

Looking for the LoopHole

(Mark 10:1-12)

(preached 5/24/15 Pine Grove BC)

Introduction

As parents, we often give clear instructions to our children.

When we built a house in Union, the girls each had an upstairs bedroom on each end of the house.

Our master bedroom was downstairs, so we had to give the girls instructions on having an upstairs bedroom.

Well, each of the girls had two windows in their room that opened to our roof.

The roof was quite steep, so Tonya and I were very clear to the girls...

Don't ever open these windows and above all, never open and then climb outside on the roof.

Well as all kids do, one of them asked...

“Well, Daddy what if there is a fire? Should we open and crawl out the window onto the roof then?”

And I would answer, “if there is a fire, wait right here in the room and daddy will come and get you.”

And they would reply... “Ok, but what if you don’t come get us?”

And I would reply, “feel your door and if it isn’t hot, open it and try to come downstairs.”

TO which they would reply, “what if the door isn’t hot and we open it but we can’t see to come downstairs because of all the smoke?”

To which I would reply, then “close your door and wait on the firemen.”

To which they would reply, “What if the smoke starts coming in our room?”

To which I would reply, “then open a window to get fresh air.”

And then they would reply with this...”What if you can’t come get us, AND we can’t see because of the smoke to get downstairs, AND we close our door, AND the smoke starts coming in, AND we open our window, but the firemen aren’t here yet, AND our door begins to catch on fire....

Can we then crawl out onto the roof?

And I said, that is the only circumstance where you can open your window and crawl outside onto the roof.

But why is that...

Why do we ignore the big principle and look for situations where the situation doesn't apply?

I think it lies with our fallen nature that pushes us to rebel against authority....

But I use that introduction because I think it gets us in the mindset of what we are going to see today in Mark 10:1-12...

Particularly in the minds of the Pharisees...

Today and next Sunday, we are going to be talking about marriage and divorce in Mark 10:1-12.

If you haven't been here, don't think that we have picked this text for any particular reason...

It is simply where we have come to after having been in the gospel of Mark for over 10 months now.

And it is going to full of instruction for us as we deal with two very controversial issues of marriage and divorce....

So, let's read the text, and then we will go back and break it down into some smaller parts...

Mark 10:1-12....

*10 Getting up, He *went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan; crowds *gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.*

² Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to ^[a]divorce a wife. ³ And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?” ⁴ They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and ^[b]send her away.” ⁵ But Jesus said to them, “^[c]Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. ⁶ But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. ⁷ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother^[d], ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

*¹⁰ In the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again. ¹¹ And He *said to them, “Whoever ^[e]divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; ¹² and if she herself ^[f]divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.”*

Let us pray.

I would almost guarantee that there is not one person in here who has felt the effects of divorce.

Either you are divorced, had parents or children who are divorced or have close relatives or friends who are divorced or either have close relatives or friends or divorced or maybe all of the above.

Whatever the case, it is almost impossible to find someone who hasn't been affected by divorce in some way.

My parents are divorced; Tonya's parents are divorced.

So it is an issue that is very close to me as well.

Now when it comes to divorce, we need to get a few things on the table before we move through this text.

First, the unbelieving world has its own view of marriage and divorce, and we should not expect it to be based upon God's view of these things.

Second, believers have views on marriage and divorce, but unfortunately there is little agreement even among those in the church.

Some hold that divorce is never an option.

That if you are divorced and remarry it is always an act of adultery.

While others in the church, feel that divorce should be granted on any basis whatsoever.

But third, divorce often becomes a source of shame for those who have experienced and a source of pride for those who haven't.

The goal in these verses is to simply get to the meaning of what Jesus is saying here...

And then to look at some other passages that will give us help to form what our view of marriage and divorce should be in the church based on the Word of God...

And not the wisdom of man.

Divorce is all around us this morning, but the Word of God is going to be the center of what we do here this morning.

So, let's look at God's Word and try to handle a very delicate issue...

I have a very simple outline to move us through these verses this morning and next week...

Verses 1-4, we will entitle,....

I. Setting the Trap (1-4)

Verses 5-9 will be....

