

God's View of Divorce, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 19:7-9

Code: 90-232

Well, let's go back to our study of the original history of man. And we have come to the origin of marriage. We have been looking at the subject of origins. In chapter 2 of Genesis we have the origin of marriage in verse 24: "For this cause a man his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife. They shall become one flesh." When God created man and created woman on the sixth day of creation, He also created the basic relationship for humanity: one man, one woman married for life. That's such a simple truth.

I have read and I have listened on the Discovery Channel, I think it was, to a series dealing with human relations in which sociological evolutionists, those who are trying to understand the evolution of society, were trying to figure out how it was that mankind evolved into monogamy. Well, they didn't evolve into monogamy they were created that way by God from the very first day.

And the sanctity of marriage is upheld throughout all of Scripture, clear through the entire Bible. Marriage is even used as an analogy for God's relationship to Israel: God is husband; Israel is wife. And for Christ's relationship to the church: Christ is the bridegroom; the church is the bride. One man, one woman for life, God's perfect plan, God's creative ideal.

But we all know that the creative ideal was subject to dramatic change when sin entered the world. And we're going to look at that in chapter 3 of Genesis when we go into the origin of evil in the world. But we know that sin entered. And when sin came into the world it affected everything, everything. Man's nature, man's conduct, woman's nature, woman's conduct, and consequently, their relationship in marriage. Everything in the universe became corrupted to one degree or another including marriage, the most sacred and blessed relationship.

As we will learn, when we get into Genesis chapter 3, when Satan tempted Eve and Eve sinned, marriage was devastated; and it has been ever since. But that doesn't mean that God has changed His standard; marriage is still the will of God as described in Genesis 2:24: one man, one woman for life. And furthermore, God hates divorce. In fact He says that, first person, Malachi chapter 3 verse 16: "I hate divorce." And that's long after the fall.

So we understand marriage as the Divine ideal. We understand that marriage has been corrupted by the fall but we understand God hasn't changed His ideal and that God still hates divorce. Having acknowledged those truths we still have to face the reality of marital conflict and we have to face the

reality of divorce in a fallen world. We agree that divorce falls short of God's ideal. But the question is: Is it every acceptable, is it ever tolerable to God? And the best way we can answer that is to look at Matthew chapter 19 because it's in Matthew chapter 19 that God, Himself, answers that question. God, Himself, incarnate in Jesus Christ.

We've been looking at this chapter and we're going to kind of wrap up our look at it. Matthew chapter 19, and I'll just remind you, verse 3, "The Pharisees came to Him, testing Him and saying is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause at all?" They bring up the question: Can man divorce his wife for any cause at all? And, of course, the popular answer was: Absolutely, yes. A very popular Rabbi had come up with that interpretation of Scripture and everybody bought into it because it was the most concession to their sinfulness and their evil desire.

The popular was yes. They were trying to get Jesus to say no. If Jesus said no they thought they could somehow make Him unpopular with the people. And Jesus answered them not by simply saying no, but by taking them back to God's original standard. Verse 4, "He answered and said, 'Have you not read that He, who created them, from the beginning, made them male and female and said for this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, shall cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate.'"

Jesus answered their question in His normal profound way that evaded their attempt to discredit Him by saying, "You don't have any problem with Me, your problem is with God." This issue is not about Rabbis; this issue is about God's Word. And He took them right back to Genesis 2:24 and confirmed the Divine ideal. The Divine ideal: male, female; one man, one woman for life. This is God's design. He brings them together, makes them one flesh. You better not separate what God joins.

And then comes the compelling question in verse 7. "They said to Him, 'Why, then, did Moses command to give her a certificate and divorce her?'" Well, of course, Moses didn't command that. Nowhere did Moses ever command divorce. He didn't command it, he didn't commend it, he didn't condone it, and he didn't excuse it anywhere. There is a portion of Deuteronomy 24 verse 1 to 4, where, in the Mosaic instruction, of course, written by Moses, as was all the Pentateuch, Moses prohibits remarriage. In Deuteronomy 24 he says if a man divorces his wife for some impropriety of some kind, and she goes and marries another man, she commits adultery and so he can never take her back because that's an abomination to God. All he's doing is regulating remarriage. There is no command to divorce; there's no commending of divorce; there's no condoning of divorce; there's not excusing of divorce in that passage. In fact, as we've pointed out, we won't go back into the detail, that actually prohibits remarriage because it says if you ever do divorce and remarry anybody else, you have engaged in an adulterous relationship and that is an abomination to the Lord and you've made yourself unclean.

So you say, "Well then in Old Testament there was no grounds for divorce?" That's right. "Well," you say, "what about adultery?" Well, originally adultery wasn't a grounds for divorce because what was the penalty for adultery? Death. In Leviticus chapter 20 and verse 10, "God says punish the adulterer by execution." Adultery did end a marriage but not by divorce. It ended a marriage by widowhood. According to Old Testament law, adultery was not originally a reason for divorce. Certainly not in the Mosaic Law, the law of God given to Moses, it was to be punished by death. And that's how sacred marriage is to God. There wasn't any grounds for divorce because if they carried out the law of God, an adulterer would have been executed. And any other cause of divorce, as in Deuteronomy 24, any other impropriety, any other thing that you did to divorce your wife would cause her to become an adulteress when she remarried and make her unclean and an abomination to God. That's why the Old Testament originally, initially, states no grounds for divorce. Adultery would break the marriage because the guilty person would be executed.

