

Marriage, Divorce, and the Divine Covenant of Love  
Mark 10:1-12

## BACK TO MARK

We have spoken often, in the last few weeks, of our journey together as a congregation post-pandemic, who we are and where we are heading together. We took a brief look at ancient Israel's journey across the Jordan River and into the land God promised them. We looked for the lessons in spiritual progress God built into Israel's experience. Today, we are going to return to another journey in another time and place. We're going to return to the journey of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as recorded in the gospel of Mark.

We have come to Jesus' final journey. We walk with Him from the northern communities of Galilee to Jerusalem. From here, Jesus' journey will take him to rejection by the people He came to love and save. It will take Him to an illegal nighttime trial, to a brutal scourging by Roman soldiers, to a crown of thorns, to iron nails through His hands and feet, and finally to a death on a rough wooden cross atop a hillside in the hot sun of a Middle Eastern spring.

As He makes His way to Jerusalem, in love for the Father and committed to fulfilling the Father's whole will for Him, we find Jesus facing critical attempts at sabotage from the Pharisees. This occasion, here in the opening verses of Mark 10, is one of those, when Pharisees come to put Jesus to the test, to find a reason to condemn Him to death.

You see, Jesus is a problem for the Pharisees and other leaders of Israel. His popularity threatens their control of the people, and if they lose control of the people, Caesar and the Roman empire could use that as a reason to exterminate the people. The Pharisees want to end Jesus' influence on the thinking and lives of the mobs of people who are so readily drawn to Him. They want to neutralize His power, to cancel His reputation, to silence His authoritative teaching.

They wanted then what our culture wants today: They want Jesus to go away . . . permanently. They want Jesus to leave them alone to their own devices. They want to do away with Jesus and His interference in the status quo, but they need a valid reason to condemn Him to death. They need Him to blatantly defy God's law. That would give them the best reason to discredit and destroy Him. So they come to set a trap.

## FOUR CORNERSTONES FOR CORNERSTONE

Now, if we are going to fully appreciate what happens here and what Jesus says, we need to understand what Jesus is doing. So, let's establish a foundation for understanding what happens here. Let's set up four cornerstones for Cornerstone that will help us build our understanding and appreciation for what Jesus teaches us here.

Here are four things that Jesus does, four cornerstones that provide a foundation for understanding His teaching:

- (10:1a) Jesus contributes to our personal experience of the Father's glory.
- (10:1b) Jesus continues His custom of teaching.
- (10:2-9) Jesus clarifies the commandment for His audience.

- (10:10-12) Jesus connects His disciples with God's truth.

Let's take a look at these four foundational cornerstones one at a time.

1. Jesus contributes to our personal experience of God's glory.

On the night that He is betrayed, before He is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane and led away to be tried and crucified, while He is still in the upper room with His disciples, Jesus prays. A sentence Jesus offers the Father in prayer puts all of Jesus' activities in perspective. Every blind eye made to see, every deaf ear made to hear, every lame and broken body made to leap and run, every demon dispossessed, every morsel of food miraculously provided, every word spoken and taught, every questions answered, every request fulfilled, all that Jesus was and said and did accomplished a single goal that He sets before God in prayer on the night He is betrayed. In John 17:4 Jesus prays:

*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.*

That is the summary statement of Christ's entire life on earth: I have glorified you. I have accomplished the work that you gave me to do. Jesus' assignment from the Father was to reveal the Father's glory to the people of this world through His own life. He lived not for His own glory but for the Father's glory. He taught and healed and served not for His own glory but that we might know and love and embrace and delight in the Father's glory.

Now, Jesus is not adding to the Father's glory as if somehow God is deficient in glory and Jesus somehow makes up the difference. What Jesus did throughout His life was to reveal, to uncover, to highlight the excellencies of God in all their perfection. The author of Hebrews tells us

**Hebrews 1:3a (ESV) <sup>3</sup> He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**

Jesus is the exact expression of the glory of God, wrapped in human flesh. The apostle Paul tells us, in Colossians 1

**Colossians 1:15-20 (ESV) <sup>15</sup> He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**

Everything Jesus was and said and did pulls back the curtain of mystery and allows us to see and experience the glory of God's person in terms we can understand and relate to.

