

FRIDAY 06 May 2022 "Divorce" (Matt. 5:31,32 & 19:3-9)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Do you find that when receiving information, whether national or international headlines, or sports news, or information from friends, that when the news is good and encouraging you welcome it, *but when the news is heartbreaking or disturbing you tend to tune it out or disregard it?*

I ask that question because these days we are sitting with the disciple Matthew as he reflects on what he remembers were the words Jesus spoke on a hillside one day overlooking Lake Galilee. Hundreds of people had gathered to hear Jesus, and the words He spoke were so significant, we today call them Jesus' "Sermon on the Mount", and they are found recorded by Matthew in chapters 5,6,7 of his book which is the first book of the New Testament.

Yesterday we looked at Jesus' powerful words concerning **adultery**. They were radical, shocking in fact, as Jesus said: ***"You have heard it said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."*** (Matt. 5:27,28) *We understand this is not a gender specific statement*, for women also look lustfully at men, don't they, and some commit what I yesterday called 'emotional adultery' in their hearts. Sadly, we must also add the issue of same gender attraction and thus 'emotional adultery' can occur between two women or two men lusting after one another in their hearts.

As challenging as that statement was from Jesus that day, 2000 years ago, it's even more challenging in our overly lustful world today, isn't it? *Sexuality permeates almost every segment of our societies, not simply tempting, but inviting and actually celebrating promiscuity and immorality.* Thus, it requires great self-awareness for a person to notice when their heart or mind is beginning to drift dangerously into lust which could so easily progress into suggestive words and then actions which can destroy marriages, families, reputations, lives and of course deeply wound children. This is especially true because of social media in our day.

But Jesus didn't shy away from important truth as He confronted the influence of moral darkness in His world, and Jesus has called every generation since to do the same. *If you are a parent or grandparent, do you feel a heavy responsibility to help your family recognize and understand the moral decadence of our world?* Are you helping them build defenses to protect their minds and hearts from the ravages of our day which are powerfully drawing everyone, even young children, into self-destructive attitudes and behaviors?

As we look around the hillside that day with Jesus, it's not difficult for us to imagine how His words, regarding adultery and lust, had penetrated deeply into the secret lives of many people listening to Him. Perhaps many were looking away from Him not willing for their eyes to meet His as they searched their hearts.

But Jesus wasn't finished, and His next statement was equally as powerful and penetrating: "It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.'" (Matt. 5:31,32) Perhaps right now some of you, my friends, are tempted to turn off this edition of "Walking with Jesus", because this issue is simply not an issue you want to think about. But would you agree that EVERY aspect of our human life is important to God, since He created us and HE designed human life as it should be lived for His glory and for our great satisfaction!? *It is therefore important we listen when God wants to warn us about anything we are doing which distorts His perfect design, do you agree?*

You'll notice Matthew made no commentary on any of the significant statements Jesus made that day. He simply reported them. And if your Bible has the words of Jesus in red letters, then you'll notice from Mathew 5:3 to Matthew 7:27 there is nothing but RED writing. No interruption for commentary by Matthew or anyone. However, sometime later, Jesus was confronted by religious leaders who pressed Him on this issue. You see friends, divorce was a big deal then, as it is now. I find the encounter in Matthew 19:3... **"Some Pharisees came to Jesus to test Him. They asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?'"** You see my friends, for as long as there has been this wonderful, God given covenant called marriage, it has been an embattled and glorious relationship.

Why is it such a battlefield? Well two main reasons as I see it...

First, change! We all change, every day, as we age and a covenant marriage between two people means they both must adapt and adjust to the changes in themselves and the changes in their spouse.

Secondly is selfishness. Let's be honest, we all want to be happy, in fact that's a driving force in each of our lives. And isn't it true that our view of what will make us happy easily becomes our priority, our passionate pursuit in life!

But by God's design the covenant of marriage is a covenant first with HIM and then a covenant with our spouse and it is a covenant that is designed by God to be irrevocable, unbreakable, and is intended to provide security for life for both husband and wife, ESPECIALLY when change happens or selfishness desires someone else! Have you ever watched a faithful marriage weather the storms of addictions or even Alzheimer's or other degenerating diseases?

So, Jesus responded to these Pharisees trying to argue about divorce: ***"Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator God made them male and female, and said 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh? So, they are no longer two but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate... I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, commits adultery."*** (Matt. 19:4-6,9)

Now friends, there were several months of time between Matthew 5 & 19, but do you notice Jesus' words are consistent? What does that tell you about God's truth? In fact, here's a powerful statement made by God through the prophet Malachi about 400 years before Jesus made the statements Matthew recorded: ***"You weep and wail because God no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hand. You ask 'Why'? It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit, they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So, guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 'I hate divorce' says the LORD God of Israel..."*** (Malachi 2:13-16)

I don't think that needs any explanation, does it my friends? And then just for emphasis, God added these words: ***"I the LORD do not change! Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from My decrees and have not kept them. Return to Me and I will return to you", says the LORD Almighty.***" (Malachi 3:6,7) So my dear 'walking with Jesus' friends, oh I realize that this divorce debate has raged for generations all around the world. And I fully understand in America and elsewhere there have been laws passed such as 'no fault divorce', and there are 'divorce lawyers' who specialize in facilitating fast divorces, and also divorce lawyers who will work every angle to maximize the separation package for one spouse or the other. I realize we live at a time when both adultery and divorce are celebrated by Hollywood and other powerful influences in society.

But today friends, I'm not seeking to argue or debate. My purpose with "Walking with Jesus", as the title suggests, is to invite us and help us live our lives in lock step with Jesus, as though we are each walking every step every day with Jesus at our side, guided us by His Word. So I leave you today pondering Jesus' very clear words, and I simply ask you... so, what have you concluded is Jesus' attitude toward divorce, regardless of the time in history, or the circumstances, or the social context or prevailing cultural norms. ***How does Jesus want you and me to view and honor Marriage, as a sacred covenant first with God and then with our spouse?*** I invite us to talk with Jesus about this... and let Him speak to us through His Holy Spirit and His Word.

Today's Scripture is Matthew 5:31, 32 & Matthew 19:3-9.