II. Stating the Truth (5-9)

And next week, we will look at

III. Showing the Twelve (10-12)....

So, let's dive in at verse 1 with...

I. Setting the Trap (1-4)

*^{10 1}Getting up, He *went from there to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan;*

As we move through the gospel of Mark, we are always moving closer to the cross in Jerusalem...

We are always inching closer to the death of Jesus Christ...

Like Jesus, we also have our sights set on Calvary, where a sinless Jesus is going to be crucified in the place of sinners like you and me...

But chapter marks a real turning point in that journey...

In the final section of chapter 9 that we looked at last week, Jesus had made a quick stop in Galilee..

Now, you can look at the map up here to get your bearings on what is going on here...

For most of his ministry, Jesus was in Galilee teaching, healing and casting out demons...

This was his home base...

All of his disciples were from Galilee, except Judas.

So, Jesus has spent most of his time in and around this region of Israel.

But now, he is leaving his home behind so to speak and is heading south to Judea and beyond the Jordan...

He is going into a region east of the Jordan River known as Perea.

Now, this is going to be very important considering the topic of conversation...

Because the area east of the Jordan River was near the region where John the Baptist had been preaching in the wilderness..

And do you remember why John the Baptist was arrested?

He told Herod that it was wrong to divorce his wife and marry his brother's wife...

And what eventually happened to John the Baptist?

They cut his head off.

And guess what regions that Herod ruled?

He ruled Galilee and he ruled Perea.

So, when Jesus shows up in Perea and the Pharisees ask him a question about divorce, this isn't a strange coincidence.

No, this a region of Israel where divorce was widespread...

Where the highest leaders in government were divorcing...

The question that the Pharisees ask is even more important considering the region and the audience...

To speak against divorce was to speak against most of the people in Jesus audience...

This would be like going into a meeting of McDonalds owners and talk about the sin of eating Big Macs.

Jesus is in a region where divorce is common, and so the Pharisees think this is a great time to ask about it..

Now notice this, they are not asking looking for a biblical answer.

Verse 2 says they are testing him.

They already have an answer in their mind.

They aren't asking so that they can obey what he says...

They are asking with the intent to drag Jesus through the mud with his answer.

The Pharisees have been watching his every move.

They know that John the Baptist lost his head when he talk about divorce...

And they are hoping that Jesus will meet the same fate when he attempts to answer their question...

So they are setting him up before they even get the words out of their mouth...

But Jesus is never trapped and he answers their question about the lawfulness of divorce with a question of his own...

What did Moses command you?

Couple things to take note of here...

First, Jesus points the Pharisees to the Scriptures to get an answer.

Moses was the author of the Law of God, and so Jesus simply says...

What did Moses command in the Scriptures?

Such a very important principle for us to keep in mind in our day?

It is never what we think is right or good, it is always what God says about something that is the final authority...

So, Jesus points them to the Scriptures to find an answer...

But the second thing to see here is that Jesus cuts through their tradition and man made religion with this question...

At this point in history, the Jewish religious system was simply a complex system of man made laws...

Though the Jews had begun with what Moses wrote in the Law, they had added piles and piles of their own thoughts and traditions of what “seemed” right.

Because the prevailing view of divorce around the time of Jesus was that it could be granted on nearly any grounds...

In fact, most of the religious leaders had been divorced.

They would cite nearly any reason for divorce...

For instance, their man made rules permitted divorce if the wife spun around so that her ankles were uncovered before other men...

Divorce was also permitted if a wife talked to another man...

Divorce was permitted if a wife spoke unkindly about her husband’s mother.

Divorce was permitted if the woman refused to wear her hair up on her head.

Divorce was permitted and even expected in the case of infertility.

Divorce was permitted if the husband simply found someone that he desired more than his wife..

And the Jewish religious leaders were getting out of marriages left and right based on these ridiculous grounds...

And it was almost always a case of the husband divorcing the wife..

So, the reasons and reasons for divorce were always growing among the Jews...

Yet Jesus cut through all those man made reasons and their human reasoning with that one question of what did Moses command?

