

# SERMON ON 'THE MOUNT'

*the unexpected path to influence and blessing*

## Important Ministry Updates

- Bro. Min Htet graduated with (M. Div.) degree last evening. \$46.67 x 2 years = \$840 January 01/14.



- Newsletter and Personal Information Collection.

## The Heart of Divorce



So we are here in the Sermon on the Mount. There are some pretty heavy topics here. We've talked about suffering, anger, lust, and now today we talk about divorce.

I told Lisa as I was beginning this week, man, I don't know if I have enough emotional energy to keep preaching the Sermon on the Mount. These are some big topics with heavy implications. But of course God knows what we need, not me. He's choosing the topics here.

So we are here in the Sermon on the Mount; we are talking about the values and ethics of the kingdom of God.

Last week we compared the ethical standard of God to a fence; we said last week that that fence is designed to alert us to where danger lies.

- Spiritual sickness lies over there
- Disease lies over there
- Death lies over there.

That is the purpose of the law. And ultimately your submission to the law will reveal what is motivating you at the deepest level. Your ethical standard will reveal what you ultimately love. If you try to consistently climb the fence, well, then you don't believe that the fence is good for you. You love your law, not God's law. You think adhering to your law will bring you more happiness than adhering to God's law.

Ultimately, it's a Lordship issue. Who is your LORD? You see, really all the commandments in the law fall under the umbrella of the first commandment. You will have no other God before me. You will have

no other LORDS in your life. You will not believe that other fountains have life. Disobedience to any command is first and foremost the disobedience to the first command. Breaking any law is breaking of the great law.

Jesus is constantly trying to get to the core. Who is your Lord? He's always simplifying, revealing, exposing trying to get at this ultimate question. What do your values reveal about what is ultimate in your life? What do the ethics reveal about whose on the throne?

And today is no different. He's doing the exact same thing. He wants to reveal through your view of marriage who is on the throne.

- Are you willing to see your marriage as a tool to glorify God - whether you have a good marriage or a bad marriage
- Are you willing to see your marriage as primarily not about you?
- Are you willing to be dethroned so he can be enthroned?
- Are you willing to decrease that he might increase?
- Are you willing to serve rather than be served.

That is what this passage is going to reveal. Jesus has been volleying back and forth between what the teachers of the law have said and what he says. You have heard it said.....but I say to you. And then he says.

And the reason he's doing this, is he's trying to expose the heart. Jesus is always grinding his ax on the big ticket items. He picks some issue and uses it to expose something deep - something fundamental and core to who we are.

So of course the ax Jesus wants to grind in this passage is the issue of divorce and what he wants to expose is quite simply this: what is going on in the heart when people pursue divorce as the solution to



their relational problems?

Matthew 5:31-32, "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery."

## **The Divorce Epidemic**

Statistics on marriage are pretty common. One out of two marriages will end in divorce. Only a minority of the children currently under the age of 5 will live all of their childhood with two parents, and so on. The statistics aren't the important thing.

That's just to point out that divorce is common; we all know that. What about an informal survey here. How many of you have parents that are divorced? So it's very common.

How can this be? How can it be that so many people are divorcing? Because after all, every one of those people promised not to. So how did it happen? Why do people get divorced?

The answer is of course because it wasn't pleasant to live with that other person. And I get a lot of these stories as a pastor - this other person was insane; they were crazy; it was hell to live with this person. All sorts of violent emotions erupt.

- Perhaps there's unresolvable conflict.
- Perhaps there are ugly yelling matches.
- Perhaps there is hatred or passive-aggressive behavior
- abuse or controlling or ignoring.
- Perhaps you are experiencing this right now as we speak.
- Your marriage is horrible.

And the thought of living with this other person for the rest of your life is more than you can handle. And so divorce seems like the way out.

If only I can get away from this other person I will be happy. That's all you can think about. You dream, if I could have only one wish granted, it would be to be away from this person. That's the reason people get divorced. It's not complicated; it's obvious.

