

## **Love for God is Love for Others**

The more I read the Bible, the more I marvel at how patient Jesus is. He takes time to teach eternal lessons to people slow to learn. He brings himself down to our level so he can raise us up to his. It seems that just about everywhere he goes, people are either asking him for something or trying to trip him up. Today's verses from the Gospel of Mark are no different where the Pharisees came to Jesus to test him. They asked him when a divorce was legal. The Pharisees weren't just testing Jesus' knowledge of the Old Testament. They were trying to get him to take a stand on this controversial issue and as a result create division among his followers. The minority view said that divorce could only happen after adultery. The majority view said divorce could happen for pretty much any reason the husband had. But as Jesus often does, he sidesteps the Pharisees' trap by teaching them the larger plan God has for marriage and divorce.

Marriage is first and foremost a gift from God. Jesus quotes from Genesis chapter 2 which we read earlier. Already back in the Garden of Eden while everything was still perfect, God gave us the blessing of marriage and how it should be. Marriage is between one man and one woman. The two commit themselves to other for their entire lives. They leave their previous family to start a new one. Marriage gives the couple a companionship unlike anything in this world where they can act on their sexual emotions in a God-pleasing way. Marriage is a wonderful gift from God for our joy.

But do we treat marriage the way God designed it? Whenever we turn on the TV or read the news, marriages seem to be falling apart quicker than the couple can say "I do." How do you talk about your spouse at work or with your friends? It seems as common to complain about them as it is to talk about the weather. We can catch ourselves redefining marriage as society does. God designed marriage to be a total commitment between one man and one woman as long as they live on Earth. To redefine marriage to be between two consenting adults as long as their love will last or anything else is a sin. Because when we redefine marriage we are saying God and Jesus are wrong and lied to us. But if that weren't enough, we also ruin God's gift of marriage in our private moments. What secrets do you have under your bed, in your internet search history, or in your credit card bill? We not only sin against the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment when we misuse our bodies, but even when our thoughts long for anyone else than your spouse.

But regardless of how often we take God's gift of marriage and throw it down the tubes, God continues to uphold it to be the joyous blessing he designed it to be. And he shows us how great a joy it's meant to be from an illustration with Jesus. In our reading from Ephesians, God uses the marriage illustration to show us the relationship between Jesus and all believers. In a perfect marriage, the husband loves his wife and puts her first as he leads the family. The wife willingly submits to the husband's lead. In the marriage illustration, Jesus is the perfect husband who loves and gives everything up for the sake

of his wife – the church. And the church is the collection of all believers who willingly submit to Jesus.

When we look at Jesus in the marriage illustration, we soon get overwhelmed as his bride. Jesus loves us so much he placed himself under God's law so he could be tempted like us in every way without sinning. He spent 3 years of his life preaching and teaching to the people who would abandon him and put him to death. He rose from the dead so he could prove his power over the Devil and give us his sure promise of life in heaven.

But if those displays of love weren't enough, Jesus continues to be our perfect husband even when we are unfaithful to him. When we take his blessings and use them for our sinful desires, Jesus is still there for us with his unconditional love. When we cheat on him by chasing after other gods and placing our trust in stuff on Earth, Jesus is still there for us with his never-ending forgiveness. Whenever we refuse to submit to God's will so we can follow our sinful hearts, Jesus is still there to welcome us back into his arms as the perfect husband who will never cheat on us, hurt us, or leave us.

In this marriage illustration, we also see how marriage is a great blessing. The commitment Jesus makes to his church of all believers is the commitment we strive for in our own marriages. If you have a spouse, read these Scripture lessons again and have a home devotion. If God has already called your spouse home to heaven, give thanks for your years of blessings. Teach the younger generations how they can experience the same blessings you had. If you haven't made the marriage commitment yet, don't rush into it. I know how hard it is to fight off that burning passion while trying to find that special someone for you. But go to the Lord with repentant hearts and ask him to give you patience. Patience to find that person you can make that life-long commitment to. Patience to guard your body and mind so you can give it fully to your spouse. And if the Lord has blessed you with the contentment of being single like he did with the Apostle Paul, pray for all people to model marriage in the way God designed it.