And this gets to the heart of this passage because the reason that divorce was frequent in the Jewish religious system is found in Deuteronomy 24...

I have put those verse up on the screen, and it is very important that we understand what is happening here...

Let me read this for us...

24 “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens ^[a]that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out from his house, ² and she leaves his house and goes and becomes another man’s wife, ³ and if the latter husband ^[b]turns against her and writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her to be his wife, ⁴ then her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since 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 gives you as an inheritance.

Now, here is what you need to understand here...

Nowhere in these verses is Moses encouraging divorce..

He is simply describing a situation where a divorce has happened...

And he is saying that if a man divorces a woman and she remarries...

And then her new husband divorces her or even dies, the former husband cannot take her back...

Yet, the Pharisees had taken these verses as an endorsement of divorce...

Say for instance, I tell you....

“If you are drinking, don’t drive.”

Nowhere in that phrase am I endorsing drinking, I am simply saying if you are drinking, then don’t drive...

The Pharisee read “if a man divorces his wife” and made it into a law that made divorce easy on nearly any grounds....

Let me give you an example of this...

Let’s say that John Andrew hasn’t been going to sleep real good so me and Tonya have decided not to give him any sugary drinks close to bedtime...

So we make that decision, and the next night at supper, we are all sitting around the table...

And without thinking, I tell Tonya...

Remember we aren’t going to give him any juice tonight....

What one word of that sentence will John Andrew hear?

Well, he will hear the word divorce and for the next 30 minutes, that is all he will say...

In Deuteronomy 24, the focus is not on what are the grounds for divorce...

The focus and command is that the former husband cannot remarry his divorced wife if her new husband divorces her or dies...

Yet, all the Pharisees heard was the word divorce and that this man divorced his wife because he found an indecency in her...

So instead of spending their time trying to avoid divorce, the religious leaders spent their times looking for ways to divorce...

What a shame on them, and what a shame on believers today who look for reasons to get out of a marriage rather than stay in.

The Pharisees are wanting to trap Jesus with this question but they are also wanting to justify their sin...

But Jesus will not fall into the trap...

And in the next 5 verses, he is going to be.....

II. Stating the Truth (5-9)

After the Pharisees answer Jesus question in verse 4, Jesus is going to take the opportunity to speak some truth into this scene...

And he begins with a very important statement in verse 5...

Divorce only exists because of the hardness of man's heart..

Divorce is not a creation of God, it is a creation of man.

God designed marriage. People designed divorce.

Divorce is a reality in the world because people are sinners.

Deut 24 was not an endorsement of divorce.

However, there had to be laws that dealt with divorce because people were getting divorced.

Let's say a friend comes up to you and wants to borrow your car...

You ask him what he needs it for...

He says that he wants to take it and crash it into a tree..

And you tell him that your car wasn't made to be wrecked; it as made to be enjoyed.

But he says... Well, there are airbags in it...

See, even the makers of the car designed it ot be wrecked...

That is why they put airbags in it...

So, let me drive it into a tree...

Well, that is ridiculous..

Airbags are in a car because accidents happen.

Airbags aren't in a car so that you can destroy the car.

The same is true for divorce.

Divorce doesn't exist so that you can go and wreck your marriage...

Divorce exists because people are fallen.

And let me say now that I personally believe that the Bible permits divorce on two grounds...

An unbelieving spouse deserts a believing spouse...

Or a spouse commits adultery.

It also needs to be said that either of those happens in a marriage that divorce is the only option.

And it also needs to be said that the spiritual condition of the coupled needs to be considered as well when it comes to divorce.

If a person was or wasn't saved at the time of the divorce is also important...

We will talk a lot more about that next week...

But before we get to the exceptions, we need to saturate our minds with the truth..

And that is what Jesus is going to do in these next verses.....

Because this is the overwhelming testimony of the Bible when it comes to marriage and divorce....

If you get married stay married...

Try to work out your differences..

Honor your vows to the Lord.

Forgive because you will need forgiveness.

Are there cases where divorce is the only option?

Yes, and the Bible allows for it in those instances...

But they are the exception.

They are the last resort.

They are only sought after much prayer and counsel.

