

The Sermon on the Mount
Part 14: Covenants and Contracts
May 17th & 18th 2014

Welcome: It's hard to believe that next week we'll be wrapping up our series through the Sermon on the Mount.

If you're just joining us, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is describing the kind of life we were created to live and the life we will live when He becomes our King...

And each week, we've come to see that Jesus' words are very hard at times...aren't they?

Which is why, when He spoke, Matthew writes that some people walked away, while others in the crowd stood with mouths wide open in astonishment saying, *"We've never heard anyone teach with this authority!"* And instead of walking away from Jesus, they were drawn to Him...and their lives were changed!

The same is true for us today. If we are going to live in the way Jesus describes (the life of the Kingdom), we must first draw near to Him and allow His words to wrestle with us! They must cause tension if they are ever going to heal and change us!

This is especially true in today's text as we consider what Jesus had to say about marriage and divorce!

For many of us, Jesus' words are going to make us very uncomfortable and unhappy. Some of us might even feel guilty or condemned. But please don't go anywhere! Stay with us, because I assure you that Jesus came to heal you not to hurt you. He came to bring joy and life, not pain and death!

Now...Whether you agree with what Jesus says...or you agree with anything that I say in the next few moments, I'm confident that the majority of us will agree on two things!

First...Marriage Matters deeply to us! Did you know that there has never been a culture or society found that didn't have marriage! That's because marriage isn't simply something that we do...it's something that was created for us! God invented marriage on the day He invented us!

It's almost as if marriage is built into our DNA.

Little girls – I see this with my two young gals, Karlie and Elise. They have never been to a wedding to my knowledge, and yet from an early age, they've played wedding with their dolls, which isn't a socially conditioned thing because my boys don't play wedding, they play Ninja! *You say...well that's just your kids Jed!* Ok...guys...did you know that when you proposed to your wife she didn't start thinking about your wedding from scratch. She had been thinking about that day for

years, which is why the majority of your ideas about the wedding were inferior to hers from day one! So here's a tip if you're getting married in the future! When she begins to plan the wedding, the very best thing you can do is nod and agree with her suggestions (and give your opinion only when demanded), and then do everything she asks you to do!

Why? Because marriage matters deeply...and if you value your relationship...you'll do what I say! Trust me!

The second thing that most of us will agree on when it comes to marriage is that marriage was designed to be good...but when it breaks, it has the power to be very bad!

Marriage: When I stood on the altar weeping like a baby in front of a few hundred people as Beth walked down the aisle to me...and people on the front row were offering me tissues and thinking, *"what's with this guy?"* My tears were not ones of sadness or pain, but of joy because Beth, my bride, the woman I love, was coming to me, and it was overwhelming, and **guys if you don't cry at that...you need counseling!**

Listen...every bride and groom who says, *"I do,"* fully expects the joy and celebration of that moment to continue! No one walks into marriage anticipating that one day they'll cry tears of sadness and heartache, do they?

Yet, something that was created to be so good and beautiful and life giving has caused many of us unimaginable conflict, turmoil, and pain!

So...if we know that marriage is good, and yet we've seen marriage become terribly difficult and bad, don't you think that it would be good to ask why this is? And wouldn't it would be wise to take another look at marriage, not from our culture's perspective (which hasn't gotten it right), but from the Inventor's point of view!

That's what we're going to do today...we want to get into the heart and mind of God...to understand the purpose of marriage and how He created it to work!

So go with me to Matthew 5:31!

Matthew 5:31 – "You have heard the law that says, 'A man can divorce his wife by merely giving her a written note of divorce.'

Now, Jesus was speaking into a 1st century, male-dominated society where women couldn't divorce men...only men could divorce women. And he's referencing the Law

of Moses that said that if a man wanted to divorce his wife, all he had to do was give her a certificate to prove the divorce!

To which most of us say, “That’s not right!” I agree...in fact, Jesus agrees...keep reading!

“But I say that a man who divorces his wife, unless she has been unfaithful causes her to commit adultery. And anyone who marries a divorced woman also commits adultery.”

