

Lake Cities Community Church
Series: On Your Mark
Pastor Craig Schill
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A Model for Permanent Marriage
Mark 10:1-12

Pre-Introduction:

This morning we continue in our study through the Gospel of Mark. Our study takes us to Mark chapter 10, verses 1-12; which is a very difficult passage on the topic of divorce. In just coming back from vacation – tackling a passage like this is akin to jumping into a cold pool of water – yet here we are.

Let me make two remarks before I begin. (1) If you have been divorced – this sermon is not about you. What I mean is not that it is not relevant, I trust it is / will be, but rather I mean that the application of this text may or may not apply fully to your situation. Our text is not the only treatment of divorce and remarriage in the Bible and therefore this sermon is necessarily limited in scope. In addition, every situation of divorce and remarriage is unique, and the application of this morning's text must be made with prayers for wisdom, godly counsel in light of God's Word. As we get into our text, I think you will see more clearly what I mean, and I will revisit this point at the end of the message.

(2) The second thing I would like to say to all of us as a reminder -- is that there is a tremendous attack on the institution of marriage in America. We are in a very odd and ironic point in our culture where we have both a "marriage culture" and a "divorce culture," We have both the highest rates of marriage and the highest rates of divorce of any other industrialized nation in the world. We are greatly conflicted in our cultural soul – and as Christians we can

offer a perspective of marriage that is full of life and joy. We have the answer the world is looking for. With that pre-introduction – let’s pray, before we open God’s word.

Introduction:

I wish you could meet Steve and Deborah. They are an awesome couple with a great marriage. This year they will have been married 37 years – Tammy and I first met 18 years ago in Flagstaff, Arizona. Over the years, we watched them raise their two kids who are both married now and love the Lord. Steve and Deb are great people. They would fit in well here at LCCC. I know you would just love them. They are just like us

But there was a time when their marriage was not so great. It was then that the issue of their potential divorce came to the six of us who were elders in our church. Steve called the pastor of our church, “*Chuck, she has left me. I think we are heading for divorce.*” For years they had silently grown apart to the point that they could not stand to be in the same room with each other. They were angry, embittered and mutually hopeless about the future of their marriage. The issue of divorce came to us. It came to our elder board.

The issue of divorce will come to you too. It might come to you as church leader. It might come to you as a friend. It might come to you as a spouse. At some point, the issue of divorce *will come to you*. And the question is, “How will you respond?” How will you respond as a church leader, as a friend as a spouse?

Well, as elders, we didn’t really know much of how to respond - we had fortunately not had this type of situation come up before in the church. So we had three of the six elders begin meeting with Deborah, and three of us meeting with Steve. I was assigned to Steve, and after the first few meetings – well...if I were a betting man; I wouldn’t have put \$.05 on their marriage making it. To me, it looked hopeless. Their marriage appeared to me unfixable. But I was wrong.

There was something that we learned in the process and there was something that Steve and Deborah had deep within their relationship which helped them to make it through those dark days. And we will discover those in our passage this afternoon.

Preview:

In our passage this morning, the issue of divorce came to Jesus and we get to see how he responded. The story comes to us in four movements; which will become our four points. Let me preview them for you - First Jesus Clarifies the Context of this passage (1-2). Second he challenges the question (3-5). Third he Corrects the model (6-9) and finally, fourth, he clarifies the consequences (10-12). We will look at each of these in turn.

1. Clarifies the Context (1-2)

Let's start with the context – verses 1 and 2: **Mark 10:1** *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.* *Notice from this verse that Jesus is in the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan River.* Who immediately comes to mind when we think the Jordan River – yes, John the Baptist. You may recall that Jesus is done with his ministry in Galilee and is on his way to Jerusalem making a stop in Herod Antipas' territory! Just a short time before these events you will recall that John the Baptist was killed by Herod. The region is still abuzz from drama and intrigue and death of those events. It was the major news story of that time. *For this reason, even though John the Baptist is not mentioned in our text, I believe the issues leading to his death are central to our story.*

Now, look at verse two. [Mark 10:2a](#) *Some Pharisees came up to Jesus, testing Him, and began to question Him...* The Pharisees come to Jesus to test him, but test is not a strong enough word. The Greek word here actually means to “entrap” – to get Jesus to say something - which will be used against him.