And nothing is new under the sun. This was the same in Jesus' day. The Jews of Jesus' day had conflict in their marriage and just like we do today, they begin looking to divorce as the solution to the conflict. This is bad. What exactly are the rules here? Is there some way I can get out of this? You can image a guy in the first century who just gets in a fight with his wife. His wife is nagging him to fix the leaking roof, nagging him that he's never around, he looks over at his neighbor's wife and thinks, man that's who I should have married etc... And he's reading along in the Torah and he gets to Deuteronomy and they are reading along and find 24:1,

Deuteronomy 24:1, "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,"

And he stops reading....Now what does he think? Mmmm.. What exactly did Moses mean by, "she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her?" Perhaps I can get out of this? In fact we know this is exactly what was going on in Jesus day.

Josephus who was a first century historian, talks about controversy between the rival rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai. Rabbi Shammai took a super conservative line, and taught from Deuteronomy 24:1 that the sole ground for divorce was some grave matrimonial offense, true marital unfaithfulness. Rabbi Hillel, on the other hand, held a very lax view. If we can trust Josephus here, this was the common attitude. He talks about this verse applying 'for any cause whatsoever'. So Hillel interpreted the word "indecent" in the widest possible way to include a wife's most trivial offenses. Some of the famous examples often cited here is that she proved to be an incompetent cook and burnt her husband's food, or if he lost interest in her because of her plain looks and because he became enamored

of some other more beautiful woman, these things represented 'indecent' and justified him in divorcing her.

Later in Matthew 19 we get the full exchange. The Pharisees had heard what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount and they come to him and ask him point blank, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause." Which really was code for, "Do you follow the teaching of Rabbi Shammai or Rabbi Hillel."

And as we come to expect from Jesus, he says, "Neither. You've missed the point all-together."

If you put together this passage with Matthew 19, what is Jesus' view on marriage? Jesus says, I'm neither a maximalist nor a minimalist. You're missing the point. Jesus hates the question. It's like the kid in school who asks, "What's the most homework I can skip and still pass the test." The teacher just doesn't want to answer that question. It reveals the perspective is painfully out of whack.

## **Jesus' Point**

Jesus is saying, what does your attitude about marriage reveal about what is going on in your heart. Jesus, in a sense is conducting an experiment. He says,

- If I raise the bar of marriage to the highest possible standard.
- If I say, you cannot get divorced for any reason whatsoever.
- If I say, marriage is absolute permanent.
- If I say marriage is non-revokable to the point that if you ever get remarried you are committing adultery.

What do you say to that? What does that reveal in your heart? If your response is something like, "How do you expect me to be happy if I



have to stay married to this person?"

You know what the Pharisees said when they heard this! Mt 19 records it, "Well man, if that's the case, it would be better not to be married at all." That revealed something didn't it. If it's that permanent I better not risk it at all.

I know that every marriage has it's ups and downs. And I'm willing to suffer some. But let's not be unreasonable. If you are going to be bind me no matter what, well then....I'm not up for taking on that kind of risk. Who knows what kind of monster this person might turn out to be.

What does that reveal? It revealed what Jesus knew all along. We think marriage is about us. Some many people come to this passage and think exactly what the Pharisees thought. Here is a passage about rules for divorce. No this is a passage about removing excuses for divorce. This is a passage about the permanence of marriage. Actually it's bigger than even that.

This passage isn't about the legal bond of marriage. How could it be? Being legally married is not some kind of ultimate accomplishment. Do you really think that the only thing Jesus cares about is whether or not the State of Idaho has you on file as married. It's the piece of paper that matters. No of course not.

Jesus wants to get beyond the legal bonds of marriage and focus our minds on the purpose of marriage. Jesus say, "Listen, this is not about divorce. Divorce exists because people are stubborn and dumb.

Jesus responds the way a teacher would respond to the question,

"What's the least amount of homework I can do to get an A." Listen pal, the only reason grades exist is because people are lazy. But the point isn't the grades. The point is to learn. Stop focusing on the grades and start focusing on the purpose - learning.

Jesus takes uses that same approach. Stop thinking about divorce. Divorce shouldn't even be part of the conversation. Let's get to the point. What is the purpose of marriage?

