

## THAILAND IF NECESSARY / INTRODUCE

Well, if you have your Bibles, and I hope you do,

- please grab them and turn to Matthew chapter 19.
- You can open a phone or a tablet to Matthew 19,
- or you can use one of the hard-backed black bibles
  - under every single chair.
  - You'll find Matthew 19 on page **824**.

## INTRODUCTION

So, last week was the singleness sermon...a.k.a. the eunuch sermon.

And today things don't get any easier...

- in fact, I think this is the weightier
- of the two sermons on this section of Matthew 19.

So, today Jesus talks about **SLIDE DIVORCE & REMARRIAGE**

Divorce has affected a lot of people in our church.

- Some of you have gone through it yourself;
- some of you are going through it right now;
- for many of you, you watched your parents go through it.

And I want you to know I don't come judgmentally on this.

- I know that for many of you
- it was one of the most painful times in your life
- and something that if you could have avoided,
- you would have.

Some Christians talk about divorce like it is THE unforgivable sin...

- as if it is the one thing you can't ever really come back from...
  - the scarlet D you carry with you for the rest of your life...
- and that is simply not true.

## EXPLAIN: STATS

But the statistics are pretty staggering.

- About 50% of first marriages will end in divorce,
- 60% of second marriages end in divorce,
- and 73% of third marriages end in divorce.

And some will point to the stat...

- that divorce rates among “*Christians*”
- are just about the same...about 50%.
  - And that is true...
  - among those who call themselves “*Christians.*”

But the Barna research group did a study...

- that showed that divorce rates among “*practicing Christians,*”
  - and to qualify as a *practicing Christian,*
  - they must say their faith is *very important* in their life
  - and they must have attended a church service
    - within the past month.
- The divorce rate of “*practicing Christians*” is 27%.

So, that is lower, but it is still an ominous figure.

And I did my best to go through our church roster,

- and I know most of you...not all...
- so, this number might be off a little...
  - but somewhere around 10% of the adults at Fathom
  - have been divorced.

Now, one last stat to share...

just to get us all adequately depressed before we dig in.

- Children of divorced parents are 35%
- more likely themselves...to be divorced one day.

## ILLUSTRATION: MY STORY

And I don't say any of this from a situation devoid of personal experience.

- Both of my parents were already married and divorced
  - before they married each other.
- And later they divorced each other,
- and now are both remarried for the third time.

And I don't say that to throw my parents under the bus,

- because I love and have great relationships
- with both my parents.

But I just point that out to say that I am not unscathed from this.

You see, when Maryse and I were engaged,

- one of the things that she was nervous about...
- was the fact that I had seen so much divorce.
  - It was what had been modeled to me!

In fact, there aren't even statistics for a guy like me

- who comes from divorce patterns like I do...
- parents with multiple divorces and multiple remarriages.

And so we were worried, and rightly so, about those odds.

I am predisposed to run when things get tough.

## TRANSITION

But I'm going to say something right off the bat...

And I want every one of you to hear this:

**SLIDE WHERE THE IDEAL IS LACKING...GRACE ABOUNDS**

I come from a place where the ideal is lacking...

- And by God's grace, we will celebrate
- our 16th wedding anniversary this Friday.

I know many of you have divorce in your story, just like I do.

- And for you this isn't just a topic to philosophize on...
  - but it's a hurt,
  - it's a pain,
  - it's your reality.

But one of the things we are committed to at Fathom Church

- is to preach all of God's Word,
  - even the parts that are hard,
  - and that make us uncomfortable.

And y'all, I wrestled hard this week with some of what I have to say today.

But we are people of the book. This is our authority.

- So, if today brings up some pain...
- or some scars...
- or even some questions...
  - I'm gonna trust that God wants us to dig into this deeply.

But always remember...

WHERE THE IDEAL IS LACKING...GRACE ABOUND.

So, let's get into our text, Matthew 19, starting in verse 1.

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### **MATTHEW 19:1-3**

[1] Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. [2] And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

[3] And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"

## EXPLAIN: TEST

So, these are the Pharisees who are questioning Jesus.

And they come to test him.

- Now, this is not a test to see whether he is a true prophet;
  - they have already decided that he's not!
- No, they are seeking something
- to turn the people against him.