So, *the Pharisee’s try to trap Jesus on*, [Mark 10:2b](#) *“Whether it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”* Bingo – the \$64,000 question. Again, John the Baptist’s words come to mind. In [Mark 6:18](#), John said to Herod, *“It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”* Do you see what they are attempting to do? Anticipating Jesus will have the same answer, they hope that he will likewise meet the same fate, and be killed by Herod. *This is a death-question.* And so there is Jesus with all these people around Him; being asked the question which led to John the Baptist’s death. Everyone knows they are talking about Herod and Herodias. You could have heard a pin drop.

2) Jesus Challenges the Pharisee’s Question (3-5)

Now we move to the second part of our text where Jesus challenges the question. Verse three he goes to the setting of their question: [Mark 10:3](#) *And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?”* [Mark 10:4](#) *They said, “Moses permitted a man TO WRITE A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY.”* [Mark 10:5](#) *But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.*

You will notice that Jesus does not answer their question because it is the wrong question based on faulty assumptions. The Pharisees had built their model of divorce around Moses’ permission for a man to provide a certificate of divorce. The only question under debate was upon what grounds it could occur, which was a matter of interpretation. One group of Pharisees

(Hillel school) interpreted the passage very broadly allowing divorce for nearly anything, such as if a wife burned her husband's meal she could be divorced. The other school of Pharisees (Shammai) was much more conservative and only allowed divorce in very limited situations, such as adultery. The Pharisees are asking Jesus to vote for one or the other, and it is a trap. If he supports the liberal side - that would have OK'd Herod's divorce and he is in trouble. He affirms the conservative side (as they expect) he is likewise in trouble. It is a trap.

But Jesus does not answer the question – he challenges their whole argument by reminding everyone that Moses only allowed divorce to make allowance for sin and human weakness. Divorce was never a divine command! Because of sin, as a practical matter, divorce had to be regulated.

I remember once when I was working as a human resources director, a manager put our College at great risk. He hired a new employee in an important position without the proper approvals, without reference checks or due process. It could have led to lawsuits from the other applicants for the job, who were not given a fair process. But the employee had already started working, and had ordered business cards. To retract a job offer would likewise put the college at risk. We had to make some quick exceptions to the normal process, in order to accommodate this person's errors and minimize the impact on the college. We had a term for this kind of thing – we called it “perfuming the pig” – the whole thing stunk, it was not the way it was suppose to be, but for practical matters we had to make allowances for the manager's sin.

Jesus is saying, Moses was perfuming the pig! You don't build your theology of marriage and divorce based on Moses' allowances any more than you would build a hiring process based on my illustration. He changes the debate. The key question is not “*when is divorce lawful*” but “*what is marriage?*” He challenges the question, so that he can develop a solid theology of

marriage. This is our third point.

3) Jesus Corrects their model of marriage/divorce (6-9)

To really understand marriage, you have to go back much farther than Moses! All the way back to creation. Look in verses 6-7. [Mark 10:6](#) “But from the beginning of creation, *God MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE.* [Mark 10:7](#) “FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER, A proper theology of marriage is tied to creation itself, that is how important the institution of marriage is to God. Then he brings the man and the woman together in marriage. [Mark 10:8](#) AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH; so they are no longer two, but one flesh. more creation language - and the two will become one flesh. Theologian J. Murray (Princeton Seminary) wrote, “Marriage is grounded in this male and female constitution - as to its nature it implies that the man and the woman are united in one flesh; as to its sanction, it is divine; as to its continuance it is permanent. The import of all this is that marriage from its very nature and from the divine institution by which it is constituted is ideally indissoluble. It is not a contract of temporary convenience and not a union that may be dissolved at will. (J. Murray, *Divorce* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974], p. 29). The marriage union is a creation of God, just as intentional and good as the creation of the moon and the Sun and the bird and the animals.

And how does God feel about people destroying what He creates? Verse 9 – [Mark 10:9](#) “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” This is God’s Permanent Model of Marriage. This is why he challenged the question – so he could correct the model. Discussion about marriage and divorce begins with an understanding that marriage itself is an act

of God's creation - intended to be permanent. And not just "marriage" in general, but your marriage and mine.

4) Jesus Clarifies consequences of Divorce (10-12)

OK, but in verse 10 the disciples begin to question Jesus. Of course they would. I mean, he really didn't answer the question, did he? We *can almost hear the disciples asking*: "Master, what you said is right and good, but Herod and Herodias are flaunting what you have said! They are setting a bad example for everyone! What do we do about them?"