But, soon after God's law was given it became apparent that the people were not going to uphold it. God told them when they went into the land of Canaan to kill all the Canaanites; they didn't do that. God told them to stay away from the idols; they didn't do that. God told them not to intermarry with the pagans; they didn't do that. God told them to obey His law; they didn't do that. God told them to carry out His law to the very letter of His law; they didn't do that. So in among the things they didn't do, they didn't execute adulterers.

And it became apparent that the nation was hard-hearted. But God is merciful. God, Himself, could have executed adulterers. Every time somebody committed adultery, God could have upheld the original standard of Leviticus 20:10 and by Divine act, executed them on the spot. But God is so merciful and God is so gracious, you see that right at the very beginning. God says to Adam and Eve in the Garden, "The day you eat of the fruit of that tree, you'll die." They ate and they didn't die. And immediately God puts mercy into place. God could have executed all the adulterers but He didn't. God demonstrates His patience and His forbearance, and His kindness, and His mercy.

And so, verse 8, Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart, because you never would do what the law said," because you never would obey, you never would implement the law, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it has not been this way." It was never God's original intention. It was never God's original plan. But you're such a hard-hearted people that God graciously and mercifully held back the execution the adulterer deserved. And in its place, Moses allowed divorce.

Jesus then says, in verse 9, "But I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality," and then that's back to the adulterous situation. If you divorce except for that issue and somebody goes and marries someone else, they commit adultery. That is to say God doesn't recognize any divorce except in the case of sexual sin.

And when God realized His people weren't going to carry out His law--as I said He could have executed the adulterers Himself--but being a God of mercy, He didn't do that. He was amazingly gracious. And He didn't execute the adulterer. But He did give the innocent person the possibility of escaping the pollution of that adultery through divorce. After all, the innocent party would have been freed from the marriage if God had executed the guilty party. The fact that God was merciful to the guilty party shouldn't then penalize the innocent. So God allowed for divorce. And He allowed it because of the hardness of heart. That's an expression intended to define willful, rebellious sin.

So beloved, I want you to understand that verse 9 is really important. Because when you put verse 8 with verse 9, Moses permitted divorce, verse 9, "Whoever divorces his wife except for immorality, marries another woman, commits adultery." What you have there is Jesus, God in flesh, affirming the only grounds for divorce. And I think Jesus is affirming that that was understood in the Old Testament. There isn't any explicit verse in the Old Testament that says that. But there isn't any explicit statement, you remember I pointed out, in which God commanded Cain and Abel to bring a certain sacrifice but it was obvious they knew what they should have done; God revealed it, it just isn't recorded in Scripture. And I'm very confident that God revealed through Moses to the people of Israel that He would allow for divorce on the part an innocent for the sin of impenitent adultery. And Jesus simply affirms that.

So we can say the only thing that breaks a marriage is adultery. In God's perfect plan, adultery would break a marriage by creating a widow who could then remarry. In God's merciful plan, God allows for a divorce in the case of impenitent adultery to free the innocent party from that intolerable situation. So there's not an Old Testament text that establishes the ground, but I think it's established right here in Matthew 19:8 and 9 in the very words of Jesus.

Now, I believe that God then allows this: divorce for the cause of adultery. And I want to show you a very dramatic illustration of it. Turn back to Jeremiah chapter 3 ... Jeremiah chapter 3. And let's just look at verse 1, God says, "If a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man, will he still return to her? Will not that land be completely polluted?" Where did that come from? Deuteronomy 24, it's almost verbatim out of Deuteronomy 24. You can't divorce and if you do divorce and she goes and marries somebody else, she can't decide I don't like this guy; I'm going to come back to you. That would something that would completely pollute the land.

But look at the difference. "But you," end of verse 1, "you're a harlot with many lovers. Yet you turn to Me," declares the Lord. In the Mosaic accommodation to the hardness of heart, in the Mosaic accommodation to sin, there was the recognition that divorce would occur. But if it occurred it could only occur for adultery. If it occurred any other way there was no coming back. So according to Deuteronomy 24 there was no coming back but God says, "I'll take you back; if you repent I'll take you back."

And look how that unfolds in verse 2, "Lift up your eyes to the barren heights and see where have you not been violated. By the roads you have sat for them like an Arab in the desert and you have polluted a land with your harlotry and with your wickedness. Therefore the showers have been withheld and there has been no spring rain. Yet you had a harlots forehead," that is to be appear as a harlot, "you refused to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to Me: 'My Father, Thou art the friend of my youth, will He be angry forever? Will He be indignant to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and have done evil things. You have had your way."