Now in Mt 19 how does Jesus answer the purpose question. Turn with me there in your Bible. How does Jesus get to God's purpose marriage? Now certain things have lots of purposes. Like duct tape for example. What is it for? It's pretty much for everything.

- You use it to tape up your broken window,
- In a pinch you could use it to replace your head gasket.
- You can use it to tape incoming Freshman to flagpoles as a form of initiation. It's great stuff. Lots of purposes.

And when we read the Bible, marriage has lots of purposes.

- One of the purposes is to sanctify us,
- one of the purposes is to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church,
- one of the purposes if companionship and friendship.

All those are good. There are lots of purposes. But here's the key: when divorce is brought up, when the Pharisees come to Jesus with the intent to test him in Mt 19.

- When Jesus senses they have this messed up perspective on marriage, what purpose of marriage does Jesus choose to respond with?
- Where purpose of marriage does Jesus use to silence them?

He quotes Genesis 2; he's going to zoom in on a very specific purpose.

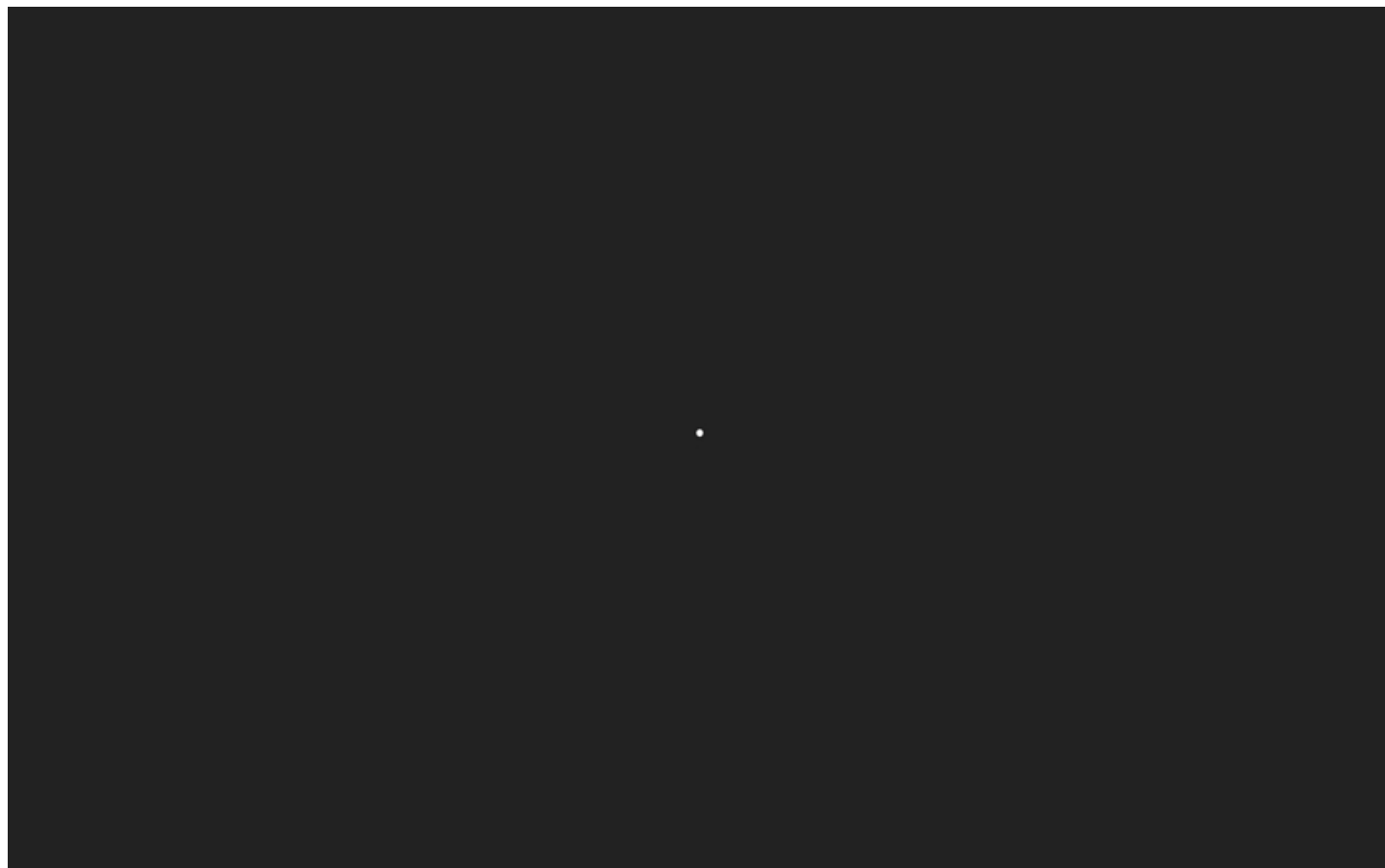
Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."

