**Jesus, Marriage and Creation**

There’s a phrase that we use when we’re ready to move on from things. We say, “Out with the Old, in with the New.” You’ve probably heard that before. When you get a new TV you put the old one in the alley or donate it somewhere or when you get a new car, you trade in the old one or junk it.

But sometimes when you get something new, you just demote the old one. If you get a new couch, the old one goes in the basement. You can use it, but you’d be a little embarrassed for guests to sit on it. When I get a new pair of shoes, I use the old ones for work shoes. I wouldn’t wear them in public, but they good to get grass stained and dirty. This is what we do with old things—we throw them away or use them privately.

This is how many Christians think about the Old Testament. If we have a New Testament, then why do we need the Old? You might like the stories in the Old Testament and it can be useful to dust off things like the Ten Commandments from time to time. But, the Old Testament can be a bit embarrassing with all the violence, strange customs and archaic laws, so we often relegate it to the scripture basement, where we might use it, but we don’t have to be ashamed of it when others see it.

We like the New Testament. After all, we’re “Christians.” Which means we should put away the Old Testament and simply follow Christ. I resonate with the idea that we should focus on Jesus. He is the center and culmination of our faith. That’s why we sing songs like, “You can have all this world, just give me Jesus” and “In Christ Alone, my hope is found…” That’s right on. Jesus is the center of our faith. But here’s the issue…

Jesus’ ministry lasted 3 years. He didn’t write a book. He didn’t even write a letter—at least not that we know of. While the words we have are pretty incredible, the reality is, we have very few direct words of Jesus. So, if this is true, then how can we to know what Jesus believed about the things we’re interested in today like immigration, the economy, marriage, race, sex and gender issues, abortion, and technology, not to mention all the questions we have about what God is like and how we should live?

Of course, we can try to reason our way using Jesus’ words, but there’s another source for knowing what Jesus thought about things he never taught directly. We go downstairs and pull it out of the scripture basement. It’s the Old Testament—Jesus’ Bible.

You see, we tend to think of Jesus in front of a green screen. When someone stands in front of a green screen, there’s no context. You don’t know whether they’re inside or outside, whether in a desert or the arctic circle. You can superimpose them wherever your heart desires. And we do that. We make Jesus the poster-boy for our particular belief and tell everyone Jesus agrees us.

The solution is to understand that Jesus was not an imaginary figure in a made-up world. He was a real-life Palestinian Jew in the Roman Empire. He was “God become flesh” at a particular time, with particular beliefs about the world.

Even at the early age of 12, he ran off—not to the movies, but to the Temple to listening to the teachers. And what were they teaching? The Old Testament. When he began his ministry, he introduced himself by opening the scroll of Isaiah from the Old Testament. (Lk 4:17-19) When he got into a discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus told her salvation is from the Jews. (John 4:22) He commended the Pharisees for studying the Old Testament, but criticized them because they refused to see that those scriptures pointed to him. (John 5:39-40) In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said he didn’t come to do away with the Law, but to fulfill it. (Mt 5:17)

The Old Testament is such an important part of the gospels that *you cannot understand Jesus if you don’t understand the Old Testament* anymore than people can understand you without knowing at least some of your family background, your experience or the Christian faith. When we know this about Jesus, other things about his teachings come into focus. So, we’re going to be spending the next 6 weeks or so looking at Jesus’ Bible and looking specifically at times in Jesus’ ministry where he quoted, referred to, or fulfilled the Old Testament Scriptures. By the end, we hope you’ll have a better understand of both Jesus and his Bible.

Today, we’re going to look at an instance when Jesus went all the way back to the Old Testament creation account to see what Jesus believed about marriage. So, turn with me to Mark, chapter 10 starting at verse 1. [read]

As usual, the Pharisees asked Jesus a question about the Law, but they weren’t really interested in Jesus’ answer. They already thought *knew* the answer. They just wanted to trap Jesus. They were trying to get Jesus in trouble with Herod, who had already beheaded John the Baptist for criticizing Herod for marrying his brother’s wife.

Jesus didn’t take the bait and only explained the sin of divorce in private to his disciples. But his answer to the Pharisees show us how Jesus viewed the Law. In short, while the Pharisees always focused on the words and *technicalities* of the Law, Jesus focused on the *purpose* of the Law. Let’s dive in and I’ll show you what I mean.

The Pharisees’ question was, *“Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”* Now, let me clarify something first; they weren’t asking about Roman Law. They were asking about the Law of Moses, which both Jesus and the Pharisees valued and accepted. Here’s the problem, the Law of Moses didn’t say much at all about divorce, so through the centuries, the Rabbis who interpreted the Law had to fill in the gaps.