Matthew 5:32

Now...at first glance, this seems very backwards, doesn’t it! Jesus seems to be saying that if a man divorces his wife for anything other than unfaithfulness (which is the word *porneia*, and it describes any kind of general immoral conduct!), he causes her to commit adultery. So, let me get this straight...if a man falls in love with another woman and decides to leave his wife, and she remarries, **she is committing adultery?**

There must be something about adultery that Jesus doesn’t understand. Adultery is having sex with someone who isn’t your spouse, right? If a man divorces his wife, and she remarries, that’s a new marriage...not adultery!

And how can someone who marries a divorced woman be committing adultery? A divorced person can’t commit adultery because they’re not married anymore!”

To which Jesus says to us... “Maybe there’s something about marriage that you don’t understand!”

Now...thankfully Jesus spoke on this topic more than once. Later on in his ministry, Jesus was approached by a group of Pharisees who were continually trying to trap Jesus, by pitting Him against Moses! They believed that Moses was a prophet of God...and therefore Moses’ words were from God, and if they could get Jesus to contradict Moses, they would prove that Jesus wasn’t from God. Then, they could have him arrested for blasphemy...and Jesus would be out of their hair!

Let’s listen to their conversation!

“Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?” Matthew 19:3

They’re asking Jesus, *“When it is ok for a man to divorce his wife and still be ok with God and everyone else?”*

During this time, there were two schools of thought when it came to divorce.

The first view said that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all! You burnt my leg of lamb...you didn't keep the house clean enough... *"I divorce you!"* No trial necessary, no documentation, no rationale...nothing!

The second view said that a man couldn't divorce his wife for any reason except for when she was found unfaithful during the engagement period. During that time, a promise between parents was legally binding. To break an engagement, you actually had to have a divorce. If, during the engagement, the woman was suspected of having immoral relations with another man, that was enough to divorce her!

These were the two extreme views...

The Pharisees wanted a list of reasons for why a man should be allowed to leave his wife! And in our culture, we have a similar tendency to want to look at our circumstances to justify our decision to walk away from a marriage! He did this; she said that. She treats me like this. He broke his promise. We fell out of love. We had irreconcilable differences. That's how we think. But Jesus didn't give the Pharisees a list of reasons, did He? Instead, He took them far deeper!

"Haven't you read the Scriptures? Jesus replied. They record that from the beginning God made them male and female."

Matthew 19:4

**Jesus says, before we can talk about divorce, "Let's go back to the beginning."
There is something about marriage that you must understand!**

"(Quoting from Genesis 2) Jesus said, This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." Matthew 19:5

That word **united** certainly refers to physical union...sex, but it's so much more than that! When a man and woman commit their lives to one another in marriage under the authority of God, they become **one**! There is a divine blessing over their marriage commitment...

God always sees marriage as a covenant relationship! Our culture tends to see marriage as a contractual relationship!

Contracts – In a contractual relationship...the commitment between a husband and wife is built on a series of agreements and expectations that must be kept in order to keep the relationship going and growing!

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Much like a Car Lease – When you want to lease a car, you walk into the dealership and test drive the vehicle, and you decide what color and features you like. Then, you step into the finance manager’s office where you hash out the terms of the agreement! 24 months...36 months...12,000 miles a year, so much down. **And what does the dealership expect?** They want you to pay your lease, keep the car clean, and return it with less mileage than you agreed to drive it. And this agreement works out very well unless you break your contract! **What happens if you stop paying the lease?** Or...if instead of 12,000 miles, you drive 15k? Or, your child takes his scooter and scrapes the handle up and down the sides of the car? What does the dealership do? They hunt you down and make you pay...don’t they! It’s not pretty if you’ve ever been there.

In a marriage built around a contract, two people meet and find in one other many of the features they’re looking for in a potential spouse. Then, they agree to the terms of the relationship, most of which are unspoken. Terms such as...if he continues to make me happy and keeps the romance alive! If she continues to look a certain way...if we continue to have great sex. If they get rid of most of their bad habits, and so on!

And this relationship will work out well until the expectations on which the contract is established are broken!