Listen to this purpose here. It's astounding: Jesus wants to change you into a more complete person by combining your flesh with another person's flesh.

Now we can narrow what Jesus is getting at here down to a single word here.

Now until this week, I had never done a word study on that word hold fast (some translations use the word cleave). And as I was rolling through the way the word is used in the Bible, I started to see a pattern in one particular way in which the word was used. It was really unexpected, but it really helped me and gave me a new angle on what God's intention is in marriage. What I saw there was such a delight to me.

The lexicons defined it as pretty much what you would expect:  
Here's a screenshot from my software.



To stick, to cling, to adhere, to glue. The heart of marriage is cleaving...that's the point. The legal stickiness of marriage is supposed to be a physical example of what is happening at the heart level. The picture is actually pretty good. You take two boards and glue them together. Once that chemical reaction takes place, those boards are stuck, forever changed. If you try to pry them apart, sure you can get it apart, but it will never be the same. That's a pretty good word picture.

Now here was the fun part for me. Look at how this word is used elsewhere in the OT. It kind of surprised me the way it was used, but gave me a really interesting insight.

Now this usage might surprise you. But check out how it's used in 1

Kings. 1 Kings begins with an indictment of king Solomon. God had told the Nation of Israel that they should not marry women from the other nations because if they did they would turn their hearts to other gods. But Solomon did not obey. Interesting the text says,

1 Kings 11:2-3, "Solomon *clung* to these [foreign wives] in love. He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart."

That's that word cleave. It's an interesting negative usage. Here's another one just like it. Speaking of the reign of Jehoshophat

2 Kings 3:3, "Nevertheless, he *clung* to the sin of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin; he did not depart from it."

Again, that word cleave. Now there are many, many other examples in the Bible of this kind of negative usage. And the reason that is so helpful to me is that it allows us to know what marriage is supposed to feel like. We know what it feels like to cling to something that we are asked to give up. We do it often.

You know that feeling when you know you really don't have enough money to buy that new dress or that new pair of shoes or that new car or that new house. But you really want it. You can't drop it. You're clinging to it. Everything in the world is against it. All reason says no. Ask anyone in the world if this is a good idea and 100 percent of them would say no. You're not in a position to get that? Even if you could afford it, it would gobble up way too much of your time. It would own you. Nope, not a good idea. But you don't care what the world thinks. Your heart is clinging to it.

It's a negative picture, but a helpful one. We know what that kind of



unreasonable clinging feels like. Now just flip it around in a positive way toward your spouse. That's the design of marriage. God designed marriage so that you would leave your father and mother and cling to your wife in that sort of way. In a way so central that no matter what the whole world says, no matter how much pressure is pulling you away from the home, no matter how many other financial responsibilities are weighing you down, you cling to her, you love her, you launch after her in wreckless sorts of ways.

Do you see what Jesus is getting at? He's saying, marriage is supposed to be so precious to you, so wonderful, such a delight, that if you were asked to give it up, it would be like tearing out that vital core of your soul. You'd give up anything, but not my marriage. You cling to it. You love it. You would do ANYTHING to stay bonded to this person.

## **Divorce as Amputation**

Do you see how messed up it is to ask the question in reverse? It would be like a person coming up to you and saying, "What are the rules for when I am allowed to amputate my arm?" You would never amputate your arm on purpose. It's your own flesh. You would do everything you can to not amputate your arm. It's part of your flesh. You are one flesh with your arm. Right?