Now this is very interesting. He says, "You're a harlot; you got all kinds of lovers. You commit adultery with one person; you got adultery going all over the place." He's talking about spiritual adultery; He's talking about Israel. He's the husband; Israel's the wife. And Israel has just got all other kind of gods, going off up to this idol and that idol and that's a spiritual adultery, being unfaithful to God. "Yet you turn to Me," He says. What is this? This is a shallow, superficial thing. It's not a real break with their idolatry. It's not the real thing. Their devotion to adultery, frankly, was notorious. They waited, according to verse 2, to rape their prey like marauding Bedouin bandits in the desert. Their desire was insatiable. They just couldn't be satisfied and they just weren't ashamed. And they even, according to verse 5: instead of coming to the Lord in repentance they thought God's anger would die out. They thought God's anger would run out. "He's not going to be angry forever. He's not going to be indignant to the end. He's not going to punish us."

"You've just gone on doing your evil things and you had your evil way and you just filled up your soul with lust and you went after every other god, you went after all these spiritual harlots, all these spiritual gods," I should say, "and played the harlot. And then you give Me lip service and you think that I'm not going to judge you and My anger is going to run out and I'm not going to punish you." This is pretty serious. He's talking here to Judah, the southern kingdom.

And then in verse 6, "Then the Lord said to me in the days of Josiah, the king, 'Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree and she was a harlot there.'" To show the serious danger that Judah and Jerusalem is in, the southern kingdom, to show how dangerous their situation is, the Lord compares to Israel, the northern kingdom. Now the northern kingdom at the time of Jeremiah had already gone into captivity. The Assyrians had come in 722BC and they had taken the northern kingdom captivity, already gone into captivity and, frankly, gone forever. They never came back ... never came back. And they went into captivity because of what they did. Have you seen what faithless Israel did? She went up on every high hill and under every green tree and was a harlot there. In other words, they had gods in every hill, in every tree. They had deities all over that entire land. They had their groves to worship the false god. They had their high places to worship the false gods.

And verse 7, God says, "And I thought after she had done all these things, she would return to Me. But she didn't return. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it." Judah, the southern kingdom, they saw it. They saw the idolatry. They saw the harlotry. They saw what Israel was doing. And they saw that Israel wasn't listening to God's call to repent. They saw that. And then, verse 8, "And I saw that for all the adulteries of faithless Israel," listen to this, "I had sent her away and given her a writ of divorce." Now I want to stop right there.

God divorced Israel. Remember now, the kingdom after Solomon was divided into the northern kingdom, Israel, the southern kingdom called Judah. The northern kingdom made up by the ten tribes; the southern kingdom made up of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. They were, of course, by Jeremiah's time, members of all 12 tribes that had migrated south to be a part of Judah. But the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken captive, literally the judgment of God, from which they never returned because of their idolatry.

Verse 8, "I sent her away and gave her a bill of divorce." God doesn't do unrighteous things. God doesn't do evil things. God doesn't do sinful things. God doesn't even do marginal things. When the relationship with God, the husband of Israel, in the analogy, was broken by Israel's incessant, unrepentant idolatry, which is a form of spiritual adultery.

By the way, those cults, those Canaanite-ish cults were spiritual adulteries but they were also rife with physical adulteries. There were within the cults of the Canaanites, typically those cults were defined by sex and fertility. They were sexual fertility cults and there were a myriad of prostitutes, male and female, that engaged themselves with the so-called worshippers in those cults. So it's very reasonable to assume that while they were committing spiritual adultery, they were also engaged in physical adultery in which, as I told you last time, may have played into the reason why Ezra told them to divorce their pagan wives. Not just because they threatened the future of the nation Israel by intermarriage, the nation could be lost as to its purity, but also they had been guilty of this adultery.

And so the northern kingdom had engaged itself in spiritual adultery: following after other gods, being unfaithful to God, the true God, and also in physical adultery associated with that. Because of that the relationship was broken and at that point, God says, it went so far that, "I sent her away," that's the language of divorce, "and gave her a writ of divorce."

The word "faithless Israel" there, you see it at the beginning of verse 8. Often translated "backsliding Israel". It really means faithless. And so there's a Divine divorce here. And isn't it interesting that God actually divorces Israel for the reason of adultery? And that is analogous to the only reason for divorce, even in the physical realm, for God's people in that also being adultery.

But let's go on a little bit. In verse 8 God says, "You saw that," He's writing through the prophet Jeremiah to Judea, the southern kingdom, "You saw that. You saw that I sent Israel away. You saw

that it was a permanent ending to our relationship. Yet, her treacherous sister, Judah, didn't fear but she went and was a harlot also." There was no fear.

In verse 9, He says, "There was a lightness in her harlotry." That's a very interesting phrase there. It came about it because of the lightness of her harlotry. Now, what does that mean? Well, I guess one way you could translate that would be to translate it "casual harlotry". They treated their harlotry lightly. It's the idea that there was no seriousness; they didn't think seriously about their sin. Idolatry did not weigh heavy on Judah. Even though they should have looked at Israel and seen the consequence of it, it didn't weigh heavy on them.

And so, in verse 10, because it was such a light thing to them and such a small thing, in spite of all of this, in spite of the divorce of the northern kingdom, "In spite of all of this, her treacherous sister, Judah, didn't return to Me with all her heart. But rather, in deception," declares the Lord. It was a fake repentance; it was a shallow repentance; there was a superficial repentance. You know, frankly, even under the "revival under Josiah" there was a tremendous amount of superficiality.

