

10/4/26

Sermon Title: What God has joined together

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 19:1-12

Divorce

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² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,

⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’?

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Jesus brings His ministry in Galilee, where He had spent most of His public ministry, to a close and enters the region of Judea to continue preaching the Gospel.

This is His final phase of ministry before He enters Jerusalem, suffers, and dies on the cross.

¹ When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem, traveling through Perea.

As the Passover was approaching, large crowds gathered and traveled with Him.

The Jews regarded Samaria as an unholy land.

Therefore, when traveling to Jerusalem, they often avoided the shorter route through Samaria and instead took the longer route through Perea.

Jesus carried out His evangelistic ministry among the crowds that gathered around Him.

He taught them, preached to them, and healed the sick.

² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

The region of Perea was a peaceful, rural area.

Its fertile land made it relatively prosperous compared with other regions.

It was also far removed from the influence of the Jewish religious establishment, and the people there were generally quite receptive to Jesus' ministry.

However, the Pharisees followed Jesus even into this region and began debating theological issues with Him.

The Pharisees and other Jewish religious authorities rejected Jesus and persecuted Him.

Herod and the religious authorities in Jerusalem had heard reports about Jesus. In response, the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem organized an investigative delegation and sent them out to examine His activities.

Although they presented themselves as an investigative delegation, their real purpose was to follow Jesus, test Him, find fault with Him, and use those faults as grounds to slander and accuse Him.

Rather than honestly observing what Jesus was doing and discerning whether He was truly the Messiah, as an investigative delegation should have done, they went around looking for grounds on which to bring charges against Him before the Jewish religious council and the Roman authorities.

They then raised the issue of divorce.

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

This region was near the place where John the Baptist had been executed for confronting Herod Antipas over his unlawful marriage to Herodias.

Taking this particular regional context into account, the Pharisees assumed that the people living there would be sensitive to issues of marriage and divorce.

They therefore raised the issue of divorce in an attempt to put Jesus in a difficult position.

The Pharisees constantly tried to trap Jesus by raising controversial issues that would invite public criticism and put Him in trouble, regardless of how He answered.

They would raise a question and demand a simple, direct answer: “Is it right or wrong?” or “Is it lawful or unlawful?”

But who is Jesus?

Jesus understood their intentions beforehand and refused to fall into their black-and-white, either-or way of thinking.

Instead, He examined the heart of the matter and gave them an answer that addressed the fundamental issue.

That is why their attempts to trap Him repeatedly failed.

Once again, in response to their question about divorce, Jesus explains the very nature of marriage, leaving them with no further grounds to pursue the argument. Drawing on God's original design in creation, He teaches them about the sacred and enduring nature of marriage and emphasizes that divorce is contrary to God's intention for marriage.

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Jesus first explains the nature of marriage by referring to God's original design in creation.

Marriage, He teaches, brings a man and a woman into the unity that God intended for them from the beginning.

In the creation account, woman was formed from man's side.

Though they are distinct as man and woman, through marriage they are united once again as one flesh.

This is God's original design for marriage.

(Gen 2:21) So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.

(Gen 2:22) Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

(Gen 2:23) The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”

(Gen 2:24) That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Therefore, Jesus teaches that divorce is not in keeping with God’s original design for marriage.

What God has joined together, no one should separate.

The prophet Malachi also declared that the LORD hates divorce.

(Mal 2:16) The man who hates and divorces his wife,’ says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘does violence to the one he should protect,’ says the LORD Almighty.

So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

When Jesus says, “So they are no longer two, but one flesh,” the expression “one flesh” does not simply refer to the physical or sexual union of a man and a woman. Rather, it describes a union in which two people become one shared community of life, united in their whole being and living under God’s law and the authority of His life-giving will.

After hearing Jesus’ answer, the Pharisees challenge Him by citing Moses’ law, which permitted divorce under certain circumstances.

⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

The Law of Moses addresses divorce and remarriage as follows.

(Deu 24:1) If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,

(Deu 24:2) if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man,

(Deu 24:3) and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, (Deu 24:4) then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance.

There was a reason Moses established this law.

In those days, women were socially disadvantaged and had little power or protection in society.

The social structure of that time made it extremely difficult for women who had been abandoned by their husbands to survive on their own.

Therefore, this law was intended to prevent husbands from casually and irresponsibly abandoning their wives on the basis of questionable excuses.

