

Meet Jesus: and hear the covenant of creation

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[0 : 00] Well, you'll find our reading in the Bible on the seats around you. It's on page 845.

We're looking at Mark, the beginning of chapter 10. And it's part of a series that I'm going through on Mark's Gospel. Whenever I get the opportunity, we'll just advance a little further through the Gospel.

I think I've been going through it for over two years now. So, Mark chapter 10 from verse 1. And it's Jesus.

And Jesus left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And the crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And the Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

He answered them, What did Moses command you? They said, Well, Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away. And Jesus said to them, Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

[1 : 11] But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together? Let not man separate. And in the house, the disciples asked him again about this matter.

And he said to them, Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

Well, it's a difficult passage, isn't it, friends? That. And I know it's pertinent to many folk. Many families will be thinking this issue through.

And perhaps as many here have experienced divorce in your family or even yourself. So it's a very pertinent issue to think through.

[2 : 14] So, Willie Philip, on his series on relationships, brought to us a particular talk, which was on marriage and divorce.

And he was referring to Matthew chapter 5, chapter 19, 1 Corinthians chapter 7. And he was able to look at the matter in a lot more detail and expound those texts, more than I could possibly hope to do in just 20 minutes.

And it's available on the web in the series, relationships. So you can listen in free on the web. And also here there's a CD, two pounds each.

I've got a pile of them outside if you want to take one with you. So that's Willie Philip's talk on marriage and divorce. There's also a book here by John Richardson. It's titled God, Sex and Marriage.

And it's from 1 Corinthians chapter 7. And John Richardson looks at the biblical marriage. And he also touches upon, in one section, the matter of divorce.

[3 : 18] So there's some material there. They're all available on the table as you leave. Good. Right. We'll begin by thinking where we are in Mark's Gospel.

In Mark's Gospel so far, Jesus has been revealing who he is. He's been showing the disciples his identity. You know, if we look at our Christmas cards, he looks very much like any other baby, doesn't he?

Baby Jesus. And I guess if you could watch him operate, you know, as a carpenter, I guess he looked like any other carpenter, didn't he? Do you think? And what did Isaiah say?

He had no form or majesty that we should look at him. He wrote 700 years before Jesus turned up. Yet, friends, watch Jesus operate, listen to him teach, and there's more than meets the eye, isn't there?

I always find it quite amusing. You know, when you look at Mark chapter 4, Jesus has just calmed the sea, hasn't he? And the disciples are absolutely terrified.

[4 : 25] And you ask yourself, why are they afraid? They're afraid of a calm sea. I think that's quite amusing myself, really, in that boat there. Why are they so frightened?

Well, it's like Genesis chapter 1, revisited on Loch Galilee. Jesus, with a word, is bringing order to the creation. It was eerie.

Who is this? They said to each other. Even the wind and waves obey him. The blind see, the lame walk, the dead are raised. And chapter 8, verse 29, it's Peter.

He works it out, doesn't he? You are the Christ. Got it. You're the Messiah. You know, the one that the Old Testament was carrying in its womb. Yeah, more than that, Jesus is operating as God, isn't he?

Doing the sort of things that only God could do. Yes, he's human, but God. And then, chapter 8, verse 31, it's a shock.

[5 : 31] It's how he'll bring in his kingdom. And it's not what the disciples expected. It's through suffering and death. He's going to be killed.

And we arrive at our passage. If you just look there at chapter 10, and verses 1 and 2. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and death.

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And the crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And the Pharisees came up.

It's ominous, isn't it, this? And in order to test him, asked, Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? What's their agenda?

Well, we know. Chapter 3, verse 6, they want Jesus dead. Chapter 3, verse 6, the Pharisees and the Herodians conspired together how they might kill Jesus.

[6 : 31] So the Pharisees want Jesus dead. That's what's behind the question. Do you remember John the Baptist? Killed, wasn't he? By Herod.

The issue, do you remember what the issue was? It was to do with adultery and divorce. And now Jesus is in the firing line.

And this delegation, they approach him in verse 2. And it's like you can smell the aroma of death. We've got three points.

Our first point is the schemes of men. So the question's sort of hanging in the air there, isn't it? Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

And you could have heard a pin drop. Everyone's holding their breath. We're on the edge of our seats, even today. Humanity, we're fascinated, aren't we?

[7 : 28] By relationships. Am I right? You know, you turn on the TV. Most of the output of the record industry is about love, isn't it?

It's relationships. It's the chat in the office. Humanity, we're fascinated by relationships. Why?