Mark 10:11 And He said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her; Mark 10:12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery." Let me add the context. Whoever divorces his wife (Herod) and marries another woman, commits adultery against her; and if she (Herodias) herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery. Jesus tells the disciples that Herod and Herodias have not gotten away with anything. There are consequences to sin. There always are even if some consequences you cannot see. In God's eyes, however, Herod and Herodias continue to commit sin upon sin. In essence, Jesus is saying, "God knows what is going on – and someone who thinks they have the same power as God as to create and destroy is a fool."

Application:

Let's talk now about application from this message. I have three application points. First, if you are a Christian, you must believe in God's permanent model for marriage. When two believers get married, we must remember they did not ultimately choose each other; but God has

ordained them to be together. God created that union and therefore the church, and our small groups and our men's ministry and women's ministry, our elders and everything else including the kitchen sink must try to preserve the bonds of marriage within the church. In fact, in our Relational Commitments that you agree when you become a member of LCCC, we try to emphasize this application. Let me read it for you.

“God designed marriage to reflect the beauty and permanence of Christ's loving relationship with his bride, the church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:7, Mark 10:6-8). God designed marriage to be a life-long, exclusive relationship between one man and one woman (Matt. 19:4-6), to provide mutual companionship through life's joys and difficulties, to create (for those called to be parents) a stable environment for raising and nurturing children, and to give strength and cohesiveness to society in general.”

This position of our church is well justified by our passage this morning. Back to the story of Steve and Deborah. The one thing they had at the core of their marriage was a belief that God had brought them together and that God wanted their marriage to be permanent. If they had had the “God wants me to be happy” philosophy – they would have certainly divorced. But their belief in the permanence of marriage allowed them to work on their marriage and to restore it to be better than it had ever been before.

The second application is, like in the story of Steve and Deborah, get help if you need it. What do you have to lose? Set aside your pride and let someone know you are struggling, and get some help. What we learned through our time with Steve and Deborah is that God works through godly leadership and accountability. God works through people to help other people. Get help if you need help. Listen again to our relationship commitments:

“Prior to performing a marriage ceremony, our church requires premarital counseling to ensure that couples enter into marriage advisedly and are as well prepared as possible for its many challenges. Similarly, when those challenges arrive, we encourage our members to seek godly advice and counseling to help them work through their struggles (Proverbs 24:6).”

Talk to me, or an elder or a godly friend. If you need help paying for counseling – let me know! We encourage you not to wait until it is too late, but to reach out for help.

Our third and final application is to extend grace to those who have been divorced – and to those who are going through marriage difficulties. I'm not saying there isn't a place for "tough love" – that is exactly what we did practice with Steve and Deborah. But unless you are aware of all the issues of someone's story – be careful of your attitude – this is an area of potential division and pain in the local church setting. One final reading from our relational commitments. Early in the church's formation, we spent a good deal of time praying and writing the following which seeks to hold us accountability to God's Word and the importance of marriage, while at the same time reflecting grace and forgiveness:

"We recognize that there are various interpretations of Scripture concerning the issues of divorce and remarriage (Matt 5:31-21, Mark 10:1-12, 1 Cor 7:12-16, Exodus 21:7-11). For example, some hold that God never permits a believer to seek a divorce without sinning against God or a spouse. Others hold the view that divorce is only allowed in cases of adultery or abandonment. Still others expand allowances to include cases of physical or emotional abuse, or other situations of endangerment. Membership in this church does not require that you hold to a particular view of divorce or remarriage.

We do, however, acknowledge that though divorce may be permissible in certain situations it is not required; and just as God patiently bears with our sins (Psalm 103:8-12, Isaiah 55:7), so offended spouses can imitate God's love in their own situations (Eph 5:1-2)

Finally, we recognize that many people come to our church already having been divorced. We want you to know that divorce never diminishes God's free offer of love, grace and forgiveness. He cherishes and loves every person who has been divorced, as does our church. God's love moves us to repentance and humility as we seek to honor him in our marriages."

What did Steve and Deborah have that carried them through the dark days of their marriage? A deep belief that God had brought them together and that God wanted them to stay together. Through the tears and the anger and the despair; they had faith to work toward healing

and restoration and by God's grace, today they are missionaries. What we learned that is we are all in this together. We all struggle. We all come to the point where we wonder if our marriage is going to survive or fail. Don't go there alone – get help and experience God's healing in the community of the church. Together we confess: "What God has joined together, let no man separate."