So the point here is this, God divorced Israel, the northern kingdom, for spiritual adultery. And that is a righteous model for when divorce is tolerable. But God tolerated a lot. It wasn't just one time and you're out. God tolerated that northern kingdom's constant, relentless pursuit of harlotry. God was so patient, so patient, wanting to forgive.

In fact, if you don't think that's true go down to verse 12. "Go and proclaim these words toward the north." He says to the people of Judah, "Go up there in the north and just yell out to the people who've been hauled off: return faithless Israel." God's still giving the same message, "I'll not look upon you in anger for I'm gracious," declares the Lord. "I'll not be angry forever. Just acknowledge your iniquity that you have transgressed against the Lord, your God, and have scattered your favors to the strangers under every green tree and you have not obeyed My voice," declares the Lord. "Return, o faithless sons," declares the Lord, "for I'm the Master to you and I will take one from a city and two from a family and I'll bring you design." Isn't that gracious? Here they are, they're already gone, the divorce is already done, and God's saying, "Hey, if you want to come back, o faithless, backsliding Israel, if you want to repent, if you want to deal with your sin, I will take you back." That's grace.

You know, it took 700 years before God divorced Israel. That's pretty patient, isn't it? Now I sometimes have to counsel with a couple and maybe the husband has committed adultery or the wife has committed adultery. And the partner says, "How long do I tolerate this?" Well, God waited 700 years before He divorced Israel. There's some kind of message in there, isn't there? That somebody's sin isn't immediately an excuse to dump your partner if there's repentance, if there's penitence. And the classic illustration is the relationship between the prophet Hosea and his wife Gomer, who became a prostitute. Yet he went into the slave market and when he found her penitent,

he brought her back, after years of adultery. She was actually stark naked being sold off as a sex slave, when he embraced her, took her back and treated her as if she was a virgin.

Divorce certainly for the cause of adultery, yes but only after extended patience. And that's why through the years, and this has gone for years and years, I've always said there is a grounds for divorce in the Bible. It is adultery. But it is that adultery that is continual and impenitent and it just goes on. And your patient for a while but it becomes apparent that there's an impenitent heart and that's the option you have. Just make sure you demonstrate a measure of patience as Hosea did, as God did with Israel, in case God should work repentance in that heart.

Turn to Isaiah chapter 50 ... Isaiah chapter 50. We have a lot more things to say tonight if we have time. Now we're going to have a message from Isaiah to Judah. Judah, back in Jeremiah chapter 3, I think it was verse 11, I didn't read it to you, said that Judah was more treacherous than Israel. I mean in some ways, Judah was worse than Israel. Israel's idolatry was worse but you know what God sees as worse than idolatry is hypocrisy. And Judah's hypocrisy was worse. But still, chapter 50 of Isaiah, most interesting, verse 1, "'Thus,' says the Lord, 'where is the certificate of divorce by which I have sent your mother away? Or to whom of my creditors did I sell you? Behold, you were sold for your iniquities and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.'"

What's He saying here? He's saying, "You know, I sent you away. I sent you away for your iniquities, your transgressions. I sold you for your iniquities." What's He talking about? Babylonian captivity. They were going to go into the captivity into Babylon; they were going to be sent away, the separation. It was the end of the theocracy. 586BC Jerusalem was destroyed. Jews, three deportations from 603, 597, 586, all carried out to Babylon. The theocracy has come to an end. And these people are separated from God.

But notice this, where is the certificate of divorce? You don't have one. God says, "I divorced Israel, I never divorced Judah." Never divorced Judah. The southern kingdom, started out as two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. But eventually, particularly under the revival under Josiah, people from all ten tribes migrated south so that Judah, eventually, even after Israel was gone away, the Judah that existed when the Babylonians came and took them away, really was made up of people from all 12 tribes. So they are newly constituted Jewish people, the people of Israel, the ones that went into captivity in Israel and got intermarried with the Gentiles and disappeared. But Israel was sort of regrouped, regrouped in Judah. And He said, "I never gave you a divorce. I never gave you a divorce. We had a temporary separation but never a divorce."

You see God has an unconditional covenant to fulfill, doesn't He? He promised that He would raise up Israel, when He made the Abrahamic promise. That He would raise up a nation out of the loins of Abraham and that that nation would be great. And that nation would be like the sand of the sea and the stars of Heaven; it would stretch across the earth and that it would be the source of blessing to the

world. And then He told David that out of that nation and to that nation would come a great King in the line of David who would establish the throne in Israel. And that Israel would have a glorious kingdom--we talked about this morning--and that they would receive all the promises to Abraham and all the promises to David some time in the future. So God dismissed the northern kingdom as an object lesson of what the southern kingdom deserved. But because of His unconditional covenant, He never gave a certificate of divorce to Judah. There would be a separation, and I want you to know, folks, that separation is still going on even as we speak.

