

Last week we saw how the living hope of the risen and returning Jesus fills us with joy and perseverance today. In the midst of suffering, it is hope that enables us to love, serve, and honor others even when they are the causes of our suffering. In the light of this truth, today I want to evaluate that closest and most powerful relationship within the human experience. It is the most powerful because it is the closest, and this power can produce abundant joy and glory or inordinate misery and suffering. It is the bond of marriage. The Pharisees, in this passage, are looking for any way to **get out of the suffering of their marriages and are using Moses’ allowance of divorce to do so. Jesus, however, reorients the covenant of marriage upon God’s original intent and purpose.** You see, marriage is about God, and our marriage issues are always worship issues. Because of this, and because I know that there are many sufferers today who are being tempted to give up, to run away, to sever what God has joined, I must declare what God has said concerning marriage, divorce, and singleness if that by these words some may escape the peril that lies outside the door of your heart. I fear the Enemy is crouching, ready to devour, and like a lioness whose cubs are threatened, it may be time for Aslan to roar in His goodness. These words of Jesus may cause some of us to whimper, but may they also find us fleeing to His mane. I implore you to trust the Word of God, to listen for His mercies and His graces, and to heed what He says with humble faith. Admittedly, I will not be able to cover every possible situation, so if you need to ask questions or want to talk, the **elders will be available with me after the service in Room 8. I’ve made it sound all dire, but the Word of God is life to the soul, and as such I rejoice that God has revealed what causes us to flourish! May His glory fill this place today.**

Marriage has a divine origin, is divinely accomplished, and has a divine purpose. This makes the institution of marriage **an indelible mark of humanity as the image of God. God invented it “from the beginning” to be a part of what it means for humanity (society) to reflect Himself.** It is not a mere social construct, nor can it truly be altered in any way from **God’s original intent** without grave and serious consequences. This has been always been apparent throughout history. Thus, every society throughout history, no matter the differences in politics or structure, have always held marriage as foundational to that society’s core stability.

Because it is divinely created, God has regulated it for His intended purposes, and we must submit to the intentions and **structure of the one who created it and “use” it the way that He has created it to be used.** For example, a gun was created by its maker to shoot in one direction, but if **you don’t submit to that intent, you are liable to shoot yourself in the face. Therefore, we ought to listen to the one who made and makes marriage, so that we don’t blow our faces off.**

1. The Essence of Marriage is Covenant to Oneness

- a. Leave and Cleave/Covenant: Vows are promises and promises have to do with the future. Wedding vows **are not to be mere statements of the present (“I love you. You make me laugh. I care for you.”).**
 - i. In a wedding you are not so much declaring your present love, but rather promises your future love. I promise to be faithful, tender, compassionate, supportive, truthful, etc. regardless of any condition on either person. It is a promise of future resilient love, service, and honor.
 1. **To say “I love you” is not marriage.**
 - ii. If marriage was a feeling, or to make babies, then it would be a moment to moment thing, but if the essence of the marriage is a covenant of oneness, then it is a permanent thing, an unbreakable unchanging thing, and it controls your future
 1. Consider: The only way to not be controlled by your past is through forgiveness of those who have harmed you. The only way to not be controlled by your momentary and fleeting affections is through a promise, a covenant. Forgiveness and Promise: Marriage.
- b. Marriage is this way because it is sourced in God Himself, who vows to His people, marries them (Hos 2:16-20), and promises them not merely love in this moment, but abiding and faithful love into the future.
 - i. Our sin and failure to love God well does not dictate his commitment or His faithfulness, but it does affect our experience of intimacy with the Lord
 - ii. In the same way, our sins against our spouses damage our experience of intimacy, but they should not affect our love, honor, service, or faithfulness
 - iii. Our pursuit of oneness does not depend upon the pursuit of oneness of our spouse, but rather upon our desire to please and honor the Lord, to rest in His pursuit of oneness with us, then to love the other out of such joy-filled hope in Christ Jesus

