and take to heart what Jesus has to say about blessed marriage and blessed little children.

I. Blessed Marriage (1-12)

As this chapter opens, Jesus left Galilee and went to the region of Judea across the Jordan, also known as Perea. Again crowds of people came to Jesus and, as was his custom, Jesus taught them. What did Jesus teach publicly? The first thing he taught was, **“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”** (1:15) Jesus taught with amazing authority from God. Jesus said, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (2:17). Jesus taught how David ate consecrated bread and then said, **“the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath”** (2:27). **It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath** (3:4). **A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand** (3:24). **Whoever does God's will is Jesus' brother and sister and mother** (3:35). Jesus taught the secrets of the kingdom of God in parables (Ch.4). Jesus taught that faith in him can bring healing and even raise the dead to life. Jesus taught the Pharisees that they had let go of the commands of God and were on to human traditions (7:8). Sin in the human heart makes one unclean. Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”**

As Jesus taught, some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”** The Pharisees are mentioned 11 times in Mark's gospel (2:16,18,24; 3:6; 7:1,3,5; 8:11,15; 10:2; 12:13). This is the 10th time.

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We don't need to review every verse. We already know that they were the main critics and opponents of Jesus and his disciples. Five of their critiques had to do with eating. They were quite legalistic about keeping the Law of Moses. They didn't approve of Jesus' teaching and activity. The first time they are said to have tested Jesus they asked Jesus for a sign from heaven, but Jesus refused (8:11). They wanted Jesus to prove his authority, like Moses who did miracles in Egypt. Actually, Jesus had already done so many miracles of healing and exorcism in public. Among these, we know Jesus healed some of them right in front of his critics, like the paralyzed man who was lowered down through the roof (2:12) and the man with the shriveled hand (5:5).

This time they tested Jesus by asking, **“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”** How was this a test? Perhaps they were testing Jesus' knowledge of the law. Also, they were trying to get Jesus into trouble. After all, John the Baptist was imprisoned for saying to King Herod, **“It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife”** (6:18). John's clear teaching on marriage caused him to be murdered.

How did Jesus reply? He turned the question back to them: **“What did Moses command you?”** Since they asked about what is “lawful,” Jesus directed them to Moses, who received and passed on God's law to the children of Abraham. Jesus pointed them back to the Bible.

In response, they said to Jesus (4): **“Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”** They were quoting from Deuteronomy 24:1 which reads as follows: **“If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house...”** Hebrew scholars debated two phrases in this verse: “displeasing to him” and “something indecent about her.” Liberal interpreters allowed for burning a meal to be grounds for divorce, while conservative interpreters said only adultery would be proper grounds for divorce. Perhaps the Pharisees were trying to draw Jesus into this debate so he would have to take sides, like in a political party. But Jesus was not drawn into the debate.

“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied (5). In the Bible hard hearts come from stubbornness, pride and unrepentance. Hard-hearted people do not listen to God's word. They are like Cain who ignored God's counsel and became a murderer and a restless wanderer.

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Surprisingly, Jesus' disciples were rebuked by Jesus for being hard-hearted, having eyes but failing to see and ears but failing to hear. Moses gave certain laws to his people because they were too hard-hearted to simply accept God's word. The Pharisees were being the same way by rejecting Jesus' words and deeds.

Jesus took them back further than Moses with Genesis Bible study. Look at verses 6-9. **“But at the beginning of creation 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.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”** Marriage was God's idea: one man and one woman leave their parents and unite to form one team, one unit, one flesh. When they unite, they are no longer two, but one. In marriage, two become one. It is leaving (one's parents) and cleaving (to one's spouse).

Marriage is a God-thing. It is not just two people getting together. It is sanctioned and blessed by God as a holy covenant, a binding agreement between the man and the woman to protect, provide and love each other as long as they both are living. This was God's intention of a blessed marriage. Jesus said, **“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

Jesus did not talk to them about divorce. Clearly, Jesus was not happy with his divorce-ridden culture. Divorce is a painful and harsh consequence of fallen people. Why do people divorce? It is not primarily because of infidelity. Here are 6 reasons, taken from my class on Divorce, taught by a professional Christian marriage counselor:

1. No commitment/sacrifice
2. Different developmental growth and changes
3. Life-cycle changes
4. Situational factors
5. Individual problems
6. Affairs