The debate among the Rabbis in Jesus’ day wasn’t about whether a man could divorce his wife—they assumed that was the case. The debate was about the *grounds* for divorce. Rabbi Shammai was most restrictive and said that the only reason for divorce was adultery by the wife. Rabbi Hillel was more permissive and allowed for divorce even if she was a bad cook. (Some of you wives just got really nervous). Another rabbi—Rabbi Aquiba allowed divorce even if the man found another woman more beautiful. It was a man’s world. There was no scenario where a woman could divorce her husband.

So, you can see that divorce in Judaism was quite easy for the man. He held all the power in the relationship. In fact, originally, all a man had to do to divorce his wife was to say the words, “I divorce you!” three times. And that would put her in a bad position, since first of all, there were limited opportunities for women to earn a living. The second reason this was particularly bad news for her was that she was then seen as damaged goods and she was less likely to find another man to marry her.

This is the background of the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. When they ask the question, Jesus turns it back on them. He asks in verse 3, **“What did Moses command you?”** They answered from the only passage in the Law of Moses that addresses divorce. Verse 4, **“Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.”** That was their summary of law when it comes to divorce. In essence, their answer to the question is “yes.”

Now Jesus does accept the Law as authoritative, but he drills down deeper than the Pharisees and rather than allowing culture to dictate what it means, he uses Scripture to interpret Scripture. Let me show you what I mean.

This is what Deuteronomy 24:1-4 says. This is everything the Law of Moses says about divorce. “**1If 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, 2and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3and 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, 4then 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.”** (Deut 24:1-4)

Now, to modern eyes this is very unfair to women. But look at what Jesus says in verse 5. **“[Moses] wrote this commandment because of your hard hearts.”** Let me paraphrase. *“Moses wrote this commandment because men are chauvinistic pigs.”*

You see, we look at this commandment from Deuteronomy and think it makes divorce really easy for a man. But the purpose of the commandment itself was to put constraints on the man and protect the woman.

Rather just saying, “I divorce you,” he had to go to a priest or Rabbi and have a certificate legally drawn up. He couldn’t just divorce her on a whim, but it forced him to take time to cool down and reconsider. And then she would have a document that said she was free—there would be no question from other men whether they were doing anything wrong in marrying her.

Now, to us, it doesn’t go far enough, but in that day, it was radical because, even though it acknowledged that the cultural patriarchy was likely not to be changed by a law, it limited the power of the man to discard his wife.

So, Jesus points out that this commandment was only necessary because the culture of patriarchy was so out of control. It’s a concession to culture. But then watch what he does. Rather conceding so much power to culture, he goes back to Scripture and shows that *you can follow a law to the letter and still miss God’s intent.*

Verse 6, **“But from the beginning of creation he made them male and female. For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh.”** Jesus goes beyond the words on the page to God’s intent for marriage in the creation account.

Now, he doesn’t quote the whole creation account—only the parts that are pertinent to the question. First, he alludes to Genesis 1:27 saying that humans were created male and female. Here’s what it says, **“God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.”** In other words, Jesus affirms that there’s an intentional design of male and female.

Now, the point of the creation story is first of all to show that humans are made in the image of God, which means that there is something different about humans that reflects God in a way none of the rest of creation does. Part of being made in the image of God is being called to carry God’s work. Let me show you what I mean. Next verse.

Genesis 1:28, **“God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply! Fill the earth and subdue it!”** So, we’re given the task of *filling* and *subduing* the earth. In this context, of course, *“filling the earth”* refers to having children. And how does that happen? Male and female come together and if everything works, children are created. Not every couple will have children, but it takes male and female to fill the earth. There are 7 Billion of us, so we’ve done a pretty good job of that.

The second task is to “subdue” the earth. Now this is an interesting word—the Hebrew word is *kabash*—not to be confused with kibosh. Again, it’s usually translated as “subdue” which many people have taken to mean “exploit” and used as an excuse to do whatever they want to the earth. This is not at all what it means. The word subdue doesn’t do justice to what it really means so, instead, think about *kabash* in terms of “imposing an order on” or “organizing something so it flourishes.”

You can see the concept even in the natural world. Trees will grow and produce fruit naturally, but they will do much better when a person who knows a bit about horticulture, prunes it and “imposes order on it” to make sure it’s growing efficiently. In the same way, humans flourish when we have a wise structure imposed on us. Not structure that’s stifling or oppressive, but one that gives our lives structure and direction.

This is what God did at creation when he separates the land from the water, the sky from the earth, and day from night. He ordered creation for human flourishing. This is *kabash*.