So, their motives behind this question are dubious.

## EXPLAIN: QUESTION

And so they ask:

**"Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for ANY cause?"**

And just as a side note,

- **but if you are looking for a reason to get a divorce,**
- **you will find as many reasons as you want to find.**

Now, they have asked about divorce because it was a cultural trap for him

There were two schools of the Pharisees: Shammai and Hillel.

- Shammai was more conservative,
  - And taught that it was ONLY lawful to divorce a wife
  - based on sexual immorality.
- Hillel was more liberal,
  - And it was the predominant view,
  - that allowed divorce for "*any reason whatsoever*"
    - literally we have records of them permitting divorce
    - for trivial things like bad cooking
    - or finding a prettier woman.

## TRANSITION

So, this is a test.

- No matter how he answers,
- he would certainly ostracize one of these two rabbinic groups.

But Jesus' answer is brilliant. Verse 4:

## MATTHEW 19:4-6

[4] He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, [5] and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."

## EXPLAIN: HERMENEUTIC

Now, in Jewish interpretation,

- the further back one went in the Old Testament,
- the more authority it possessed.

So, Jesus goes all the way back!

- He first alludes to Genesis 1:1
  - when he says "from the beginning."
- And then he alludes to Genesis 1:27
  - "male and female he created them."
- And finally in verse 5 Jesus quotes Genesis 2:24
  - to show that from the beginning,
  - the will of God was marriage,
  - not divorce.

So, Jesus' tactic...

- is to bring up the very principles of creation,
- and the first marriage to make his point.

## **POINT 1: MARRIAGE**

And it's my first point, as well.

- Before we talk about divorce and remarriage,
- we need to be clear on what marriage is.

### **SLIDE MARRIAGE IS**

- **ONE MAN**
- **AND ONE WOMAN**
- **FOR ONE LIFETIME**

That WAS God's intention...and that STILL IS God's intention.

In marriage,

- God has yoked two people together into oneness,
- and therefore NO ONE should be allowed
- to divide them or break that union.

Jesus goes to the heart of their question to say:

- it's not whether people have a RIGHT to divorce...
- but rather, whether such a thing
- can EVER be in accordance with God's will.

## **TRANSITION**

So, to the Pharisees question concerning divorce...

Jesus responds with the biblical definition of what marriage is.

But they come back at him...verse 7:

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## MATTHEW 19:7

[7] They said to him, “Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?”

### EXPLAIN

So, they must think at this point, “Oooo...we’ve got you now Jesus!”  
“You wanna quote the scriptures to us...well what about this verse?”

And they’re referring to Deuteronomy 24.

- But remember, these Pharisees are testing Jesus.
  - They aren’t after the truth...
- they just want to catch him.

So, they obviously feel...

- that they have caught Jesus
- in a legal error because Moses
- had indeed permitted divorce.

But this Deuteronomy 24 verse, let me put it up on the screen.

### SLIDE DEUTERONOMY 24:1

[1] “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found **some indecency** in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house

### EXPLAIN: INDECENCY

Now, the key phrase is in verse 1:

- “some indecency” in the Hebrew it is *erwath dabar*



It's a very ambiguous phrase,

- and it's what the Jews argued about constantly...
- it was the basis for the Shammai/Hillel debate.

What does **something indecent** mean?

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## **EXPLAIN: COMMAND**

So, the Pharisees ask, **"Why did Moses command divorce?"**

- Now, by calling it a "command"
- the Pharisees are assuming
- that it was required of God's people
- as a part of his will.

And in fact, in certain cases of sexual unfaithfulness, like adultery,

- the Torah did command that the adulterous parties be killed.

So they ask, **"Why did Moses command divorce?"** Verse 8:

## **MATTHEW 19:8**

**[8] He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so."**

## **EXPLAIN: COMMAND VS. CONCESSION**

**So, rabbis at the time taught the difference...**

**between a COMMAND in the law and a CONCESSION...**

- A COMMAND expressed God's heart...
  - it showed what God desired from the beginning.
    - This is why Jesus starts with marriage...
    - Marriage was God's heart!

- But a CONCESSION was something God allowed
  - because of man's sinful condition.

This allowance for divorce, Jesus said, was not a COMMAND; it was a CONCESSION due to their fallen state.