Look at over at chapter 54 of Isaiah, verse 5, God is talking here to Judah. He says, "Your husband is your maker." Your husband is your maker; there hasn't been any divorce. "Your husband is your maker whose name is the Lord of Hosts. And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel who is called the God of all the earth. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit. Even like a wife of one's youth when she is rejected," says your God. "For a brief moment," verse 7, "I forsook you. But with great compassion, I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid my face for a moment but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the Lord, your ... what? Your Redeemer. "I'm going to redeem Israel; it's just a brief separation." "But," He says, "it's been going on a pretty long time." It's being on for really, well, over 2500 years. It's been going on the 500 years that ended the Old Testament era; the 2,000 years now and they're still separated from God. Yes, but that's just a moment in the light of eternity and in the purposes of God. And there is a separation but not a divorce and this is only for a while and the Lord will redeem His people. Oh, that's just a great promise.

Turn to chapter 59 of Isaiah and verses 1 and 2, "Behold the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save. Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." This is a separation. Your husband is your Maker. Your husband is your Redeemer. You are forsaken for a time. There is a separation for a time. But God is going to redeem you. And it's going to depend upon your repentance.

This is another model we need to keep in mind. Divorce is allowable for unrepentant adultery. But God, who sets the standard, was extremely patient before He actually carried the divorce giving every opportunity for an adulterous wife to repent. God saw the value of a separate without a divorce during which there is constant offer of salvation and restoration and redemption. You see all of that, models upholding the Divine ideal. What could be better than that an adulterous, who has violated a marriage, is brought to conviction, brought to repentance and that marriage brought to restoration?

You know there's a lot at the latter part of the book of Isaiah about calling Israel to repentance. Back in chapter, is it 55, verse 3, "Incline your ear and come to Me." Here's God constantly calling this disobedient, adulterous wife back. "Come to Me; listen that you may live and I'll make an everlasting covenant with you according to the faithful mercies shown to David." Over in chapter 57, again, in

verse 15: "'For thus', says the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is holy, 'I dwell at a high and holy place and also with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. For I'll not contend forever neither will I always be angry, for the spirit would grow faint before me in the breath of those of whom I have made. Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry and I struck him. I hid My face and was angry. And he went on turning away in the way of his heart. I've seen his ways,'" love this, "'But I'll heal him. I'll lead him and restore comfort to him and to his mourners.'"

Over in chapter 59, again, verse 20: "A Redeemer will come to Zion and for those who turn from transgression and Jacob," declares the Lord. And then that wonderful new covenant language, "I'll make a covenant with them. My spirit which is upon you, My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor the mouth of your offspring, nor the mouth of your offspring's offspring," says the Lord, "from now and forever."

Look at chapter 61. I mean the whole beginning of the chapter pictures the Messiah calling this wayward wife back. "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, the Lord has then ordered me to bring good news to the afflicted. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, freedom to prisoners. To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all who mourn. To grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantel of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. And they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He may be glorified. Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations; they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations." All of that is language of restoration. All of that is language of salvation. And God redeems His people.

Go over to chapter 62, verse 11. "Behold the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, say to the daughter of Zion, 'Lo your salvation comes. Behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him. And they will call them the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord.'" Again, it's just talking about the fact that there's coming a time when God's going to call them back and He's going to save them, He's going to redeem Him.

Over in chapter 63, verse 7, "I shall make mention of the loving kindness of the Lord, the praises of the Lord according to all that the Lord has granted us. And the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He has granted them according to His compassion and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses." I mean God's grace is so magnanimous, His kindness, His love, His tenderness, His mercy, His goodness. In fact, God is so forgiving, He is so willing to take back an adulterous wife, this is so wonderful, end of verse 8, "So He became their Savior." He, Himself, in all their affliction, He was afflicted. And angel of His presence saved them. In His love and in His mercy He redeemed them. He lifted them and carried them all the days of old. That's always been God's attitude. He is a God of redemption. He is a God of restoration. "And He will lead His people," the end of verse 14

says, "and make for Himself a glorious name."

In chapter 65, the same thing, verses 17 to the end of the chapter. Verse 22 of chapter 66 talks about how the Lord will create a new Heaven and a new earth and that the name of Israel will endure forever. Of course, that is when the Kingdom comes. And we saw it this morning in Zachariah, how that the Lord is going to save Israel. In Zachariah 13 the Lord is going to pour out a cleansing stream and purge the sins of the Jews at the end of the age and bring in His glorious, glorious kingdom.

So I say all that to say this: God is separated currently from the Jewish people but He is not divorced. In fact, go back to Isaiah 62:4; you've got to look at this. It's just really great. He says in verse 4, just part of it, "It will no longer be said to you forsaken." There's coming a time for the people of Israel, that will no longer be said them forsaken. "Nor to your land will there any longer be said desolate. But you will be called; My delight is in her and your land married. For the Lord delights in you and to Him, your land will be married." You're not going to be called the forsaken of God anymore. You're going to be called married.

God is separated from the Jews but not divorced. Yes, he was divorced; He divorced the northern kingdom and they were gone. And those rebellious people were lost for all eternity. But God is not divorced the Jews still the reconstituted nation of Israel is now separated from God because of their sins and their transgressions. But I'm just pointing out to you the fact that God is so very patient 'cause He made a covenant.