That's not something you do lightly. It has permanent consequences. Any doctor who fixes a sliver by cutting off the arm would be thrown in jail. And any counselor who recommends divorce as a solution to selfishness belongs in the same category as this doctor.

- Can you live without an arm? Of course.

- Is cutting off an arm sometimes necessary to save life? Sometimes. Rarely.

But its so unnatural. Things have to be in the utmost perilous condition for that to make sense.

Jesus talks about loving your wife as your own body. You love and cherish your own body. Do you see the picture. Don't treat this as a flowchart issue. If this, then this. If this situation, then you can get divorced, if this then you can't. That's so backwards. Your doing exactly what the Pharisees wanted. Your playing into their hand. Put that thought away from you. We aren't even going there.

So many people take pride in their positions on divorce and miss the point. Don't be guilty of that.

Shamai sheltered beneath their super strong position. We don't allow amputation for any reason. Okay, great. That means very little to Jesus. That's like taking pride in the fact that you have a limb. Well great. That's a good start. I have never amputated my limb, therefore I am awesome.

- And all along they are hacking at the limb with knives.
- They are burning their limb.
- They hate their limb.
- But they won't cut off. No, that's against the law.

Do you see how that misses the point? Jesus says, love your wife as your own body. That's the part he cares about.

Hillel on the other hand sheltered beneath their right to amputate limbs. I have the right to hack of limbs. Watch me do it. Watch me cut off my fingers one by one. Just dare me to do it again. Watch

me. I'll cut off another one. And your saying, "I think your missing the point." Oh, you and your self-righteousness. I'll cut off another.

Do you see the absurdity of asking when it's okay to chop off your arm? Jesus in his genius uses the picture of one flesh. Don't you want to be whole? Don't you want a healthy body that works in unison? Think of all you can do with a healthy body. Think of how pleasurable this world is when you are living in full health?

## **Focus in on the problem**

Well what if things are ugly? What if things are hard? What do we do then?

Isolate the problem. When conflict and misery in marriage arises we get very messed up in our diagnosis. We think the problem is the leg. We think the problem in the marriage is the other person.

But the problem is the disease. The disease of sin in us and in the disease in sin in the other person. That's where the energy needs to be focused. We need to attack the disease of sin not the healthy arm that is suffering under the disease. If you watch this play out in people's lives you see this very revealing cycle.

- First they'd give anything to be married.
- Then anything to be unmarried.
- Then anything to remarried to another person.
- Then they'd give anything to be unmarried.
- Then they'd give anything to remarry another person.

Do you see the cycle? Wherever you go, there you are.

Marriage is just the container for the opportunity. Marriage is just the

press that squeezes on the heart. Ahh, now we can get to the good stuff. Marriage is what forces you to go deep and deal with who you really are. Your marriage gets you to see yourself in the worst possible light. The closer you are with a person the closer you see yourself. People who are not married are not forced to deal with their own heart in a way that those who are married.

- The value of staying together is so that you can learn what love really is. Now you have a context to live out what God calls - agape love, unconditional love. You had no idea what it meant to love someone before you got yourself into a situation where you now live with an unlovable person.
- The value of staying committed to one another is not that being legally bound is noble. That is nothing. Some people think, well I haven't divorced this person; therefore, I have honored my marriage vows. That is so embarrassingly missing the point entirely. No

Listen, this is God's beautiful perfect design. We can't get rid of it because we didn't invent it, and because we didn't invent it we can't then just do anything we want in it.

You have to submit to the design of the Creator, and when you enter into marriage, you actually enter under the regulations of the Creator.

I'm getting ready for a Andrew and Cassie's wedding and found an old prayer book that started out the marriage ceremony by saying: "Marriage is instituted of God, regulated by his commandments." That's what it says, because what God created, he has the right to regulate.

God has a plan for your marriage that is so wonderful, so beautiful.

But you have to submit to his rules. You have to listen to his design. You have to respect the fences. And if you don't want to put effort into your marriage, if you don't want to try hard at honoring the Lord, if you don't want to look inwardly and confess and be soft and humble, then you will be in a very terrible, horrible place.