2. The Purpose of Marriage is to Reflect the Image of God
 - a. **“THEREFORE the man shall leave and cleave”** – For what reason?
 - b. **“He created them male and female”**
 - i. This is imago dei language from Genesis 1:27 and 5:1-2
 1. Each time **“created them male and female”** is expressed it is further explained as **“in the likeness of God”** or **“in His own image”**
 - ii. **“Therefore...”** comes in Genesis 2:24 in relationship to the details of the creation of man and woman in the likeness of God
 - c. Covenanting to Oneness **images God’s very character**
 - i. The foundational reflection of the image of God at the beginning was marriage
 1. The foundational relationship was not parent/child
 - a. So, why are we OK with divorce, but not abandonment of a child?
 - b. We should be OK with NEITHER for it reimages God, i.e. idolatry
 2. The foundational relationship was not same gender
 - a. This is why same-sex relationships are not marriage in a biblical sense, no matter what affection or attraction there may be
 - b. This is an entirely other sermon, but the Church, as redeemed image of God, is made of both genders and same-gender marriage does not reflect this initial and foundational reality
 3. The foundational archetypical relationship of humanity was the marriage of one woman and one man as the reflection of the image and character of God
 - ii. This means that your marriage is NOT your own, nor is primarily and foundationally about you, but it is about GOD
 1. Now, this imaging of God is what your souls was made for!
 2. It is joyful and fulfilling and glorious at the same time as it is about God
 - d. The oneness that is imaged in marriage, one flesh, is not simply sexual
 - i. **It’s not that you’re physically naked, but that you are spiritually and soulishly naked before one another**
 - ii. You are known and knowing another person at the deepest, most intimate, most God-like way (thus, not sexual, but spiritually)
 1. You are vulnerable and known and at that very moment loved and delighted in and served and honored
 2. THAT is what marriage is supposed to be, just like the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as the image of God Himself
 3. In that, it is a UNIQUELY GLORIOUS THING
 4. **This is why Adam poetically declares in that moment, “At last!”**
 - iii. This oneness means to love like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
 1. Glorify one another (honor) (John 5:23; 17:5, 22-24; Phil 2:4-11; Heb 5:8)
 2. Love one another (John 14:31; 15:9; 17:24)
 3. Serve one another (Phil 2:4-11; Matt 26:39; John 5:19-20)
 4. Proclaim the greatness of one another (John 15:26; 16:13-14; 17:5)
 5. Rejoice/Delight in one another (Luke 10:21; Heb 12:2; John 3:35; Mark 9:7; 2 Pet 1:17)
 - iv. We must see that this is the reason that God has told you, O single Christian, to marry only to those who also desire to image God rightly and are committed to Jesus Christ
 1. It is a truth for life, a soulishly good command to guard you and cause you to flourish
 - a. For your marriage to be all that it was meant to be, it means opening all the way up to somebody, all the way down deep and if your love looks into the foundation of **your soul, and can’t figure it out at all**, you feel used when they either yawn or laugh
 - b. If you willingly and wittingly pursue a person with whom you cannot truly find that deep soul intimacy at such a level, you are bound to have a shallow friendship with shallow intimacy

- i. I know that some of you are here in your marriages, married to unbelievers, and feel the weight of this reality
 - ii. I only state this principle as a warning to those still single, who have yet to covenant with another, to help them avoid these things
 - 2. Also, if this is the essence and purpose of marriage, then how are you looking for a spouse?
 - a. What are your priorities in dating? Are you looking for a man whom you can bare your ENTIRE soul to and find passionate love?
 - b. Are you looking for a woman who deeply wants to honor and image God rightly above all other things?
 - c. Or, are you starting with romance and sexual attraction and hoping for friendship after that?
 - i. **How do you “filter” the prospects? Physical attraction first or spiritual attraction first?**
 - ii. Only one kind of quality actually grows over time...and it’s not physical attraction.
 - 3. Singleness also images God rightly in love, service, honoring of others as well
 - a. Jesus was single, when we speak about marriage in this way, we do not mean that singleness is somehow lesser than these things
 - b. Marriage is unique, so is singleness
 - c. In fact, Jesus says that some are called to this singleness and should receive it as a gift from the Lord
 - i. **This does not mean that someone wants to be married but is not (that’s not the gift of such singleness)**
 - ii. Rather, it means that some are not drawn to marriage, are in control of their sexuality, and want to devote themselves to Christ Jesus without the difficulties of marriage
 - d. **Even more, both Jesus and Paul seem to call it “better” for the sake of ministry** because you are freed from the obligations of providing for family (1 Cor 7)
 - v. Jesus has much to say to you who are currently married as well
 - 1. Strive for this this soul oneness!!
 - a. Make a conscious, Christ-dependent, prayerful, effort to lay your soul bare before your spouse
 - i. Share what delights you and what grieves. What makes you afraid and what strengthens your soul.
 - b. Make a conscious, Christ-dependent, prayerful, effort to LOVE your spouse when he or she does this to you!
 - i. This means that you must be patient, kind, merciful, forgiving, supportive, servant-hearted, and compassionate
 - ii. It means that you must also be exhorting, confronting with gentleness, voraciously dedicated to your spouse so that they are encouraged and strengthened to be one with you in such vulnerability
 - c. Make a conscious, Christ-dependent, prayerful, effort to seek the good and the joy of your spouse in every way in love, service, and honor
 - 2. When both husband and wife do this, there is GREAT JOY and DEEP God-like ONENESS!
 - a. It is uniquely glorious and uniquely proclaiming to the world of the greatness of the goodness of God!
 - b. You image Him so clearly in this moments, honor Him so greatly at these times
 - c. Frankly, when this soul oneness runs deep, your sexual oneness also runs deeper and more fulfilling and is honoring to Lord as reflecting His self-giving other-centeredness rather than idolatrous self-serving self-centeredness

