

Cheltenham
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Excluded from God's Kingdom

Message Notes

Text: Matthew 19:1-15
(Cf. Mark 10:1-16; Luke 16:18; 18:15-17)

1. Excluded by Divorce

The Pharisees' question: *"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"*

The two rabbinic schools of Jesus' day:

Shammai – divorce was only allowed if one's spouse was unfaithful (The main school of thought in Jesus day)

Hillel – a man could divorce his wife if she burnt the toast
Another Rabbi added, "Or if you find someone more attractive"
(Hillel school was closer to what was general practice in society)

Jesus answers by appealing to God's original purpose in creation:

"At the beginning the Creator '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 flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

The Pharisees respond by quoting Scripture back at Jesus...

"Why then...did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" (19:7)

They're quoting from...

Deuteronomy 24:1, *"If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house"*

Deuteronomy 24:2-3, *"...and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled..."*

Matthew 19:8-9, *"Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."* (This is directed at men & protects the rights of women)

Ken Wilson (Vineyard pastor and author) writes,

"Is the biblical teaching on marriage simply descriptive, that is, does it simply describe what marriage is meant to be as a norm? Or is it also prescriptive, that is, does it lay down clear rules that must be followed in every case? In my pastoral practice, I have answered that question. I have said, "It's God's original intention, in general, for people who marry to stay married for life. But that doesn't mean that people who are trapped in deeply harmful marriages must either remain married, or remain single after divorce. I've determined, by my pastoral practice, that it is legitimate to regard the text as descriptive, as generally normative, not prescriptive — that is, not prescribing what must happen in every case."

Jesus is probably using hyperbole here (that is, exaggerating a point in order to get across a powerful truth). In this case the truth is that neither marriage nor divorce should ever be entered into lightly or unadvisedly but prayerfully and with the counsel of wise people.

That being said, we will never exclude people from the Bayside Church community who have been separated, divorced and / or remarried. You are welcome here!

2. Excluded by Difference

The disciples' response to Jesus' teaching on divorce is to emphasize singleness as a better option than marriage – and Jesus didn't disagree, and neither did the apostle Paul – both single men (Cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-2)

Matthew 19:11-12, *Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others — and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."*

Jesus refers to three types of Eunuchs...

Those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, refers to those who, by their own free choice and for the glory of God's Kingdom, abstain from marrying. They voluntarily remain single and celibate and commit their lives to serving God and His people...

"Eunuchs who were born that way, and...eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others" refers to those who are unable to function sexually within a heterosexual marriage.

People like that may choose not to marry or, if they're already married, there needs to be honest and open communication between husband and wife about making a choice to keep the marriage together because of the many other positive things that their relationship can bring.

Examples of people Jesus may have been referring to could be those with a certain disability or impotence, people who have same-sex orientation or have had surgery that has rendered them incapable of sexual intercourse. It also includes those who are intersex (Hermaphrodites) – a general term used for a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn't fit the typical definitions of female or male. Intersex people, just like Jesus said, are *"born that way."*

All of these people that Jesus mentions were excluded from temple worship, according to the Law of Moses.

Deuteronomy 23:1, "No eunuch is to enter the congregation of God."

KJV, "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord. A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord." In other words, they were excluded.

But then comes a wonderful promise of a time when things would change (Isaiah 56:3-5):

"Don't let foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord say, 'The Lord will never let me be part of his people.' And don't let the eunuchs say, 'I'm a dried-up tree with no children and no future.' For this is what the Lord says: I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy and who choose to do what pleases me and commit their lives to me. I will give them — within the walls of my house — a memorial and a name far greater than sons and daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!"

Acts 8:27-39 tells the story of the conversion of Eunuch who was an Ethiopian court official by the apostle Philip, who was led by the Holy Spirit away from a revival to bring salvation to one man!

3. Excluded by Development

Matthew 19:13-15, "One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him. But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left."

One word summarizes children in Jesus day – Powerless! They were the most powerless people in society. The disciples had no time for them. Surely the Kingdom of God would be achieved by force or moral reform. No one expected the Kingdom to come by becoming powerless like children. The totally powerless might just have to depend on their heavenly Father!

For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children.”

Further Reading

Blog: Divorce and Remarriage

Blog: The changing face of marriage

(Both blogs can be found on the Bayside Church website)