As you can see, all of these reasons to divorce could be overcome with a serious commitment to honor the covenant of marriage before God. So a greater question is then why do people marry. Here are 5 common myths that people believe before marriage:

1. Expectations are the same for both of us

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2. The relationship will grow and get better
3. We will overcome the bad/difficult
4. We will always feel and experience love, passion, intimacy and commitment
5. Happily ever after... (like many movies)

Jesus taught God's ideal and original intention of marriage based on Genesis chapter 1 and 2. The Pharisees were quick to find the loophole in Moses' law to justify their own behavior and lifestyle, which was less than ideal. People must submit and surrender to God's way, rather than using God's word to justify our own desires and ideas.

Even Jesus' own disciples had difficulty accepting Jesus' words. So when they went into the house, they asked Jesus in private about this teaching. Jesus answered them (11-12): **“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.”** Divorce cannot reverse the marriage process. In divorce, one becomes two halves, which are both incomplete and torn. The breaking of the marriage bond is a traumatic experience that leaves a permanent wound, since you never forget your marriage partner.

Why do people divorce and remarry? Basically, because they think they will be happier to unite with someone else, someone “better” for them. They also feel that their marriage is broken and unfixable, or not worth fixing. But if their marriage wasn't dissolved by God then they are committing adultery, according to Jesus. One Christian scholar condenses strong marriages into one essential ingredient: they REPAIR well. Every relationship has problems and challenges that result in damages. Strong marriages and strong relationships deal with differences through respectful communication, and giving and receiving forgiveness.

II. Blessed little children (13-16)

Jesus dealt with the serious and weighty topic of divorce. Just then, people were bringing to Jesus little children for Jesus to place his hands on them and bless them. As we know, Jesus was a busy man who was in high demand. Many people came to him with serious life problems. Jesus only had 24 hours per day to do everything, including sleep, like everyone else. He probably needed 12 secretaries. So his disciples tried to help him by screening his personal visitors. In this case, the disciples rebuked those who brought their children. Maybe they said, “Don't you know Jesus doesn't have time for such trivial affairs? Get your kids out of here!”

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As we know, children can be really cute and make us smile at times, but they can also be quite annoying and disruptive, especially when they want something and throw tantrums. Also, they generally are not very helpful in accomplishing great tasks or solving difficult problems. They are simply too weak and too ignorant. Isn't it surprising that Jesus had just taught them a short time ago to welcome little children in his name? Jesus had even made it a point by having a little child stand among them and then taking the child in his arms saying, **"Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."** Jesus' disciples were slow learners.

When Jesus saw what his disciples did, trying to send the children away, Jesus was indignant. It means Jesus was not happy. He was very displeased with his disciples. They were frequently saying and doing things contrary to the mind and heart of Jesus. So Jesus made it another teaching moment. He said to them (14-16), **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

Why does the kingdom of God belong to little children? Children are good at receiving. They receive almost anything you want to give them, because they trust the giver's love, and they are curious. As we get older, we become more discerning but also more distrusting and suspicious, perhaps because we recognize the greed, selfishness and hypocrisy in all people, including ourselves. Little children are weak and vulnerable. They want someone to protect them, to provide for them, and to love them. Protection, provision and love are 3 things that all people need and should have and should learn to give as we mature.

There is another reason Jesus blessed the little children. It is because they came to Jesus or were brought to Jesus for his blessing. Jesus delights in blessing those who come to him humbly, just as they are, for his blessing. Jesus invites us to come to him, in faith and in humility.

Jesus made little children a standard for heaven: **"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"** (15). Here, the children contrast the Pharisees. The Pharisees came to test and trap Jesus. They came to shame and defeat him. Why? Because they thought they had nothing to receive from Jesus. Rather, they felt threatened by Jesus, that they would lose too much to accept Jesus' teaching and side with him. They were not

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prepared to give up anything. But neither were they open to receiving anything from Jesus, even the kingdom of God! Jesus' disciples were in danger of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their bad influence and teaching. The Pharisees were unbelieving and hard-hearted. In contrast, the little children were trusting and pure-hearted.

We must receive the kingdom of God like a little child to enter it. We must come to Jesus, just as we are, for his blessing. We must simply accept God's message and messenger, Jesus, rather than justifying our sins through complicated excuses. May God give us blessed marriages and give us humble and trusting hearts to receive the kingdom of God like little children.