*A healthy* family is *kabash—*it’s a structure that brings about human flourishing. And you can see it’s value statistically. Where families are stable, children raised by mom and dad do statistically better than other situations. Even today, the greatest risk factor for child poverty isn’t race or education, but uninvolved or absent fathers. Husband and wife aren’t just partners in *creating* life, but partners in *ordering* life. Not just for kids, but for the couple, too.

Why do you think insurance premiums go down when someone gets married? They’ve done the math. Marriage has a strange effect on people. Married men, smoke less, drink less, have more sex, are more disciplined and live generally healthier lives than unmarried me.

We know we live in a fallen world and we can’t always have that ideal, so there are amazing people who adopt children to provide that structure for them or relatives who take in children so they can have a chance. But what I hope you see here is that the purpose of marriage isn’t to make you happy or fulfilled—it’s a societal good. If people ever wonder why Christians talk so much about family, whether you agree with how they go about it or not, that’s why.

Let’s go back to Jesus’ statement. He jumps from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2 and quotes this directly, **“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother, and the two will become one flesh. So, they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

Now, this “one-flesh” thing comes describes the creation of humans in Genesis 2. It says, Adam was created out of the dust of the ground. But it was not good for him to be alone, so God created a *suitable* *helper* for him. *Ezer kenegdo* is the Hebrew. Now “helper” doesn’t mean women are inferior. “Helper” is the Hebrew word *ezer,* which in the Bible most often refers to God—like in the Psalms **“God is my ever-present help.”** That word is *ezer*, so unless you’re prepared to say that God is inferior to us, you can’t use it to justify patriarchy. It also says that helper is “suitable,” which is the Hebrew word *kenegdo*. It means literally, “the same but opposite.”

In the creation story, God created woman after he paraded all the animals in front of Adam and no suitable help was found. So he created woman, who wasn’t an animal—was human, like him, but opposite or complimentary—that’s sexual difference.

We think it says God made woman out of man’s rib, but newer translations reflect that it actually means that God took woman out of man’s *side*—or you could say that when it comes to marriage, men and women are each half of a whole. It gives them *equal* status and partnership in the task of multiplying and subduing. When male and female come together in marriage, the two sides of humanity are brought together.

Now I know this opens up the question of those who aren’t married. Does that mean they’re incomplete? Actually, no. This is a description of marriage, not of life in general. Both Jesus and Paul actually affirm the goodness of being single as well and in fact, talk about marriage being a concession to the fact that people have a hard time controlling their lust. Also, Jesus wasn’t married—so there’s that, too.

So Jesus explanation is that because people’s hearts are hard, Moses realized the reality that some people weren’t going to listen no matter how many Laws he made, so he simply made a law that limited the damage they could do. But both patriarchy (male dominance) and divorce are against the original intent of a man and woman becoming “one flesh.” And Jesus quotes from Genesis, **“What God has joined together, let no one separate.”** It’s interesting that Jesus takes the most restrictive position on divorce as any of the rabbis.

So you can see that when you know the Old Testament, Jesus said a whole lot more than it appears at face value, but let me land the plane. I know that some of you, because it’s a big issue in our society say, well this is what Jesus would have believed about same-sex marriage. I think there’s a strong case to be made for that, but I’m not going to go into that today first of all, because we don’t have time. But more important, if that’s the only point you come out of this with then you’re missing Jesus’ point.

The Pharisees were the ones who wanted to focus on the technicalities of the Law, because it allowed them an out. But Jesus didn’t treat this as a technicality. He treated it as a human issue and a pastoral care issue. You see, the key to what Jesus says here, is when he says, *“Moses only allowed divorce because of your hard hearts.”*

He’s saying to the Pharisees—you guys and your technicalities of Law are doing damage to God’s intent for marriage. God intended marriage to be a structure that ensures the care, growth, and flourishing of everyone and you’ve twisted it to serve your own ends. Now, I know this is really harsh way of saying it, but don’t we do this today?

I understand that there are some marriages that seem like lost-causes. You want to make it work, but the spouse isn’t interested at all. But most of the time marriage problems happen between two people with good intentions, but whose hearts have become hard. And their heart has become hard because they’ve unwittingly bought into the idea that marriage is there to make you happy.

If you are sitting here today with your spouse, you’re not with the person that is supposed to make you happy, you’re sitting with the person who is supposed to make you better. You’re sitting with your teammate and together you are called to work toward the flourishing of the world. That might be through your family. That might be through the church, it might be with your neighbors. You were created in the image of God to partner together for good.

There are many times when your heart will become hard you will be tempted to distort your marriage by thinking it’s all about your happiness. And when you’re not happy, you’ll be tempted to give up. But instead, soften your heart. Let go of your rights and look outward. And when you do, God will grow you and change you and transform your marriage into what he intended in the beginning.