*He gets a new job and we don’t get to spend as much time together! She used to be more available, but we had children...and now we’re growing apart! We don’t have the financial security we once had. She used to look so good. He used to have a six-pack and now he has a single pack! We used to get along so well...and now all we do is argue and fight! **Now...we’re looking to get out!***

A contractual marriage will crush you because you’ll never be able to satisfy the expectations of your spouse all of the time. Nor will they be able to fully satisfy you! Your marriage will become a moment-by-moment relationship where each spouse watches the other to determine if they are meeting their end of the bargain. The moment one spouse fails to meet the expectations, the marriage is destined to deteriorate!

Please hear me! God did not establish the marriage relationship on a contract, but around a covenant!

When Jesus described marriage, He quoted Genesis 2, which says! *“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.”* The text actually says that the man **cleaves** to his wife!

To Cleave – is to make a public vow of faithfulness, commitment, and exclusivity!

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This is why...when a couple is married the pastor doesn't break out a contract of agreements! *Do you agree to do this for her...or else? Do you agree to love him like this...or else?* Ok...sign here! No...what do the bride and groom say?

I promise to love and serve you. I promise to care for and protect you. I promise to stick beside you no matter what life brings. I promise to hold you, regardless of your response, appearance, health condition, financial status!

They pledge their lives to each other because the essence of marriage is a covenant...a permanent, life-long commitment of oneness! This is exactly what Jesus says...

"Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together." Matthew 19:6

Now, you might be thinking, *"Jed...are you telling me that even if he did this, or she said that, and my friends are telling me to walk away...that I'm supposed to stay in that relationship?"*

I'm only suggesting what Jesus is saying. How do you make two out of one? How do you un-one what is one? We tend to think in contractual terms...and so we want to go to the circumstances, events, betrayal, so that we can justify our reason for leaving. But Jesus says, *"Before you attempt that, I want you to realize how complicated this is going to be."*

You're trying to make two out of one."

The Pharisees were trying to make this permissible!
Jesus says, *"I'm not even sure that it's possible!"*

You might have recognized your divorce, but maybe your Father in Heaven did not.

Now, if you're confused or taken aback by this, so were the Pharisees! Which is why they continue to question Jesus!

*"Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written note of divorce and send her away? They asked. Jesus replied, Moses **permitted divorce** only as a concession to your hard hearts, but **it was not what God had originally intended.**" Matthew 19:7-8*

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Did you catch that? Jesus says to them, *“Moses permitted divorce because your hearts were so hard!”* During this time, men were kicking their wives out of the house...and they had nowhere to go. If a woman showed up on her family member’s doorstep, suitcase in hand without a legal certificate of divorce, everyone imagined the worst and sent her back onto the street! So...Moses issued a certificate of divorce so that women could be legally protected and safe!

**Divorce was permitted as a concession to deal with the breakdown of marriage because the men weren’t taking care of their wives!’
But, notice Jesus said that divorce is not what God had originally intended!**

It is in this context, that Jesus comes back to a similar statement as the one He made earlier in chapter five...

“And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery – unless his wife has been unfaithful.” Matthew 19:9

Since marriage is a divinely blessed relationship where two people become one, when someone who has been divorced remarries...(expect for the case where a spouse has abandoned the marriage covenant, physically or emotionally), ‘it is adultery.’

This is hard!

Now...it might seem to you that Jesus is accusing and condemning people who are already wounded or hurting or downtrodden. But what you must do with texts like this is put them through the filter of the rest of Jesus’ ministry and his interactions with people!

Do you remember the woman caught in adultery? Or, the woman at the well in Samaria who had five husbands? Did Jesus say to either of them, *“I condemn you because you committed adultery”*? No...to the woman caught in the act of having sex with a man who wasn’t her husband, Jesus shooed away all of her condemners, then he looked at her and said, ‘I don’t condemn you!’ He didn’t ignore or make light of her sin, but He didn’t use it against her! He said...that sin...it was really bad and if you keep doing it, it’s going to destroy you. But I came to set you free, I came to give a 2nd chance. I came to heal what has been broken by sin. **So go and sin no more!**

When you begin to see that Jesus came to free people, not condemn them; that He came to heal, not to crush. Jesus calls sin what it is, but then He looks into our eyes and says, ‘Go and live differently by my grace.’ This alone will free you!