The point is this: the encounter with the Pharisees here in Mark 10, both the occasion and the subject, the test and the answer, accomplish the purpose for which God sent His Son into the world: to truthfully, accurately represent to us the perfect heart, mind, will, character, nature, and glory of God Himself. This teaching on marriage and divorce from the lips of Jesus accurately expresses God's sovereign person and glorious intent. This is the **first cornerstone** we have to put in place.

The **second cornerstone** in our **foundation for understanding** Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce comes more directly from Mark's comment in verse one:

**Mark 10:1 (ESV) *And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them.***

## 2. **Jesus continues His custom of teaching.**

It was Jesus' **custom** to teach. What Jesus is doing here, when this controversial topic of marriage and divorce is imposed on Him by the Pharisees, is **what Jesus is always doing**. Jesus is teaching the people who have gathered to hear what He has to say. He is providing instruction, as any good rabbi does, in the word of God and the ways of God so that those who hear may learn to know God, love God, and obey God with their whole hearts. Jesus is accomplishing exactly the four pillars of the word that we talked about last week from Romans 17:4: instruction, endurance, encouragement, and hope.

This was His custom, His usual, typical, normal way of doing things. This was His default activity. This was the natural expression of His character, His heart, His innermost motives. Teaching others about God in all His glory was the honest expression of Jesus' true self. Jesus' heart was to take people to the word of God and teach them the truth about God for His glory and their good.

Cornerstone, understand this, please. **Jesus still gathers His people to teach them, and every time they gather, He is there to teach them.** Christ's goal for us remains the same. In John 14, as Jesus is introducing His disciples to the Holy Spirit and the role He will have among them, he says,

***“the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”***

**Jesus' goal, His instructional objective (for the teachers among us), is that those whom He teaches will come to know and love God in all His glory.**

Is it possible to stress often enough, loudly enough, emphatically enough how much of the mess we find ourselves in in the world today, in our culture, in our communities, in our families, in the church of Jesus Christ, and even in our own lives comes as a direct result of our neglect of God's truth about Himself in His word? Can we not say with some degree of accuracy that the mess we find ourselves in is traceable to the fact we have not, as a culture or as the church, sat at the feet

of Jesus and learned what was His custom to teach us?

Jesus custom of teaching ought to be matched by our custom of learning, but sadly, this is often not the case. Many Christians today will read a devotional book based on the Bible, but not read the Bible itself. Many will practice a casual devotion but avoid intentional study. Families rarely read the word together in our day, and, because of this neglect of God's word, our children are learning that little Jesus said or did is really all that relevant or important in their lives.

**It remains the custom of Jesus, even now, to teach His disciples. Oh that God may make us a people whose custom it is to learn!**

Knowing God and experiencing the life change that comes from personally knowing Him was the heart of Jesus' ministry and is **the heartbeat of the entire New Testament.**

The apostle Paul, in his Spirit inspired letters to various Christian churches often mentions his prayer goal for them. In Philippians 1:9 he writes,

*“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with **knowledge and discernment.**”*

To the Ephesian church he writes,

*“I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of **revelation in the knowledge of Him . . .**”*

In Colossians we find,

*“We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the **knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding . . .**”*

**It quickly becomes clear as we read through the gospel and Paul and the rest of the New Testament that the life of faith, the disciplined and disciplined life is a life of continual learning about Who God is and how God expresses His sovereignty over the church and the world to the praise of His eternal, magnificent glory.** For each of us and all of us, there is a great deal to learn!

What does this **foundational cornerstone** mean for us? What is the takeaway from the fact that teaching was Jesus' custom and that this interchange with the Pharisees is an example of Jesus' consistent practice of instructing people and glorifying God?

Let's take careful note here of the subject of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce. Is Jesus primarily using this moment as an occasion to teach a system of moral, ethical principles? Is that what we think? Certainly, it is not less than that, but it is much, much more than that. Is Jesus just offering a course on religious methodology? Is He merely fomenting a radical, counter-

cultural revolution, just stirring the social pot to get a communal reaction? Is this teaching on marriage and divorce primarily a treatise on human social behavior or is there something more here?

