

**“Till Death Do Us Part”**  
**The Gospel According to Mark 10:1-9**  
July 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018

A married couple had a quarrel and ended up giving each other the silent treatment. Two days into their mute argument, the man realized he needed his wife’s help. In order to catch a flight to New York for a business meeting the next morning, he had to get up at 5:00 AM.

Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, “Please wake me at 5:00 AM.” The next morning the man woke up only to discover his wife was already out of bed, it was 9:00 AM., and his flight had long since departed. He was about to look for his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. He read, “It’s 5:00 AM. Time to wake up.”

Thus far in 2018 we’ve seen some amazing marital longevity among our Trinity Church family:

- Back in February, we rejoiced with *John and Evelyn Sproston* as they marked **65** years of marriage.
- Also that month, *JW and Jo Dellitt* marked their **50<sup>th</sup>** wedding anniversary.
- In March, *Jerry and Ella Mae Baker* celebrated their **57<sup>th</sup>** wedding anniversary.
- And a week and a half ago, *Keith and Dorothy Dew* observed their **66<sup>th</sup>** wedding anniversary!

Such milestones are the result of much sacrifice and patience, having thick-skin, rejoicing and sorrowing, and downright big-hearted love from both husband *and* wife. There have been other lengthy marriages celebrated in our church family - in the 40 years plus range so far this year - and there are more significant anniversaries coming up as the year progresses. We rejoice with all who are blessed with long-term harmony in their lives together as husband and wife.

Even so, preaching on the topic of marriage (and listening to a sermon on marriage) can be uncomfortable. Perhaps you desire to be married, but you’re not for various reasons. It is important for us to remember that godly singleness is God’s good will for some of His children. Marriage isn’t for everyone; and the church does a disservice not to include singles in her ministry. Others are single because of divorce (maybe multiple divorces). Maybe you’re solo because your spouse has died, or you’re in the midst of some other separation. Regardless, you are a lovely soul who is an important part of this congregation. You’re not a lesser person because you’re not married. You are God’s child; you are beautiful, and you are necessary!

As we continue our study of Mark’s gospel account, we come this morning to the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter, having concluded our study of **Chapter 9** last Sunday. In the verses of sacred Scripture before us, **Mark 10:1-9**, we’ll note that God’s Word, the Holy Bible, teaches a high view of marriage. In an age where marriage is maligned and attacked from every angle, it is good to be reminded (or taught for the first time), what God says about the permanence of marriage.

**The Gospel According to Mark 10:1-9:**

“Then He (Jesus) arose from there (Capernaum) and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them again.

<sup>2</sup> The Pharisees came and asked Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?” testing Him.

<sup>3</sup> And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?”

<sup>4</sup> They said, “Moses permitted *a man* to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss *her*.”

<sup>5</sup> And Jesus answered and said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. <sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female.’ <sup>7</sup> ‘For this reason a

man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh. <sup>9</sup> Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate."

The Pharisees were still at it – trying to discredit Jesus before the masses. Their question to Jesus in verse 2 is another attempt to manipulate Him. They ask, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife?" Matthew, in his gospel account (**Matthew 19:3**), adds "for just any reason?" "Is it lawful for a man to divorce *his* wife for just any reason?" But, in typical fashion, Jesus fields their question by posing one of his own. He asks in verse 3, "What did Moses command you?"

Their response "Moses permitted *a man* to write a certificate of divorce, and to dismiss *her*," harkens back to **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**, the primary Old Testament passage concerning divorce. Jesus responds to the Pharisees' answer by drawing attention instead to marriage, and thereby taking the spotlight off of divorce. "The Pharisees' primary interest lay in seeing how far they could go and still remain within the letter of the law. Jesus' primary interest was in restoring men to the lifestyle for which they had been made." (Ferguson, 158)

Jesus emphasizes the permanence of marriage in three ways in today's passage of Scripture. The first reason for marriage is verse 6, "...from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'" From the time He created the heavens and earth, and everything in them, **God created marriage**. (*Remember the T-shirt or bumper sticker, "God don't make no junk"?* That slogan applies to marriage and everything else He made). Marriage is for the good of all people, not Christians only, but also non-Christians. (Of course, the Bible also teaches that Christians marry Christians, pagans marry pagans – no mixing between the two).

According to **Genesis 1:26 & 27**, God created the first man (Adam) on Day 6 of creation. Verse 27 reads, "So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him..." But, God saw that man was alone. Adam wasn't able to perform the tasks God had given Him to do without some help. So, God created a help mate for Adam. He put Adam into a deep sleep, removed one of his ribs, closed up the place where He took the rib, and God made the first woman, Eve.

The first marriage ceremony took place according to **Genesis 2:22** when God "brought her (Eve) to the man." And, from that time, fathers have brought their daughters to their grooms at the beginning of the traditional marriage ceremony.

**So, one reason God intends for marriage to be long-lasting is because He created it. A second reason is that two separate humans become one in marriage.** That's verses 7 & 8, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, <sup>8</sup> and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh." Jesus here quotes **Genesis 2:24**. Marriage is the making of a new, distinct family before God. A man and a woman come together in holy matrimony, and they retain their separate identities, but they are now one in body and soul unlike before. This is why, traditionally, they have the same last name as a result of their marriage to each other. "(Marriage) is the most intimate union in the human race, for the two become one flesh. This is not true of a father and son or a mother and daughter, but it is true of a man and woman." (Wiersbe, 144) Husband and wife make vows of marital union to each other

before both God and man. Parents do not have as intimate relationship with their children as they are intended to have with their spouses.