- So, on one side you have the liberal view
  - that amounted to divorce-on-demand.
- And on the other side you have an almost legalistic view
  - that said divorce was commanded...
    - if not the death penalty!

And to both sides, Jesus says NO.

**No one should separate what God has joined together.**

### ILLUSTRATION: AMPUTATION

So, Tim Keller illustrates like this:

- Divorce should be as radical
- as AMPUTATING an arm or a leg.

When I was a kid and I got hurt my dad would comfort me with dad jokes

- He'd say: *"Oh my...that injury looks bad."*
- *"I think we might need to cut that leg off!"*
  - I do the same thing with my daughter!
- And through the tears and snot I'd laugh,
- and say, *"Nooooo!"*

Listen, there MIGHT BE times when amputation is necessary,

- but any doctor would be run out of practice
- if he was constantly and quickly saying,
- *"Let's just amputate it."*

- Hang nail? Amputation.
- Sprained ankle. Amputation.
- Varicose veins? Cut it off!

No! Amputation is the LAST thing that you do!

## TRANSITION

So...

- if there is EVER a case for divorce,
- it is a CONCESSION because of sin,
- not a COMMAND to be adhered to.

Now, verse 9 is the tricky verse.

## MATTHEW 19:9

[9] And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

## POINT 2: DIVORCE

So, let me make my second point here.

### SLIDE DIVORCE IS SOMETIMES PERMITTED

So, Jesus gives one exception for when a divorce is permissible.

- Divorce isn't allowed for ANY reason (like Hillel said),
- but ONLY for sexual unfaithfulness (like Shammai said).

The problem is,

- the Greek word Jesus uses here
  - that's translated *sexual immorality*,
- is *porneia*.

And *porneia* is a broad word that includes all kinds of sexual sin:

- it includes adultery,
- sex before marriage,
- homosexuality,
- bestiality,
- incest,
- and more.

So, is Jesus saying that ANY sexual sin can be grounds for divorce?

Well, historically this has been interpreted as *marital unfaithfulness*,

- and I think that's probably the best interpretation
- of *porneia* in this context.

Having sexual experiences with someone other than your spouse

- is akin to killing the covenant...
- it breaks the covenant...
- and is a ground for divorce.
  - Divorce is still not required,
  - but it is permitted.

## TRANSITION

So, sexual unfaithfulness is one biblical allowance for divorce.

- You say, "*is that the only exception?*"

Well, in 1 Corinthians 7 Paul uses the same logic...

- of breaking the marital covenant
- to allow a second biblical allowance for divorce,
- which is DESERTION.

## EXPLAIN: CONTEXT

If in a marriage,

- one spouse becomes a Christian...
- and the unbelieving partner wants to stay married...
- then the Christian should NOT move for divorce.

Now, biblically,

- Christians are NEVER supposed to marry someone
- who does not believe in Jesus.
  - This is the principle of being EQUALLY YOKED,
  - and I don't have time to go into it this morning,
  - but it's MASSIVELY important.

But in the case in 1 Corinthians,

- This is a new church,
- and they are all new believers.

They WERE equally yoked...as unbelievers,

- got married,
  - THEN one of them got saved,
- and to that, Paul says, "*stay married.*"

But...Verse 15:

## SLIDE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:15

[15] But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister **is not enslaved**. God has called you to peace.

## EXPLAIN: DESERTION

And that little phrase: **is not enslaved** is so important.

So, if your unbelieving spouse wants a divorce...

- you cannot stop them.
- That is what we call DESERTION.

And if you are DESERTED, that is a biblical divorce.

You are not enslaved.

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## **SUMMARY: POSITION**

So, the traditional Protestant position...

- which is held by most evangelicals...
  - and to which we at Fathom hold...
- is that divorce is permissible on two grounds:
  - SEXUAL UNFAITHFULNESS and DESERTION.
- In both cases the marriage covenant is killed...
  - it's broken...
  - it's amputated.

## **EXPLAIN: OTHER GROUNDS?**

Now, let me just add...

- that I am sympathetic to,
  - and yet extremely cautious,
- about finding other grounds for divorce.

You ask:

- do these teachings cover every conceivable situation
- in which divorce could reflect God's permissive will?

