

Synopsis of Sunday's Sermon

Divorce. Like 21st century America, 1st century Palestine was characterized by easy divorce...no, change that to *exploitive* divorce. Back then Jewish men, who held all the cards, would — for the flimsiest of reasons — divorce their wives without consequence. “As long as the ‘divorce writ’ is in order, everything is legal,” appears to be the mindset of the average Jewish male.

You hear it in the words of the Pharisees in Matthew 19:1-12. Their question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”, is basically answered by Jesus with a resounding “NO!”. Their “Why then...?” response shows their stance on the issue. Jesus, however, declares that God’s design is for marriage to be a life-long commitment. Divorce is (or, in some cases, indicates) a horrible breach of God’s design for marriage. Modern America has a long way to go get back to God’s design.

Monday's Leftovers

It’s hard to preach on a topic like divorce or a text like Matthew 19:1-12. To some extent it is the complex topic itself, but beyond that is the reality that the 300 or so people in attendance find themselves very diverse situations. To deal with marriage and divorce in one sermon addressing its application to those who are single, married, divorced, divorced and remarried, and never-to marry is a Herculean task. And I’m no Hercules (as if I had to tell you that one).

But as I prepared last week for Sunday’s lesson — and now reflect back on it — there is one verse that comes to my mind more than any other. It’s one that applies to all of our situations in every moral situation. It’s I John 2:1. Here’s what John writes:

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin,

we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense --Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.

Wow. John says his goal for his readers is simply this: **Don’t sin**. That pretty well sums up God’s designs for all of us, doesn’t it? “I want you to be holy, to say ‘no’ to every temptation that comes along, to never sin.” That’s the design. Sadly, it’s not the reality...for any of us! That’s why the three letter word “**But**” is one of the most significant words in the verse. If we do sin, fall short of the design, we have someone as an Advocate.

I go back to the diverse group we had Sunday...and to a dilemma I had in preaching the sermon. With one breath I needed to say, “Don’t sin. Live God’s designs for marriage!”; and with my next breath to say, “But if you failed, there is hope.” So let me take a deep breath and say the following two things:

“If you are single be sure to marry the kind of person God bids you to marry. If you are happily married continue to work on being the spouse God designs for you to be. If you are unhappily married, pray for patience and be committed to God’s design for marriage to be life-long relationship.

“Did you get married to someone against God’s designs (II Cor. 6:14-15; I Thess. 4:4-5 [NIV footnote])? Did you get tired of your marriage and renege on the sacred vows you made when you got married? Have you found yourself in a subsequent marriage that was not in God’s will? Don’t dismiss your failures to live by God’s design! But don’t let Satan delude you into thinking you’ve committed the unforgivable sin either! Through God’s grace and Jesus’ sacrifice every sin can be forgiven and every broken child of God restored.”

May we be a church that lives by God's design...and when we fail to live in the fullness of His grace and forgiveness.

-David

P.S. - The Bridegroom cometh!" "Yes, Lord, come quickly!"