But no matter how much we try to live the model marriage, you and I know the sad truth. Divorces will happen as long as there are sinful people in a marriage. This is why Moses permitted divorce as the lesser of two evils. To be that public declaration that the marriage commitment has been completely broken. But yet even in this world of sin and divorce, marriage hasn't changed. It is still designed to be for our blessing. If you are having trouble with your marriage, don't wait until it is too late. Ask for help. Not do you have the Bible, but you have your pastors who care for you and will guide you into God's Word. We have our WELS certified counselor Cinda Drescher who is qualified in the latest research to help you get your marriage back on the right track. And if one of the spouses has committed the biblical grounds for divorce, adultery or desertion, come and talk with us to see if divorce is the lesser of two evils in your case.

Regardless of where you fit on the marriage spectrum, whether you are celebrating another anniversary and trying to find the person who'll commit to the "I do," whether you were the one who broke the marriage commitment or got divorced, never forget God's love for you. No matter how many times we give him reasons to divorce us, he will always be there. He will forgive us every time we come to him in repentance. Your God loves you and that will never change.

It is this love that blows our minds. We cannot understand how God will always be our perfect husband no matter how many times we fail to be the perfect spouse. It is this inability to understand God's love that we must squash down so we don't lose sight of our Savior.

After Jesus finished teaching his disciples these lessons about marriage, believing parents were bringing their little children to Jesus so he could bless them. When Jesus learned that the disciples were doing this, he was indignant. He rebuked the disciples and said **"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."** We hear these words in connection with baptism, like we saw earlier, and in them Jesus shows us how we enter God's kingdom. It's like a little child.

Children will believe just about anything their parents tell them. Those of you who've raised children know exactly what I'm talking about. If you were to tell them that the sun was a really bright lightbulb in the sky, they'll believe you. If you were to tell them the White House is made out of white cheese that the President can eat whenever he gets hungry, they'll believe you. Okay, maybe not that since it's so crazy. But still little children will believe just about anything. And they believe it because they trust the person who told it to them. Why wouldn't little Jimmy believe what his parents tell him? He trusts them to keep loving and providing for him as they have in the past. So it makes sense that little Jimmy trusts in everything his parents say.

This complete trust is what Jesus is referring to. We receive the kingdom of God when we completely trust what Jesus tells us in the Bible. I think we can all agree that we need to trust Jesus. But do we have the complete trust like that of a little child? That's a whole other level! Going back to marriage, one argument I've heard about why it's okay to redefine marriage is because the world has changed. When God first instituted marriage, it was in the Garden of Eden without any sin. But times have changed! There's more than one man and one woman on Earth, our government will take care of the widow now, we have evolved from our hunter-gatherer stage...the list goes on. Just because sin has corrupted this world doesn't mean that God has changed. When Jesus quotes from Genesis chapter 2, he reaffirms that marriage hasn't changed. We need to watch out for

this tendency to reinterpret God's Word. We need to completely trust what our Lord says even if it doesn't make sense.

Or take a look at baptism. How is it God can take an infant who has been born in sin, who can't do anything for God or show us how repentant they are, how can God wash him of all sins and put the Holy Spirit in him? I don't know. But I trust in God's Word. He tells us that in Baptism the Holy Spirit creates faith. And like a little child who completely believes their parents, so we completely believe Jesus and what he tells us.

Now I don't know about you, but I'm happy it's this way. Because when I look at myself and what my Savior has done for me, I don't want it to be the other way. I know how sinful I am. I know how many times I have wronged God and disobeyed him in my thoughts, words, and actions. I know how undeserving of his love I am. But I completely trust what God tells me. When he tells me that he loves, I trust him completely. When he tells me how Jesus died once for all people on the cross, I trust him completely. When Jesus tells me my sins are forgiven and I will see my Redeemer in heaven with my very own eyes, I trust him completely.

But this is not just true for myself. It is true for you too. Consider how God has shown his love for you already! You have Christ living inside you through faith! You have so many possessions that you don't know where to put them all! You are surrounded by brothers and sisters in the faith who honestly care about you and wish to see you in heaven! You have a Savior who loves you so much he died for you! God has blessed you so much already and he will continue to do so. Trust in God and all his promises. Have the complete trust of a little child and believe the good news of Christ and what he has done for you. Come to God's Word and pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen your trust so that it may always be like a little child's. Amen.