Application

Now...this raises a number of questions for us!

Does this mean that if I'm divorced, I'm living in a perpetual state of adultery?

The verb tense Jesus uses doesn't seem to say that. **Does that mean that you need to get out of my 2nd marriage?** (Finally, I have a loophole! I have a message and a text!). It doesn't say that either.

Where do I stand in relation to the rest of the church? You stand alongside the rest of us adulterers! Remember Jesus said that anyone who looks at another person with lust in his/her heart has committed adultery! So, if you're in your first marriage, don't you dare look down on someone who has walked through a divorce!

Well...if Jesus doesn't condemn you, and the church doesn't condemn you...and any church that does condemn you is not the church (the church is the body of Christ...the living, breathing representation of Jesus Christ, filled with His Spirit, and reflecting His personality and heart!).

Where do you stand?

You stand squarely in the middle of needing God's grace as every other person in here does!

What do we do with this? If you're single and you want to remarry! If you're in a 2nd or 3rd marriage, what do you do?

Application

For these last few minutes, let me share my heart with you, and give you three things to do if Jesus' words are resonating with you.

Embrace – Say... *“Jesus I believe you, regardless of my situation, or what I've believed about marriage and divorce to this day. I embrace what you say about the nature of marriage!”*

*“I believe you created marriage for one man and woman for life, and I'm not going to ignore it because it's uncomfortable or unpractical! I'm going to look at it full on and say, 'what you say is true, **what is one can't be un-oned.**”*

That's the beginning! It's always the beginning when it comes to God. Do you remember how you became a Christian? You said, *“I'm a sinner...and I need your grace.”* You acknowledged what was true...and then you reached out for the grace of God!

If you're ever going to move forward today, regardless of your experience, you need God's grace! "God...I accept your definition of marriage with all of its complexities and loose ends, and I need your grace!"

Confess – Admit... *"God, I've failed and I haven't lived up to your standards!" I didn't know better. Some of us will admit, "I knew better but I did it anyway!" You thought, "I'm going to get married and it will all work out...and it has been hell...and you've been blaming others since.*

One of the reasons many of us continue to experience heartache and ramifications from our past is because we've never owned our sin and confessed our need for God's grace!

Some of us need to go to our spouse and confess that our anger or bitterness stems from a past relationship, and we need to admit that we stepped into this relationship wrongfully and ask them for forgiveness. Then, confess to them that you want to start over and love them like God has called you to!

Some of you need to go to an ex that you wronged. To this day, you've been playing that relational brokenness doesn't exist, but it does! And though reconciliation might now mean remarriage, as followers of Jesus we're committed to restoring peace where it has been broken!

Ask – Finally... go to God and ask for the grace to start over!

If you have been divorced...does that mean you'll never be able to be married again? Or that you'll always live regretting yesterday's choices?

If the Bible gives us one promise, it's that God continually gives sinners 2nd chances! Over and over, liars, swindlers, cheaters, back-stabbers, and adulterers find mercy in the presence of God.

The New Testament is a story that even when we turn our back on God and His design for our lives...He does not stop pursuing us with His redeeming love!

In Jesus Christ...we, the poorest of poor, the filthiest of sinners, find God's love for us! And through Him, our hearts are drawn back into the arms of our Heavenly Father.

Today...no matter where you are...single, single again, married, or on a 2nd marriage...if Jesus' words have resonated with your heart...invite Him into your

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life...and ask Him to give you the grace and power to live the life He's created you for!

Close

I'm going to give you time to pray...and reflect! I want you to consider what could change...not only in your life...but in the lives of your children...their children...your family, this world if we, the body of Christ would begin to take the words of our King seriously...and by his grace, begin to live in our marriages as God created us to!
Men...laying down our lives for our wives! Women...loving your husbands!
Husbands and wives, renewing our covenants with one another!

Pray