The point of all of this is to establish that divorce for adultery was allowed as an act of mercy to the guilty who, if the law of God was actually enacted, would be executed, according to Leviticus 20:10. So divorce was an act of mercy toward the guilty. It was also an act of mercy toward the innocent so that a person married an inveterate, unrepentant adulterer didn't have to spend their whole life in that condition. That they had the option of divorce for adultery and could go on and marry another when there was impenitent adultery.

We believe that's affirmed by the fact that God actually divorced Israel for adultery. But we also believe there's an attitude conveyed by Hosea and Gomer, illustrated in God and Judah, there's an attitude conveyed in the prophet Isaiah here, that God, though He separated from Judah, was immensely patient waiting for the repentance and the restoration. That's sort of the high ground that God takes. And I don't expect that God wants us to wait 700 years or maybe even seven years. But I think there needs to be some exercise of patience to see what God might do.

Turn to Matthew chapter 1, and you know, while you're waiting, instead of saying, "Oh, that wretched, adulterous partner, I'm glad they're gone." You ought to have the attitude of God and pray for their cleansing, and pray for the penitence, and pray for their brokenness, and pray for the restoration of the marriage. But to show you that this was definitely the pattern, I want you to notice chapter 1 of

Matthew verse 18.

The birth of Jesus Christ was as follows, "When His mother, Mary, had been betrothed to Joseph," they literally, a betrothal was a binding legal contract; they were legally connected. They had made their vows, they had not consummated the marriage; but the betrothal was the legal union, though the physical union came later. They were betrothed. And amazingly, before they came together, because betrothal did not allow them to have a physical union, they were waiting for that. This was a time in which the contract was made and so the husband could then prepare his life, to take his bride into his home. And he had some time to do that, usually up to a year. He finds out, before they've ever come together in a physical relationship, that she's pregnant.

Verse 19, "Joseph, her husband, being a righteous man," now that tells us that he would do what was right before God, "and he was also a kind man," he didn't want to disgrace her. So he decided to do, what? "Put her away privately." What was that? Divorce. Now, what would have been the grounds for divorce? He looks and sees she's pregnant, he assumes she's had a relationship with somebody else. And as a righteous man he did what was a righteous act and what was a kind act. He didn't parade her in front, he wasn't going to parade her; in his own mind he couldn't do that. He said, "I'll just divorce her."

Again, here's a righteous man going to divorce his betrothed for adultery. Which again indicates to us that it was common knowledge that since execution was not what occurred, divorce had taken its place, and God allowed it where there was adultery. And Joseph, in a righteous manner, was going to do this. I suppose we could question whether he might not have been a little more patient. But I think at the time he would have been so totally devastated that this was his immediate thought. "While he was thinking it," verse 20, "an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream saying, 'Joseph, son of David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. That which has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'" There never was a man; the baby was created in her womb by the Holy Spirit.

But again, you have illustration here of the fact that a righteous man would break the marriage vow on the basis of adultery. We can then say that that is the Divine allowance. The Divine ideal: one man, one woman for life. The Divine allowance: adultery allows for divorce.

I stretch you a little bit: What do you think will do in the millennial kingdom with adulterers? If I know anything about the millennial kingdom I know this: that the rule of God will absolute, right? And that the law of God will pervasive. And I would say that the best educated guess would be that in the scenario of the millennial kingdom, you will have the law of God enacted in a very instant and firm fashion. So you may find in the millennial kingdom adulterers being dealt with by God in the way that was prescribed in the original law, even death.

So go back to Matthew 19, after that long journey back hundreds of years to Isaiah and Jeremiah. But back in Matthew 19, this is really interesting. Jesus upheld the Divine ideal, He just says, "Look, you know," verse 4, 5, and 6, "God hasn't changed the Divine ideal: one man, one woman for life; don't you separate what God's brought together. What about divorce? Well God tolerates it because of your hard-hearted resistance to doing what His law demanded that you do. God, in His mercy, allows it. But if you ever divorce your wife except for immorality, except for sexual immorality--and that's a broad category, any kind of sexual immorality--and you divorce for anything other than that, and you marry someone else, you then consummate a relationship in adulterous fashion. Because God doesn't recognize the divorce because it didn't have the proper grounds."

Bottom line: Jesus is saying marriage is for good. And the only way out is divorce. By the way, this is reiterated in Matthew 5:31. And there are two other passages: Mark 10:11 and 12, and Luke 16:18. In the Mark passage and the Luke passage, the exception isn't given. It doesn't say except for immorality. But we know when we study the gospels and we compare Matthew, Mark, Luke--the Synoptics they're called--and we bring them together, we know that the truth of any incident or any teaching is the composite of those. One doesn't cancel out the other.

Mark upholds the Divine ideal by just saying there's no basis of divorce; and if you divorce you commit adultery. Luke upholds the Divine ideal, if you divorce and remarry; you commit adultery. But Matthew, here in Matthew 19 and back in Matthew 5, adds that one caveat which we can know is true because we can see it in the Old Testament as I just demonstrated in God divorcing Israel: except for sexual sin.

So Jesus upholds the Divine ideal. And He silences these wicked Pharisees, really makes them look wicked. They were trying to trap Him and all He did was show them up, show them to be wicked in their disobedience to God's Divine ideal. Well, so much for the conversation with the Pharisees.