Well, let me quote one of my seminary professors, Dr. Craig Blomberg:

**SLIDE** *“Obviously, Jesus’ teaching was not exhaustive or Paul could not have added to it. ... Cautious interpreters, therefore, have suggested additional extreme situations in which divorce may be the least evil of several options. It is probably best not to add to the biblical list, however, but simply to treat other cases one at a time, asking if the marriage has in reality been as fundamentally destroyed as if sexual unfaithfulness or irrevocable abandonment had occurred.”*

So, it would seem...

- that there COULD be other, extreme situations...
  - and yet, I think it is safer biblically...
- to maintain that there are two acceptable grounds for divorce.

But I COULD envision, in extreme situations, where we might conclude:

- *“This man or woman has not completely abandoned...*
- *but their life is tantamount to desertion.”*
  - If a person is strung out on drugs,
  - gambling all their worldly possessions,
  - or has repeatedly beaten their spouse,
    - might that count as DESERTION at some point?
      - Perhaps.

And none of this is to be entered into lightly.

But amputation is never the first option.

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## ABUSE

But I will say this,

- if you are in a physically abusive marriage,
- you need to get out of physical contact with your abuser.
  - I am NOT saying that divorce is THE only option,
- but I am saying that you need to,
  - first, get safe,
  - and second, get the help you need.

## APPLICATION

And so, I will say that each case needs to be dealt with individually.

- It's why we need biblical principles,
  - so we have something to apply
  - in these gut-wrenching,
  - difficult sinful scenarios.
- But this is also why we need the local church,
  - pastors and elders,
  - to walk with us in discernment.

I'm begging you: **do not try to walk this on your own.**

## TRANSITION

Now, to the question of remarriage...

This can be even more tricky than divorce.

- Because Jesus, back in verse 9 said that an unbiblical divorce,
  - followed by remarriage,
- amounts to adultery.

So, when, if ever, is remarriage NOT adultery?



Well, in Romans 7:3 we find that remarriage is clearly allowed.

- After a spouse dies...
- the same logic as used for divorce applies:
  - the covenant is dead.

But what about after a biblically sanctioned divorce? Is remarriage ok?

### **POINT 3: REMARRIAGE**

Well, let me make my third point...remember:

MARRIAGE IS ONE MAN AND ONE WOMAN FOR ONE LIFETIME.

DIVORCE IS SOMETIMES PERMITTED.

And third:

**SLIDE REMARRIAGE IS PERMITTED**

**WHERE DIVORCE IS PERMITTED**

### **EXPLAIN: REASONS**

Let me give you a few reasons why I think that is biblical:

- First, in our text,
  - the very fact that Jesus had to clarify
  - when it is NOT permissible to be remarried,
  - implies that there are times WHEN IT IS.
- Second, all scholars on every side of this debate
  - agree that it was a given for first century Jews
  - that remarriage was an option after a valid divorce.
    - Therefore, if Jesus wanted to teach that
    - remarriage after EVERY divorce was unacceptable
    - he would've needed to make
    - that new teaching much clearer.

- And third,
  - back to Paul's phrase "is not enslaved"
  - from 1 Corinthians 7:15.
    - This probably implies
    - that the spouse who has been deserted
    - is free to remarry.

Of course,

- just because a divorced person may be free to remarry...
- does not mean it is necessarily a good or wise idea.
  - A lot of other considerations come into play.

But the general principle is:

- where God does give concession for divorce,
- he also gives concession for remarriage.

## **APPLICATION: UNBIBLICAL REMARRIAGE**

Now, if you are divorced...and as you look back...

- you don't think it was a biblical divorce,
- then the Bible is saying that you should remain single.

And that is, perhaps, the most unpopular thing I'll say this morning.

If you are unbiblically divorced, you should remain single.

That's not popular...even within the church...

- But that's because we tend to think
  - that because God is a God of second chances...
- That means there shouldn't be
  - any ramifications from our first chances...

But this is the seriousness with which the Bible takes marriage.

Remember, WHERE THE IDEAL IS LACKING, GRACE ABOUND...

BUT, divorce is no small thing.

- And so, please don't think you can just remarry,
- and then repent later.
  - That's a dangerous slippery slope of sin.