What is the heart of all Jesus' teaching, whether on marriage and divorce or some other subject? What is Jesus' intent as He responds to the Pharisees? Is He just confronting their pride and arrogance and putting them in their place or does He have something more eternally significant in mind? Is Jesus laying down the Law just to increase the guilt and pain of already broken, hurting people, or is there healing, hopeful grace in these words?

We should go back to Jesus' prayer in John 17 and remind ourselves of His words in verse 3. They provide the answer to these questions. The words of this prayer reinforce the underlying motive for everything Jesus says and does, for every word that comes out of His mouth, for every teaching and lesson He brings to our attention. Listen to Jesus as He begins to pray in the presence of His disciples in the upper room on the night He is betrayed. Listen, to His heart for you as He prays:

***“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup> since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. John 17:1-3 (ESV)***

Every word Jesus teaches is both an offering of glory to God and an offering of eternal life from God to you. Every teaching of Jesus teaches us the Father, the one true God. Personal, experiential knowledge of God the Father is the sum and substance of eternal life. Through the knowledge of God we have a personal relationship with Him, and that relationship is eternal life for us.

What does that mean for us this morning as we come to Mark 10:1-12 and Jesus' only teaching on marriage and divorce in this gospel?

It means, first of all, as we investigate Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, we should be looking for the character of God Himself in this teaching. It means we are not looking primarily for a moral, ethical worldview, though that is exactly what God will work in us when we come to understand this correctly. It means we are not making a specific social practice our principal inquiry, though we will see the infinite value of a specific practice once we understand Jesus adequately. **What this means is that above all, first and foremost, our number one priority as we consider this teaching of Jesus on human relationships is to grow in the knowledge of God, to find the person and character of the one true God in the teaching of Jesus.**

No matter what your life experience has been to this moment, Christ's intent in this teaching on marriage and divorce is to offer every one of us knowledge of God and eternal life through that knowledge. There is no intent of Jesus here to beat people over the head with their sins, their guilt, their shame, their failings, their disappointments, their anger, or any of the myriad emotional responses that accompany divorce. This is not one of those “I told you so” moments

and should not be understood as such, presented as such, or received as such. This is Jesus pointing us to the Father and inviting us to grace, as was, and continues to be, His custom.

There are two more foundational cornerstones we need to put in place. We need to get to the heart of this passage and hear Jesus clarify the commandment for His audience, and we need to witness Jesus connecting His disciples with God's truth. We will take up those two cornerstones next week. If you want to do a little prayerful preparation for next week, let me suggest two opportunities you can seize this week:

- First, read **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. This is the passage the Jesus and the Pharisees are talking about as they talk about Moses and the subject of divorce. It is the only passage in the books of the Law that deal with the subject.
- Second, try to answer this question:
  - What is the difference between permission and accommodation?
  - And here's a bonus question:
    - Why, when Jesus responds to the Pharisees, does He refer to Genesis 1 and not Deuteronomy 24?
    - What does Genesis 1 reveal about God and His purpose in creating that relates to marriage and divorce?

## CONCLUSION

**God acts in His Son in the world to introduce Himself to us as He truly is.** God works in the world through His word and His Spirit so that you and I will know Him in truth and in glory. God so loved you, as part of this world, that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to live a sinless life and die on the cross in your place on your behalf, so that through faith in Him you should not perish but have everlasting life.

The world and culture in which we live often paints God as an ogre dedicated to your immediate misery. Nothing could be further from the truth. God calls us to mercy, to grace, to new life, to real joy, to abounding hope, and to continual help. He sets before us one entry point to grace: faith in His Son, Jesus. Jesus, who in His life revealed the exact expression of God's glory and consistently taught us God's truth. Jesus, who in His death on the cross, took our sin upon Himself, with all our guilt and shame and satisfied God's righteous call for justice.

Today is the day of salvation. Now is the appointed time. Put your faith in Christ. Trust Him and enter into God's promised joy, no matter what your life has been, no matter where you are. Believe in Him and God will forgive your sins, take away your guilt, and create a new life in you.