Because we're made friends, aren't we? Think about it. In the image of a relational God, you see. And these Pharisees, they ask one man the question.

And it's like the whole of the world is listening in for the answer. What does the Creator think about divorce? Well, rather than going to a detailed discussion, Jesus, he effectively tells us today, he says, what a question to ask.

You know, the verse 2 question, it's a question about divorce, isn't it? But friend, think about this. The question in your mind is probably about something else.

[8 : 38] And you're asking yourself, you're saying, well, can I get away with this and still be a Christian? And like a rogue trader, we start in small amounts and soon we've lost control.

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? Give us a loophole, Jesus, a bit of leeway. See the approach of sin, friends. Do you see?

Here's Adam and Eve. Think about what they've been given. You know, we give a microphone to Adam and we say to him, we say, what's in your account, Adam?

And he says, well, it's a great, it's a lovely creation. God's made this creation. And actually, I live with the Creator. It's amazing, isn't it?

And we've got each other, says Eve. And Adam says, well, we're not short of food or anything. And Eve says, we have a lot of fun as well.

[9 : 42] Wasn't it fun, Adam, when you were naming all of those animals? It was so funny. The name you should choose for some of those animals. I mean, Adam, a hippopotamus.

Whoever would think of a name like that? Adam says, she's always teasing me. Eve says, it's love. It's great, isn't it? And Adam pauses to contemplate his lot in life.

He says, I have to say, it's just perfect here. And God says, behold, it is very good. Yet our pathetic friends, Adam and Eve, they begin to convince themselves that God has shortchanged them.

And this is our sin. We think we've been shortchanged in life. We want it our way and not God's way. It's being ungrateful, isn't it?

It's seeking satisfaction outside of God's provision, pushing him out of our lives, do you see? Listen to this.

[10 : 48] In our thinking, we're trying to divorce God. We're being unfaithful to him. And the Pharisees want a society like that.

They want to legitimize easy divorce, tidy it up with a bit of paper and a sort of legal process, like Adam and Eve covering themselves up.

It's the pattern of sin. Sinclair Ferguson says, their primary interest lay in seeing how far they could go and still remain within the letter of the law.

Friends, I know this world in which we live is a Genesis chapter 3 world. Marriages do sadly break down, but there's a difference between the perpetrator and the victim.

There's a difference between convenience and commitment. In Deuteronomy chapter 24, Moses had introduced legislation to regulate the tragic fallout from broken marriages, to sort of mop up afterwards, so that people can get on with their lives afterwards.

[12 : 03] But the Pharisees and the first century Jews, well, they were using this legislation, are you with me, as a license, do you see? A scholar named Lightfoot, he studied rabbinical teaching of the first century.

And he said the first century Jews were using this divorce legislation for all sorts of absurd and frivolous reasons.

So that was our first point, the schemes of men. And we thought about the human pattern of ingratitude and the devious manipulation of God's law.

And now, it's not just in the matter of divorce, there's a deeper application, isn't there, to our lives, friends. We do it more generally when we sin, you and me.

We sort of try and divorce God in some way. And so rather than get involved in a detailed legal argument, Jesus takes us back to basics.

[13 : 10] And that's our second point, the covenant of creation. The Apostle Paul said in Acts chapter 17, in him we live and breathe and have our being.

And what he's saying, he's saying we're totally dependent on God. And so, friends, think about this. We ignore the patterns of creation at our peril, don't we, do you see?

The laws of nature, we might call them. You know, at a basic level, we don't drink salt water, for example, do we? There's a harmonious way to live on planet Earth so that it sustains us.

You know that, don't you? We all know that. And in his mercy, God, he ultimately reveals the very best way to live on his planet, on his turf.

And he says to the Pharisees, just turn over and look at verse 7. Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

[14 : 13] So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. So think about this. The Pharisees are looking at marriage from the destruction end.

Are you with me? And God is looking at it from the creation end, do you see? Two perspectives. You get that clearly in verse 9. God and man.

Just look there at verse 9. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. But the Pharisees, they've raised that question. They've said, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

They've asked the question, haven't they? They want to destroy marriage. And the author of marriage is saying, listen, he's saying, can't you see? I've made the two one.

And you're trying to wreck my work. You're trying to destroy it. Tear it apart. Job begins, doesn't he, to sort of question God's ways towards the end of Job, chapter 38.

[15 : 18] And God replies. He says, where were you, Job, when I created the world? And that's the sort of thing that God is saying here. It's like Jesus here.

You know, have you ever been to a court and there's been an expert witness? It's like, or you've seen it on TV. They wheel an expert witness in, don't they? And it's like Jesus is the expert witness.