Now, I am hesitant...

- to give a sweeping,
- black-and-white,
- blanket statement,
- on when remarriage is permissible
  - and when it's not.
- Just like I did with divorce...
  - because there MIGHT be extreme cases.

But remarriage is something that really needs to be taken case-by-case.

- Even if you had a biblical divorce...
  - it might be wise to remain single!

Again, you need to be an active part of a church.

- You need people around you to help you in this.
- You need leaders who you've submitted under
  - to help you discern wisdom.

### **APPLICATION: REMARRIED ALREADY**

And finally,

- if you were unbiblically divorced,
- and have already remarried.

And today you're like,

- *"uh oh..."*
- *Jesus said if I get divorced*
- *and then remarried then it's adultery...*
- *so, what about us?"*

Well, I can't find in the Bible any place

- where it says that breaking a second marriage
- will somehow fix the first one.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 that each one should **"remain as they are"**

So, I think you should stay in that marriage.

But you should be asking:

- Where do I need to confess?
- Where do I need to repent?
  - And just like with any sin,
  - if there is genuine repentance,
  - God is faithful to restore and forgive.

Now, does this mean those Christians have gotten away with sin?

Not at all!

**We are never better off for having sinned.**

- There are consequences in our relationships.
- There may be consequences in your spiritual life.

And if you look back at your sinful divorce and remarriage...

- and think *"Wow, I'm glad I didn't know all this ten years ago"*
  - that is a big time red flag
  - that something's very wrong in your heart.

If the Spirit is at work you will not think,

- *"Phew, I really got away with one here."*

Instead you will think,

- *“O Lord, I am so sorry.*
- *I was ignorant of the Scriptures.*
- *I was blind to my own sin.*
- *I have broken your law and sullied the name of Christ.*
- *Please forgive me.*
- *Have mercy on us Lord.”*

## CONCLUSION

Now, let me end with this:

- in John chapter 4 we find a story
- of Jesus coming to a well in the heat of the day.
- And a Samaritan woman came to draw water.

And Jesus strikes up a conversation with her, and says this in John 4:13

### **SLIDE W/PADS JOHN 4:13-18**

[13] Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, [14] but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” [15] The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

[16] Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” [17] The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; [18] for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

Five husbands! And the sixth she's just shacking up with!

You know what I love about this?

- I love that Jesus doesn't downplay...
  - the most painful,
  - embarrassing,
  - dirty part of her life.
- He doesn't placate her.
- He doesn't excuse her sin.
- He doesn't pretend it didn't happen.

No, he takes her shame head-on.

And he makes her a better offer than her sin could ever produce!

Church, this is the God who we love and serve.

- To us in our brokenness, he says come.
- To us in our sinfulness, he says come.
- To us in our guilt and our shame, he says come.

Wherever you are today, Jesus says,

- *"come, and I will give you living water,*
- *and you will never be thirsty again."*

Sex, marriage, divorce, remarriage...none of those things will satisfy.

You'll still be thirsty.

- But Jesus has water for you
- that will become a spring of water
- welling up to eternal life.

**SLIDE WHERE THE IDEAL IS LACKING...GRACE ABOUNDS**

God, help us with this.

Let's pray.

## RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – [fathomchurch.org/give](http://fathomchurch.org/give)
- PRAYER - [fathomchurch.org/prayer](http://fathomchurch.org/prayer)
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

### 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

## RESOURCES CONSULTED:

- <https://marriedpeoplechurches.org/author/barna/>
- <https://www.thedailybeast.com/will-i-ever-get-married-15-signs-youll-tie-the-knot>
- <https://www.jacksonwhitelaw.com/arizona-family-law/what-year-of-a-marriage-is-divorce-most-common/>
- <https://www.owenbylaw.com/blog/2018/october/statistics-children-divorce/>
- Blomberg, Craig. From Pentacost to Patmos.
- Carson, D.A. The Expositor's Bible Commentary. Matthew.
- DeYoung, Kevin. *What Did Jesus Think of Divorce and Remarriage?*
- Greear, J.D. *When Is It OK to Divorce and Remarry?*
- Keller, Tim. *Marriage, Divorce, & Singleness*.
- Osborne, Grant R. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Matthew.