It also sought to protect socially vulnerable women from the serious disadvantages and hardships they would otherwise face.

⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

Indeed, many Jews lacked the purity of heart and the spiritual commitment necessary to uphold God’s original design for marriage.

Some husbands abused their wives in order to drive them away, and some even went so far as to kill them.

To prevent such evil, Moses permitted divorce, which was a lesser evil compared with the greater evils that some husbands were committing.

However, one thing we must understand is that Moses did not command husbands to divorce their wives whenever they found something indecent about them.

He merely permitted divorce under certain circumstances.

When Jesus says, “It was not this way from the beginning,” He makes it clear that the marriage law established by God Himself in the Garden of Eden did not originally provide for divorce.

Divorce destroys the created order established by God, the Creator—the union in which a man and a woman become one flesh.

For the Pharisees, who were legalistic in their approach to religion, Moses represented the highest standard of authority.

But Jesus is greater than Moses.

Jesus often challenged the attitude of those who elevated Moses’ authority above everything else and distorted the true spirit of the Law.

He would say, “Moses commanded you this or that, but I tell you...”

Here, too, Jesus teaches an absolute moral standard by declaring His own authority, which surpasses that of Moses.

He says: “Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

At this point, we might wonder whether Jesus is saying that divorce is permissible in cases of sexual immorality, and whether this contradicts His teaching in verses 4–8.

However, there is no contradiction.

Sexual immorality is presented as an exceptional circumstance in which divorce is permitted.

Under the Law of Moses, a woman caught in adultery could be sentenced to death by stoning.

Therefore, allowing divorce in cases of sexual immorality can be understood as a less severe consequence than the death penalty that adultery could incur.

The disciples, however, found Jesus' strict teaching on marriage difficult to accept.

They complained that if the conditions for divorce were so demanding, it would be better not to marry at all.

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

In response, Jesus explains that not everyone can accept the calling to remain unmarried or live a celibate life.

He says that only those to whom this gift has been given can do so.

¹¹ Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

Remaining unmarried or living a celibate life is not an absolute rule or command that applies to everyone.

Rather, it is a voluntary choice for a small number of people who are called to remain unmarried for spiritual purposes.

The phrase "those who are born that way" refers to those who, having been called by God and responded in faith, voluntarily give up marriage.

In this sense, they are spiritually like eunuchs, choosing to remain unmarried for the sake of God's Kingdom.

Neither Jesus nor His disciples regarded the unmarried life as holier than the married life.

Nor did they consider it the highest level of Christian service or gospel ministry.

Rather, they understood it as a special calling given to certain people so that they could be more fully devoted to serving the Kingdom of God.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

Through this passage, Jesus teaches us that marriage is not merely a human institution in which two people come together to live with one another, but a sacred institution established by God Himself.

His words, "What God has joined together, let no one separate," remind us of the sacredness of marriage and the profound responsibility that comes with the marriage covenant.

Marriage and family are not merely human contracts or relationships that can be easily entered into and abandoned according to momentary feelings.

Marriage is a sacred covenant established by God, and husbands and wives are called to love one another and faithfully fulfill their responsibilities according to that covenant.

The world sometimes tells us that when a relationship is no longer beneficial or when two people no longer see eye to eye, they should end the relationship and go their separate ways.

But as citizens of the kingdom of God, we must remember the love we shared and the vows we made when we first entered into marriage.

We must cherish the covenant we made before God and remain faithful to it, fulfilling our responsibilities to the very end.

Of course, this is by no means easy.

It requires great patience and sacrifice, and at times, we must endure tears and pain.

Satan continually seeks to deceive us and destroy the families God has established.

The world offers all kinds of seemingly reasonable excuses to encourage divorce. Nevertheless, we must not be swayed by such temptations.

Instead, we must remember God's original purpose for marriage and strive diligently to preserve our families.

When facing a crisis in your relationship, do not give up too easily.

Rather, seek to work through your difficulties with patience and forgiveness.

Instead of insisting on having your own way, seek to understand your spouse's weaknesses.

Humbly lay your own shortcomings and stubbornness before the Lord as well.

And whenever you face moments that are too difficult to handle in your own strength, seek God's grace and help.

Persevere, therefore, and do all you can to preserve your family.

This is pleasing to God.

As you walk in the path that pleases Him, God will be with you.

He will help you.

When we nurture the precious bond and family that God has joined together with the love of the Lord, our homes will become little havens of heaven, reflecting God's holiness and love in this world.