3. Striving for this oneness is HARD, because it means dying to serving your own needs and pouring yourself out for the sake of another, but it is gloriously good!
 - a. JUST LIKE JESUS DID FOR YOU!!

3. In this Light of This, Divorce, De-cleaving, REIMAGES God Grotesquely

- a. Divorce is the opposite of oneness, it is an amputation
 - i. We live in a society where divorce is seen as changing clothes, but because of the oneness of marriage, it is more like taking off your arm
 - ii. More than that, because marriage is something God has done (What God has joined together), the separation of such oneness is so devastating that Jesus says not to let any man do it (let no man tear apart)
 - iii. Amputation can be survived, but the effects are lifelong and devastating and radically transformative.
 1. Like amputation, it is not something to be considered lightly, nor is it something to be considered simply because there is pain, or suffering, or hurt
 2. Amputation is reserved for the direst life-threatening circumstances, so ought divorce never even be considered unless there is a life-threatening harm with no other cure.
- b. Divorce only exists because of **at least one member's** sin, and sometimes amputation is necessary because of the hardness of such **a man's heart**
 - i. There are times to amputate, there is a time to divorce
 - ii. Jesus gives such a time: porneia – sexual immorality *due to the hardness of heart*
 1. I would caution here quickly: it is better to forgive a *repentant* spouse than to divorce
 2. Yet, it may be necessary to amputate when there is no repentance
 - iii. Sexual Immorality (and desertion, I would argue from 1 Corinthians 7) make a remarriage, or new oneness to another allowable
 1. Any other reason for divorce and remarriage is sinful
 - a. There may be others, i.e. continued unrepentant physical violence, for example, abuse of the children
 - b. Either way, divorce is not to be entered into lightly, quickly, or without the recognition of such amputation and reimagining of God
 2. Now, please know that there is forgiveness when we repent of all sin, so divorce is no different
 - a. I would argue that if you have divorced your spouse unbiblically, you need to repent of it as sin, then receive the forgiveness of God and move forward in obedience
 3. If you are contemplating divorce for any reason but unrepentant sexual immorality or desertion, do not sin, but fight against hopelessness with the gospel, AND ASK FOR HELP FROM HIS CHURCH, to please the Lord with faithfulness and seek to image God rightly as far as it depends upon you out of love for the Lord
 - a. Often we need one another to preach living hope to us, to point us and sometimes carry us to Jesus
 - b. Church, come alongside such sufferers with compassion, patience, and the promises of God!
 - iv. If you have been divorced, you have not necessarily sinned!
 1. Yet you may feel the effects of the amputation.
 2. Flee to the One who never divorces His people (Jesus), but has had to deal with a spouse **who was unfaithful (us!), and loves you to death...literally...and lives to hold your honor secure**
- c. This hardness of heart that leads to divorce may be in our hearts even though married!
 - i. Honor myself, shame her
 - ii. Love myself, reject her
 - iii. Serve myself, discard him

