

Apprenticed to Jesus: Marriage *Matthew 5:31-32*

Introduction: We're in the midst of a series on discipleship. The Sermon on the Mount is the core curriculum of discipleship – the core of what Jesus wants to teach us to obey. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches a type of righteousness that was deeper and more substantive than commonly accepted in His day. Today we consider His teaching on marriage and divorce in Matthew 5:31-32.

Opening Discussion: In what way has your life been touched by divorce?

Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (for background)

Steve said:

In light of Deuteronomy 24 people in Jesus' day taught, "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce." This teaching simply assumes that men will send their wives away. But when they do, they must give their wives a certificate of divorce which gave her the legal status of an unmarried woman. In that culture, the men had all the power and authority, so the teaching is put in terms of the man giving this certificate of divorce.

The teaching was straightforward enough, but the real debate among the Pharisees centered upon the permissible reasons for divorce. Remember that Deuteronomy 24:1 mentioned a man finding "some indecency" (NIV uncleanness) in his wife. One school of thought (Shammai) was rather restrictive; adultery was the only legitimate reason for a man to divorce his wife. The other school of thought (Hillel) was very permissive; a man could divorce his wife for "any good cause" – such as serving a meal that was accidentally burned (Carson, SoM, p. 45).

Read Matthew 5:31-32

1. What does Jesus teach about divorce?

2. What is Jesus affirming about marriage?

3. In what ways does Jesus challenge the prevailing views of divorce in his day?

4. In what ways might Jesus' words challenge the prevailing views of divorce in OUR day?

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-15

5. What does this passage add to our understanding about divorce?

Steve said:

A word to those who have been divorced . . . I also feel compelled to say that there are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. It is just wrong if the church – either this local church or the body of Christ in general – has made you feel like a second class citizen because you’ve been divorced. There is absolutely nothing incompatible between upholding the sanctity of marriage and being full of compassion for those who’ve had tragic experiences with marriage. Such compassion expresses the heart of God.

6. For those who have been divorced, what has your experience with the church been like? Have you been supported? Have you ever feel like a "second-class citizen"?

Steve said:

A word to those who are married . . . Jesus’ emphasis on commitment in marriage reflects a perspective on marriage that we need to recapture in our day. As followers of Christ we should not break the marriage covenant. When there are problems – and there will be problems – we should approach them with the conviction that there is much more at stake than our short-term happiness and comfort. As mentioned earlier, when the other person breaks the marriage covenant through adultery or abandonment or something equally egregious (such as physical/sexual abuse – in my opinion), divorce is permitted due to our hardness of heart (as Jesus says in Mt. 19). It’s not commanded; it’s permitted. But the norm among Jesus’ disciples is commitment in marriage.

7. What is at stake in marriage beyond our "short-term happiness and comfort"?

Steve said:

Gary Thomas asks the question, “What if God designed marriage to make us holy more than to make us happy?” That perspective changes everything.

8. What difference might having this perspective make on your marriage? How might it affect how you view difficulties in marriage?

9. For those who are not currently married, how does Jesus' teaching affect how you think about future marriage?

10. For those who are not currently married, what can you be doing now to lay a strong foundation for a future marriage?