IF anything, the church needs to stop listening to the world and start listening to the Word when it comes to marriage and divorce.

And so, let us look at how Jesus answers the question of divorce...

And he simply starts with the truth about marriage....

#1- Marriage has been God's plan from the beginning.

Jesus goes way beyond Deut 24 to answer the question on divorce...

The underlying truth of this whole matter is that God designed man and woman to marry.

Marriage was created because it is not good for man to be alone.

Now, are there single people who serve the Lord faithfully?

Absolutely, but it is a gifting to be able to do that.

In the beginning, God designed marriage and the intent was for marriage to be a lifetime of commitment...

In Malachi 2:16, we read this...

¹⁶ For ^[w]I hate ^[x]divorce," says the Lord, the God of Israel, ...

One truth that Jesus is trying to get across to the Pharisees is that God designed marriage with a purpose...

To provide companionship and to enable Adam and Eve to obey his command to multiply and fill the earth...

And divorce only works to undo God's purpose for marriage...

It creates aloneness, and it prohibits reproduction.

But there is another truth in verses 5-9 that we need to see...

#2 – Marriage is the work of God.

Look closely at verse 9...

⁹What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

Ultimately, divorce is a rejection of God's work in your life...

The truth of every marriage is that God was at work to bring you together.

Because God is all powerful and all knowing and all seeing, his sovereignty was at work to bring you together...

Ultimately, divorce says to God...

I got a better plan than you.

I can run this world better than you...

Now again, are there legitimate reasons to divorce?

Yes, the biblical describes them and we will talk about them next week, but most divorces are simply a reflection of a heart that thinks it knows better than God.

But there is one final truth about marriage that we need to see before we are done...

And Jesus doesn't mention it specifically here...

But it applies to believers especially who are considering a divorce for any reason...

What is the relationship of Jesus Christ to his church?

Well, other texts refer to the church as the bride of Christ.

Jesus is the groom and we are His bride.

He is going to come get us and take us to a marriage ceremony in heaven one day and then we will feast at a marriage supper...

But this picture of Jesus being married to His church is all over the NT...

And I want to ask us all a question....

Aren't we glad that Jesus doesn't have a low view of marriage when it comes to His church....

Aren't we happy that he doesn't simply cast us off because He sees something better....

Isn't it unusual that Christians are so thankful for a Jesus who is fully committed to them....

Turn around and show very little commitment to their own spouses and look for any reason to get out of their marriage...

How dare we ask and beg Jesus to be committed to us as his bride when we show no commitment to our brides and our grooms..

No wonder the church has no voice in the world.

When we are no less committed to our marriages than the world is....

I know why the world doesn't listen to us.

And what is trying to do this morning in these verses is to start with the truth about marriage..

Jesus starts with the truth about marriage in these verses because the Pharisees need the truth and so do we.

God designed marriage.

God hates divorce.

Those in the church need the same reminder as well....

And though he isn't going to offer grounds for a biblical divorce in Mark, he is going to offer them elsewhere and we will look at them next week....

Conclusion

Let me end with this....

I have no idea about most of your pasts.

You may be in a marriage that has lasted 70 years this morning...

Or you may be working on a marriage #5

I really don't know...

But I know this...

Unbiblical divorces were paid for at the cross along with lying, cheating and stealing...

And on top of that, if all of this is news to you, you can't go back in time to make things right...

You simply confess this to the Lord, and then live your life in light of what you now know.

And let me add this, we need to a people who speak the truth about these issues...

For too long, we have let the world dictate the rules of marriage and divorce.

But the best response to that is not always your protest signs and petitions, it is also the testimony of your marriage before an unbelieving world...

But let me add one more thing before we are done, we need to be a people who show compassion for those who are divorced.

For too long, the church has shunned people who are divorced...

And that is a tragedy...

How did Jesus respond to divorced people?

You only have to look at the woman at the well in John 4.

She was working on husband #6 when she bumped into Jesus going to get a drink of water.

Did Jesus run the other way?

No, he showed her mercy.

He gave her truth and she believed.

WE should be no less compassionate to those who have been divorced.

Let us pray.