He's bringing in information. He's bringing in his testimony. Bringing in evidence. And where is it from? From creation. Jesus is teaching us what went on at the creation of the world.

Do you see? So, let's think now about temptation more generally. What's happening when we're tempted and we're beginning to sin in this area or that area?

Think about this. We become introverted, don't we? We just think of our own little situation. We look at what we can get out of life. Forgetting that our purpose, listen, on planet Earth is greater than ourselves.

[16 : 27] Isn't it? Do you see? And Jesus is saying there's a certain there's a certain covenantal law in marriage. It's a union forged in the creative ordinance of God when he made the world, you see.

It's like it's written into the software of creation. Something that we shouldn't pull apart. You see, think about this. it's all birthed in an absolutely faithful God, isn't it?

Christopher Ashe says this, The calling to faithfulness is rooted in the faithful love of God for the people he has made.

Permanence is rooted in biblical theology and anthropology. The creator God is himself unchangeably faithful and utterly trustworthy in his eternity.

Both in what we may call his inter-trinitarian relationships and in all his dealings with his creatures. His eternity and faithfulness are inseparable.

[17 : 39] Were he to change with time in his commitments his perfection would be destroyed and the moral fabric of the cosmos would disintegrate. So friends, divorce is the antithesis, isn't it?

Of God's faithfulness do you see? But sadly, you know, in society today it's more often that the two become one flesh.

There's that deep psychological union. Are you with me? And then it's sort of torn apart. It's like a robbery has taken place. It's like someone has stolen something from you.

And it's David and Bathsheba, isn't it? It's smash and grab, you see. And we're entertained by TV soaps, aren't we, that trivialise sex.

And it slowly leaks into our consciousness. It slowly brainwashes society. Christopher Ash quotes a little article that was in The Observer in 1998.

[18 : 45] Here it is. Greater economic equality has helped to modernise marriage. Serial monogony, says The Observer, is likely to become the norm. According to forecasting group The Henley Centre, with greater economic autonomy, there is simply no need for till death do us part.

The partner for life is going the way of the job for life. And friends, think about it, we reap what we sow, don't we?

Sinclair Ferguson in his commentary on Mark's Gospel comments on this question of marriage. And he says, if this basic creation design were overthrown, moral, spiritual, psychological and social chaos would result.

And friends, I would suggest that that's where we are now in society. It's the disintegration of family, the disintegration of society.

Yesterday's headlines in the Herald, the prisons are bursting at the seams, record number of inmates. We reap what we sow.

[19 : 58] Yet the final judgment, friends, has not yet taken place, has it? And that's our final point, briefly. Number three, the verdict of God. And we move behind the scenes now, and we're going to get the verdict from the judge, verses 10 and 11.

And in their house, the disciples asked him again about this matter. And he said to them, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.

So Jesus sees through this first century pharisaic legislation, doesn't he? You know, the bit of paper said divorce, but the verdict of the creator, well, it was adultery, wasn't it?

And so, friends, as we close, beware of manipulating God's law. There's a covenant written in to creation. Listen, written in to you.

And a human being, that's you. You're more than your own convenience. But if you're hurting today, friend, maybe you've been weeping yourself to sleep and nobody knows about it.

[21 : 15] It's to do with relationships. Well, you need to hear that Jesus loves you. And friends, ultimately, the Bible points us, doesn't it, to a new creation where there'll be no marriage because the church is the bride of Christ, says the Apostle John.

And who, think about this, how did Jesus bring that kingdom in? It was at Calvary, wasn't it? Through a relationship breakdown.

We divorce God, friends, in our wickedness, yet through Jesus, he takes our rebellion upon himself. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Do you see what's happening there? And suddenly, yes, it's divorce that reconciles us to our Creator. And the Creator knows chapter 10, our passage, is on his way to Jerusalem and crucifixion.

Here it is. This is love. This is faithfulness. What did we sing earlier? Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father.

[22 : 31] There is no shadow of turning in thee. Thou changest not. Thy compassions, they fail not. As thou hast been, thou forever wilt be.

Shall we pray? Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your faithfulness. We thank you that we can turn to you and away from ourselves, away from the way that we often choose to live.

We thank you, Father, that through Jesus Christ he took upon himself the judgment and the punishment that would have otherwise been ours. That at that moment, the relationship with you was broken for our sakes, that we might be righteous in your sight and perfect and united with you for all of eternity.

so we thank you, Father, for the good news of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and we pray you'd help us to live accordingly. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us this day and forever more.

Amen. Amen.