I love what happened in verse 10. You just have to see this; I won't take long. The disciples. Having put the gospel record together, the conversation with the leaders is over and now He's talking to the disciples. And they said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." Now, why would they say that? They got the message: if you get married, it is permanent; it's permanent. If you get married and you are so tied to a wife that only her sexual sin, only adultery, could ever release you from that, that means that you have to put with everything else. They got it.

So there it was very putting, they had met plenty of women; they knew what marriages looked at. And, of course, in their environment you could dump your wife for anything; this is news to them. "You mean if it's not adultery, it's for life, no matter what she does or says or how she acts. It's better not to marry." You know they were right at the point where I often am when I talk to young people who are really in a big hurry to get married. And I say, "The only thing worse than wishing you were

married is wishing you weren't." You don't want to be in too much of a hurry; they're just saying that's it for us, we're out. "It is better not marry 'cause you are stuck."

Then Jesus says to them, verse 11, He said to them, "Well not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given." What's that? What statement? "Better not to marry." Not everybody can handle that. You can sit back and philosophically say, "You know, if I get married and I got to stay with the same woman for life and the only I can get rid of her is if she commits adultery, and she doesn't do that and I'm stuck for life with other thing she does, I'm not going to get married." Jesus says the problem is not everybody can stand being single. Not everyone can accept this statement, only those to whom it has been given, only those who have been given the ability to be single. In fact, the Greek meant, only those who have space, or have room, in their lives for singleness. Metaphorically it means only those who can accept this in their minds, who can accept this into their emotions, who can accept this into their moral will.

It's easy to say, "Well, I'm going to get married; I'm not going to get stuck with some woman my entire life. How do I know what she'll be like? I look at her now; she looks fine. What am I going to have in ten years? How do I know what I'm going to have? How do I know what paths are going to go in what direction? How do I know that?" And Jesus says, "Well, it's easy to say that; it's just not possible for you to handle that morally." Because you're wired by God to have a partner, most of us are. And that's why the Proverbs, in chapter 5, and chapter 18, chapter 19, says you better have a wife and you better fulfill your physical desires with your wife. And the marriage bed is undefiled and it's the place of fulfillment, bliss and joy, and intimacy. That's why younger widows are told, in 1 Timothy, to marry 'cause they can't just around when they're designed to have a husband; they're designed to have the fulfillment of the physical relationship with a husband.

And the Lord explains further in verse 12. And it uses that kind of old word "eunuchs". He says there are only three possibilities for staying single, folks. So if you want to stay single, you got to be in one of these three categories. "There are eunuchs who are born that way from their mother's womb." A eunuch is a person who would not be able to function in a physical relationship. And, in some cases, that's congenital. That's some kind of a congenital defect, some kind of a physical defect. Some person who was born in a way that gives them the inability to have a sexual relationship, preventing normal cohabitation and desire.

"And then there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men." Now that's a big deal in ancient times. If you were the king and you wanted some guys to work in your harem you made them eunuchs, for obvious reasons. And there people who were made eunuchs, they were physical castrated, actually. 2 Kings 20:18, Esther 2:14, even Acts 8:26-39, you have that kind of indication. You remember Philip and eunuch who worked in the realm of Queen Candace of Ethiopia. It was done in the ancient world to some slaves, as I said, particularly keepers of harems.

Thirdly, verse 12, and this is I think where you get into a spiritual understanding, "There are eunuchs you made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven." That's figurative. There's a singleness, there's an abstinence from the normal conjugal relationship that design meant anyone to have. There's an abstinence from marriage that is strictly voluntary for the sake of ministry. Realizing the course of gospel ministry, realizing the way in which God can use you, you have been called by God to pursue a singleness that is connected to your usefulness in ministry.

Now do you understand this? If you don't have a congenital defect and you don't have some kind of surgical incapacity, the only other reason you ought to be roaming around the world alone is because you have been called to a ministry that is unique and that the best fulfillment of that ministry calls for you to remain single. There aren't any other reasons for you not to have a partner. And one of the great tragedies of modern times, and even in the church, is this mass of people running around without a partner trying to cope with the obvious desires that are so strong.

Now go to 1 Corinthians 7 ... 1 Corinthians 7:7. Now Paul, when he writes this, is single. I believe he was married at one time. Some say because he was a member of the Sanhedrin and you had to be married, it's probably a good guess. But maybe his wife had died and certainly he, there's no indication of his wife being a part of his life in Scripture. But he says in verse 7, "I wish all men were even as I, myself, am." I wish everybody were single like me. "However each man has his own gift from God." So let me add this, singleness for the Kingdom, as Jesus described it in Matthew 19, singleness for the Kingdom is accompanied by a gift from God. That's a most interesting thing to say. It's accompanied by a gift from God. Now go down to verse 9, "If somebody doesn't have self-control over that, let them marry. It's better to marry than to burn." It doesn't mean to go to hell. It means to burn with desire. It's better to marry than to burn with desire.

So the disciples, you know, they say, "Well, it's better not to marry." And Jesus, "Well not everybody can handle that. If you don't have a congenital reason for that or some kind of accidental or whatever reason for that, and it's not because of some ministry, some role you're playing in the Kingdom of God for which the Spirit of God has gifted you to be able to deal with that, there are some people who just don't need to be married, they are gifted by God for that, it's nothing physical; they're just gifted by God for that. But if that's not the case, then," Jesus says, "You can't handle singleness. You can't handle it."

