

Sermon on the Mount Sermon Series

Sermon 17

What Did Jesus Say About Divorce?

Someone who says they believe that Jesus is a prophet and yet does not read what He said is like a man who received a letter from his good friend. He put the letter in a prominent place on the top shelf in his home. Every day he showed the envelope to his friends, but he never opened the letter to read it!

Jesus makes a statement in the Sermon on the Mount regarding divorce. At this point in the sermon Jesus has been teaching about the spiritual nature of the law. If you hate in your heart, whether you actually have opportunity to demonstrate your hatred or not doesn't matter, you are breaking God's law. You are a murderer. If you lust in your heart, you have committed adultery.

Jesus then makes the following statement:

Matthew 5:31-32 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'³² "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

According to the Turkish Statistics Association, in the year 2013 125,305 people divorced in Turkey. Forty point three percent (40.3 %) of those divorces were in the first five years of their marriage. Another 21.5 % were the second five years of their marriage. Fourteen point one percent (14.1) were in the third five years of their marriage. Another 10.3 percent of divorces were in the fourth five-year period of their marriage. In the year 2013 600,138 people married in Turkey. (<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=16051>)

This means that roughly 1 in every five marriages is ending in divorce. Why are they ending? In a survey done by the Turkish Statistics Association 96.7 % of those divorcing said they couldn't get along with their spouse. (<http://www.aa.com.tr/tr/yasam/309686--bosanma-orani-son-10-yilda-artti>). Perhaps you are one of those people. Maybe you divorced or are thinking about a divorce. You want to know what God thinks about the situation. You want to know what the Bible says about divorce. We will look at this today. It is a sensitive, emotional topic. I wish to tell you that there is hope for those who are struggling in their marriage and there is healing for those who have divorced. God is not a tyrant looking for a reason to punish you. There is forgiveness from God for those who have sinned. But God also expects a genuine repentance from you in return.

Matthew 5:31 "Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.'

What saying is Jesus referring to? It is a saying that was commonly used in Jesus' day. It is partially based on a Bible text. Let's go to Deuteronomy 24:1.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, ² "when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's *wife*, ³ "if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts *it* in her hand, and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, ⁴ "then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that *is* an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God is giving you *as* an inheritance.

The Bible is not directing people to divorce their wives and give a divorce certificate. It says, "When a man divorces his wife and gives her a divorce certificate, then what should be done?" This is a very important distinction. The text does not say that divorce is acceptable. The law addressed the situation if someone should do that. What should be done in the case of a divorce? The divorced person will never return to the first husband again.

In Jesus' day people divorced their wives for trivial reasons. People looked at this passage in the Old Testament and to make an excuse for themselves to easily divorce their wives, they interpreted it to mean that it gives permission for divorce for any reason. What did Jesus say? He said that the only reason for divorce is the violation of the marriage bed. Now we just learned that if we lust in our heart we commit adultery. Can you divorce your spouse if they lust in their heart? No. The Bible text says:

Matthew 5:32 "But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery.

The term, "sexual immorality" here is from the Greek word *porneias* from which we get the word porno. The word indicates a physical act of sexuality, not impure thoughts.

What about the poor woman here? Her husband sends her away perhaps through no fault of her own, yet Jesus says that man causes her to commit adultery. Why did Jesus say that? Well in those days, financial independence from men was much more rare than it is today. For most women to survive after divorce they would either become a prostitute or remarry.

Jesus says that whoever marries her commits adultery. Why did Jesus say that? If the woman has to remarry to survive, why is she guilty? Jesus is not saying that she caused the situation. She is forced into it. Yet the situation is fundamentally wrong. Marriage was designed by God as an indissoluble union. So God's plan is marred. If someone steals bread because they are hungry

have they committed a crime? Yes. But we tend to look at the punishment of that crime differently when we analyze why the sin was committed in the first place.

Jesus spoke about divorce in a more detailed fashion in Matthew 19:3:

Matthew 19:3-6 ³The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for *just* any reason?" ⁴ And He answered and said to them, "Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning 'made them male and female,' ⁵ "and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶ "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

Jesus appeals to God's original plan for mankind when He is explaining God's law. This is a good method to use for interpreting your Bible. New and different situations arise over the course of time. But as we look at God's original plan for our lives then we can better understand what God is trying to tell us.

Matthew 19:8 He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

Jesus isn't saying that the Bible was wrong in the Old Testament law of Moses. We looked at that passage and we saw that the Bible does not instruct people to divorce their wives. We do see that Moses did not forbid divorce because the people who so long had been in slavery did not have a developed sense of love or patience or mercy. But Jesus is calling us to a more mature level.

Are you thinking about a divorce? That is not God's will for your life. I am not saying that you can't escape if your husband is physically harming you. You should get out of danger. But even if you run away, he is still your husband. If he does not commit adultery you are not free to remarry.

Most people divorce because they can't get along. Earlier in this sermon series we talked about basic human nature. We saw that it is selfish. It is the love of self that creates so much stress and fight in the world. We want to have our own way. We love self more than others.

If you are in a bad marriage situation, what can you do? You can't force your spouse to make the changes you desire. You can only ask your spouse for change. But you can make changes in you. You can ask Jesus for a new heart so that you will not be consumed with selfish desires. You can ask God to give you love for your spouse even if they are not behaving properly. You can learn to love to give and not love to receive. Don't try to do this in your own strength. You will fail. It is a spiritual thing. God loves the unlovely. You need to get this unselfish love from Him.

I couldn't cover many questions you may have about divorce in one sermon. Next time I will share some more. But in the meantime, what should you do if you have already divorced? What should you do if you divorced and remarried? Are you lost? Is there no hope for you? You are

not lost - yet. There is hope. But you do need to be honest with yourself and with God. Were you 100% innocent? It does happen. A man runs off with another woman. The woman is innocent. But most of the time when we look back at a failed marriage we can see that we did not behave perfectly. We were selfish. We did not give unselfish love to the spouse. We were immature. If that is the case, you need to confess that to yourself and to God. God will forgive but there is not forgiveness to those who don't confess their sins.

Proverbs 28:13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes *them* will have mercy.

The first step in healing is to be open with yourself and God. Then you want to receive His healing. You must believe that He will forgive and accept your repentance. You must ask Christ into your life and to make you a new person. He will give you power over selfish thoughts and love for others. It is a miracle. It is the new birth.

John 3:5 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

May God give you much love.