- iv. Proclaim my importance, minimize him
- v. Rejoice in my own flesh, grieve her soul
 - 1. Therefore, divorce is a soul amputation that is always due to the hardness of heart
- vi. Herein lies the greatest violence of divorce
 - 1. Divorce declares that God is unworthy and that I am more worthy
 - 2. That I am more important than God Himself, not merely in an interpersonal sense (although surely it is that), but in a cosmic eternal sense
 - 3. THAT is why God says in Malachi 2:16, **“He who sends his wife away covers his garment in violence. So guard your SPIRIT and be faithful!”**
- d. Divorcing your spouse, therefore, is not wrong simply because of a law that God flippantly imposed, but rather because divorce is completely unlike Him!
 - i. **Like last week’s sermon, suffering** and joy are inextricably linked with our apprehension and present preoccupation with the risen Jesus who suffered for us
 - 1. To flee suffering by de-cleaving does not honor Christ
 - 2. To endure suffering with loving self-sacrifice, to honor and serve and love a sinner is pleasing to Christ
 - 3. And He lives to plant your hope of circumstantial change firmly in His new creation, where you and your spouse will finally love well
 - ii. If you pursue divorce against His Word, O Christian, know this. You have sided with the enemy who wants to part man from God, you do not side with God, and that is precarious position in which to find yourself.
 - 1. If you have done this, know also that with repentance comes mercy, and with confession comes cleansing – God is mercifully for you in Christ Jesus!
 - 2. Know also that from today forward you can covenant to oneness, to trust Jesus and obey, to hope in the midst of suffering because your Lord is alive for your good
 - iii. If you have been divorced, know this: God relates to your suffering personally.
 - 1. God calls himself a divorced person (Isa 50) when we deserted him and committed adultery with the idols of our hearts
 - 2. He knows the betrayal, the pain, the rejection, and HE ENTERED INTO YOUR SUFFERING TO REDEEM YOU OUT OF IT

4. What Shall We Do?

- a. How shall we love like this? How shall we covenant like God rather than reimage Him grotesquely? How shall we flourish in oneness?
 - i. The reality is that when we love well, deeply, vulnerably, and compassionately marriage has the power to create tremendous joy, strength, and glory
 - 1. This is primarily true of our own souls – loving well, depending upon Christ, pleasing God by doing so, fills our souls with joy
 - 2. When both parties love well, there is tremendous glory in the marriage relationship itself and great praise of God
 - 3. When only one party loves well, there is still glory, though it may lack oneness and intimacy, **for the Lord is pleased and God is honored by the one spouse’s faithful love**
 - ii. Yet, if I have failed to love well, or if I have been unloved well by my spouse, this marriage bond has the power to create tremendous grief, weakness, and horror
 - iii. **If I could love like Jesus loved, I could know tremendous joy, but I can’t love like Christ loved, so am I doomed in marriage?**
 - 1. This is why the disciples proclaimed, **“It’s better not to get married!!”**
 - 2. **Yes! It’s easier not to love well in such a way, but it’s glorious to love in such a way!**
- b. Set Your Eyes on Your Living Hope: **SEEK JESUS FOR YOURSELF!!**
 - i. It is not the solution to seek a better marriage, but rather to seek a better savior and strength for this moment: Jesus the Risen and Returning

1. Ultimately, we love one another well not to have a better relationship, but because it pleases God for you to be like Him, and because by His Spirit we delight to love sinners.
 2. **When you see Jesus loving and serving and honoring other people, you see that you can't live up to that, but you're looking at it wrong.**
- ii. Rather, you must see Jesus loving, serving, and honoring you **so that you don't NEED that from your spouse and can love them well regardless of their love for you!**

“When Christ is my hope, he becomes the one thing in which I have confidence. I act on his wisdom and bank on his grace. I trust his promises and I rely on his presence. And I pursue all the good things that he has promised me simply because I trust him. So, I am not manipulating, controlling, or threatening my way through life to get what I want, because I have found what I want in Christ. He is my hope.”— Paul David Tripp