Now if you can handle it, go down to verse 26 of 1 Corinthians. Let's say you're single, verse 26, "I think then that is good in the view of present distress," I mean living in the world that we live in today, it's a good for a man to remain as he is. "Are you bound to a wife? Don't seek to be released. Are you released from a wife? Don't seek a wife." In other words, given the present distress, the hostile world in which we live, if you can bear singleness then that's good. If it's not a problem for you, don't do it just because of social pressure, don't do it because your mother keeps saying, "What's wrong

with you, Albert?"

Now verse 28, "If you should marry, you haven't sinned. And if a virgin should marry, she hasn't sinned. Yet such will have trouble in this life." That's true. You know, before I got married I had my trouble. And then I got married. Then I had my trouble and Patricia's trouble. And she just had her trouble. She married me. She got her trouble, my trouble, and the trouble of this church and all the people in my life. You do multiply your trouble, don't you? So if you're gifted to be single, because of the pressure of the system, because of the problems of the flesh, the philipsys, the pressure of pushing two lives together. She inherits all of my quirks, and all of my relationships, and all of my family. And I get the same from her. And it just complicates life. That's how it is.

In verse 29 he says, "The time is short so that from now on those who have wives should be as though they had none; those who weep, as though they didn't weep; those who rejoice as though they didn't rejoice; those who buy as though they didn't possess; and those who use the world as though they didn't make full use it. For the form of the world is passing away." You know, you got to hold really lightly to this world. And marriage has no relationship to eternity. It doesn't have any impact on eternity as such. It's part of the passing world scene like weeping, and rejoicing, and buying, and pleasure.

And in verse 32, "I want you to free from concern, but one who is unmarried is concerned about the thing of the Lord." How do we please the Lord? I went back to this person who has been gifted for singleness and his whole life is given to ministry and he's going to spend his whole life in ministry, and all he ever thinks about are the things of the Lord, how he can please the Lord. But the one who's married has to think about how he's going to please his wife. Now that's okay if God designed you to be married. But if you can still single, because of the pressure of the system, the problems of the flesh, the passing of the world, and the preoccupation of the married with their spouse, if you don't need that then stay single for the Kingdom so that you can give your life wholeheartedly for the Lord.

Verse 34, He says the person who's married has divided interest. And when He says in verse 35, I'm just telling you this for your benefit. I'm not trying to put a restraint on you. I just want to promote what is reasonable. And I want to secure undistracted devotion to the Lord. So it's fine to say marriage is permanent. Let tell you something folks, I'm glad marriage is permanent; I wouldn't have it any other way. I wouldn't ever want to be married but the one that God has given me. I have enjoyed the greatest fulfillment that a person could ever be enjoying in this life, in every aspect of life. And certainly in the crowning element of life, the relationships God has given in my marriage. I wouldn't want it to be any other way.

And my dad was married to my mom, she died a year ago this week. And they were married 64 years, I think. And it was bliss to the end. It's the way God designed it. And it's really hard now that she's not there. And that's good because all the memories are sweet. And when you enjoy the best

that God can provide, it's just the best. And all the fulfillment that comes with children, and grown children, and the extended family, and the joys of accumulated memories, and battles fought and won, and all that comes with life. And the blessing of God on the one spills on the other. But you have to choose well to start with, because it is permanent.

But it's just too easy, as the disciples needed to hear, to just say, "Well, I'm not going to get married." Unless you qualify under those three qualifications, you ought to get married. Choose carefully and choose spiritually. Can I tell you that, people? Choose spiritually. Beauty fades. Character doesn't. And virtue doesn't. Look for someone who's humble; whose beauty is on the inside. Look for someone who loves Christ and is a servant. And you will enjoy the best that life has to give. When God made the Divine ideal to be marriage, He filled marriage, that Divine ideal, with all the best. That's why I keep going back to 1 Peter 3:7, where Peter calls it "the grace of life". The best that life has to offer. It's the ice cream sundae of life.

So the Divine ideal stays the same, but God, in mercy, allows divorce in the case of adultery. And as I told you a couple weeks earlier, there's one other, one other means that God allows for divorce. Right there in 1 Corinthians 7. If you go down to verse 15, "If the unbelieving one leaves, let him leave. The Brother or Sister is not under bondage in such cases. God has called us to peace." If the unbeliever says, "I want out of this relationship. I want nothing to do with this. I'm out." Let him go. "You don't know that you're going to be able to save your husband," verse 16 says. "You don't that you're going to be able to save your wife." You don't know that. Let them go. God can do that if He chooses to.

So that is a second cause in God's tolerance for divorce: when an unbeliever leaves, let him go; you are no longer in bondage to that person. Just those two exceptions, pretty narrow, huh? Pretty narrow. Other than that, the Divine ideal is upheld and marriage is for life, and what a joy.

Father, thank You for our time tonight in Your Word; we are again amazed at its breadth and depth and height and length, its clarity. Help us to be faithful to obey it. We pray in Christ's name, Amen.

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