**A third reason God intends marriage to last long is that only God can dissolve marriage** (and that isn't to happen often, as we'll see in next week's message). Here again is verse 9, "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate." According to Jesus' teaching here, husband and wife form a *team*. They work, plan, pray, play, pull together. William Hendriksen puts this in stark language when he writes in his commentary, "For a man to separate that which God has yoked or joined together means...to defy an act of God!" (Hendriksen, 379)

In the weddings I conduct, the format of which comes from the *PCA Book of Church Order*, there are questions of consent I address to both husband and wife. For instance, to the groom I ask, "*Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife, to live with her after God's commandments in the holy estate of marriage? And will you love her, honor and cherish her, so long as you both shall live?*"

Then, there are the vows themselves, addressed individually to both groom and bride. For instance, to the bride, I ask her to repeat, "I, \_\_\_\_\_, take you, \_\_\_\_\_, to be my wedded husband, and I do promise and covenant before God and these witnesses to be your loving and faithful wife in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as we both shall live."

This passage in **Mark Chapter 10** includes a concession that divorce will happen. Some marriages just don't work, even after much time and effort devoted to improving them. It is also true that some marriages probably never should have taken place. In verse 5, Jesus teaches that the hardness of human hearts is why He provides some concessions for divorce in His Word, the Bible. We'll explore those in more detail next Sunday, Lord willing.

As we come to make some applications to our lives from these verses of sacred Scripture this morning, there are three that I've come up with. For sure, there are many other possibilities. But, the first two of these are my observations from nearly 40 years of supervising other people, which includes 19 years of pastoral ministry.

### **Application:**

1 – **Don't give your heart away to someone else too quickly.** If you are single, for whatever reason, don't be looking to rush into marriage because you've "fallen in love" with someone else. Because God intends marriage between a man and woman to last until one of the two buries the other, it would behoove everyone to do their due diligence in choosing a life mate. Almost every couple that comes to me for pre-marital counseling has already decided they were going to be married, have said as much to their families, they've set a date, reserved a venue, and have begun asking their friends to stand up with them at their wedding ceremony. Oh, pity the pastor who stands in the way of a couple pursuing marriage because he's not convinced the couple may be good for each other, or that they aren't yoked equally when it comes to faith! It is a hard place where the objective questioning of a pastor runs up against the subjective lust of a couple who will get married come hell or high water. Don't give your heart away too quickly!

2 – But, deciding upon the proper spouse shouldn't lead to a lifestyle of sin. Dear ones, **don't live a pretend marriage while merely living together with someone else.** Cohabitation, living

together outside of the bond of marriage to each other, is dangerous to the soul! In all likelihood and probability, a man and a woman living together (who aren't family) are sinning. They are engaging in sexual relations regularly, and so defying the living God who commands chastity among His people instead of fornication and adultery. **Galatians 6:7** teaches us, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

The bed of marriage is for those who are married to one another. **Hebrews 13:4** tells us, "Marriage *is* honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge." Rather than moving in with each other, an unmarried couple should be running away from the potential for sin. **2 Timothy 2:22** – "Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart." **Romans 13:14** declares, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to *fulfill its* lusts."

I could say much more, but in the interests of time, I'll ask you to help spread the word, especially with other professing believers in Jesus Christ. Living together outside the bonds of marriage is a poor example to others, it reflects a lack of commitment to live a holy life, and it leads to great sin. Move out, get married, or break up. Church, we must be willing to go as far as opening up our homes to others to live with us until the situation changes.

3 – **Don't give up on your marriage so easily.** If you are in physical danger from an abusive spouse, then physical separation could be in order, at a different location perhaps, even to include the county jail if a spouse is being battered. *Is God able to change the hearts of sinful men and women?* Yes, He is. To include our own hearts. He commands us to trust Him and to obey Him and His Word. Yet, it is also true that you may not be doing what you can to keep your marriage from failing. A wise man once wrote, "Success in marriage does not come merely through finding the right mate, but through being the right mate." (Barnett Brickner)

Dear ones, let me also say this. God is compassionate and full of grace, abundant in mercy and truth. He is tender, gentle, and kind. He loves you even if your marriage is sour, limping, or headed for the ash heap. If you have secured a divorce from the one whom you pledged lifelong faithfulness, God is able to restore you and nourish you. If your marriage hasn't turned out like you had dreamed or hoped, it still could. We serve a God Who is able to do what is impossible with us. He says that all things are possible for him (or her) who believes.

4 – Finally, and briefly, God has given human marriage because it illustrates the relationship of Jesus Christ and His people. Jesus is the Head of the Church, and the Church is His body. In **Ephesians 5:22-33**, the Apostle Paul connects the husband to Christ the Head, and the wife to Christ's body.

So, God has intended that marriage is to be life long, for at least four reasons. He created it, 2 human lives become one in marriage, only God can dissolve marriage, and marriage pictures Jesus and His people. We must also remember not to give our hearts away too quickly, not to defy God and live together outside of marriage, and not give up too quickly on our marriages when tough times come.

There was a very unusual military funeral in California in December of 2013. Sgt. First Class Joseph Gantt, who fought in both World War II and the Korean War, was laid to rest. He had been captured in Korea in 1950 and died the following year. But his body was not returned for many years, and his death was never confirmed by the North Koreans.

His wife, Clara, waited decades for her husband to come back. She regularly went to meetings with government officials seeking information about what had happened. Clara even bought a house and had it professionally landscaped so all Joseph would have to do when he came home was go fishing. She was 94 years old when his remains were finally brought home for a military funeral with full honors. It wasn't the homecoming she dreamed of, but she finally knew his fate. Clara told a reporter who interviewed her, "He told me if anything happened to him, he wanted me to remarry. And I told him 'No, no.' Here I am, still his wife, and I'm going to remain his wife until the day the Lord calls me home."