1. The Almighty Creator of heaven and earth, the speaker in the garden, the holy one became a baby, tormented on the cross, dying to his own seizure of well-deserved glory FOR YOU
 - a. When you realize that you were the deserter of God (Isa 50) and that we all have cheated on Him, committing adultery with the idols of our hearts (Hos 3; Ezek 16; **James 4**) **AND you see His great faithfulness towards you...how does your heart respond to being married to a sinner?**
 - b. This repentance towards God and faith in His great mercy and unfailing love towards you in Jesus should melt your soul
 2. If you know that personally, and if you fill your heart with it, it melts your heart towards your spouse, enabling you to love sacrificially, to honor undeservedly, to serve wholeheartedly with joy *because it is like Jesus and pleases Jesus!*
 3. When you KNOW that God is for you, that He loves you perfectly, that the cross proves that Jesus holds you, keeps you, guards you as His beloved, then you are able to open up to another person even though you might be mistreated, to pursue oneness **in spite of the other's** response
 - a. And amazingly, this often opens up the other person!
 - b. But until you know that you are secure in the love of God and you delight to honor Him and glorify Him above all else, you will not serve others, even your spouse (they can hurt you the worst)
 - c. **If we avoid trusting Christ's love in such a way, for long enough, our hearts are hardened to his love and to loving and serving our spouses, and the result of the hardened heart is the grotesque sin that despises God**
- iii. Therefore, seek with all your heart to find your way to grasp deep in your soul the greatness of the glory of the grace of God towards you in Jesus Christ
1. Spend your time at the cross, where Jesus suffered FOR YOU, and imbibe His covenant promises of the gift of His Holy Spirit, to strengthen your soul for the love of the saints
 2. Cling to Him, delight in Him, seek Him to see Him to savor Him so that you can satisfy Him by being like Him
- c. All of You: **PREACH THE GOSPEL TO FELLOW SUFFERERS!**
- i. Whom can you walk alongside to strengthen the feeble knees, bind up broken hearts, who are suffering through the lack of intimacy, love, oneness in their marriages?
 - ii. How can we walk alongside to strengthen and uphold those who have been called to singleness through divorce or through same-sex attraction and must bear the cross of obedience to the Lord through such loneliness?
 - iii. Come alongside, Church, and through the Holy Spirit proclaim the living hope of Christ Jesus!
- d. **Look at Jesus for your soul's most intimate** oneness so that you can pursue oneness with selfless love, service, and honor of one another, and hate the divorce which kills and reimagines God!

This is admittedly difficult, to love your cause of suffering, to be patient when wronged, to forgive when sinned against, to honor another above yourself, to serve when unappreciated. Crucifixion is hard, too. And you have a Savior who **knows what it's like to die daily. Yet, he lives to fill you with hope, to strengthen you with His graces, and who loves more deeply than any sinner ever could.** Fly to Him rather than run from loving your spouse.

Because, divorce is not merely the breaking of the bond between a man and a woman, but it is rather that we are saying to the created order that this is what God is like. This is the image of God that we portray. Not the sacrificing self-effacing love of the Cross, but we project a non-committal, weakened love that gives up on us. Yet, it is we that have treated God abusively: unloving, betrayed him, used Him for what he can give us rather than loving him for himself, **and we surely don't appreciate what he has given us** as worthily as he deserves. We killed Him in our sins, and even when raised to live by His grace and bound to Him by faith, we are the selfish party in our marriage to Christ Jesus.

So, shall this reality of what divorce is, its pronouncement that God gives up, walks away, leaves us in our sin, settle on a **heart that grasps God's mercy in Christ Jesus? The apostle John writes, "Whoever says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this is the commandment that we have from him: whomever loves God must also love his brother."** The closest brother that you have is your spouse. To hate him or her, electing to serve and honor your own needs above your spouse, is to say that you **aren't** really loving God. You see, marriage and divorce are worship issues at their very core, not merely relational or moral issues. How we love shows whom we worship.

Marriage, and the commitment to love, serve, and honor a fellow sinner in order to honor God, reveals daily to me the weakness and depravity of my own flesh and my desperate need to go to the cross and see and savor the great mercies of God towards me so that I can show mercy and Christ-like love and compassion to my wife. To love your spouse well, in spite of his or her love for you in return, is not rooted in how great he makes you feel or how much she serves you or how intimate you feel with her, it must remain rooted in the desire to please and honor Jesus, the One who died to make you complete, who bound Himself to you, a sinner, and bore your shame upon his body on that tree. This is true because this is how God loves and you have been made in his image. In your suffering, apathy, and anger today, look to this merciful God:

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God loved us so, we also ought to love one another. (1Jo 4:10-11 ESV)