

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Heart of Marriage and Sex”
Mark 10:1-16
New City Church of LA
March 1, 2009
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I. Vision of New City

Welcome to New City. We are a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church.

II. Introduction

We’ve been going through the Book of Mark in a series called the REAL JESUS. The first half of the Book has been about who is Jesus. And the second half of the book is about discipleship: how to follow Jesus.

- He taught us that to follow him is to deny ourselves and take up the cross and follow up.
- He taught us that to follow him means to engage in an intimate prayer life with God.
- He taught us that to follow him means to serve the lowly.

Now, the topic turns to marriage. What does it mean to follow Jesus in our marriage? So, the sermon today is entitled: the heart of marriage and sex.

If we look all around us, not only in society in general, but also right here in this room, we see the reality of broken marriages, broken relationships, broken sexual behavior, broken lives. We are so broken; there are bits and pieces of ourselves everywhere.

Many of us are divorced. So, this topic of marriage is a very difficult and sensitive topic for you.

Many of us are sexually active outside the context of marriage. So, this topic of sex is a very difficult and sensitive topic for you.

I could try to make you feel more accepted and comfortable and lower the standard to the standard of our culture and become realistic about what people can do. I

mean, sex is everywhere! Broken marriages are everywhere! Loneliness is everywhere. It's hard to live a sexually pure life.

If we just lower the standard, we won't get to the heart of what God intended marriage and sex to be. We will never enjoy the fullness of marriage and sex.

I was doing pre-marital counseling session and one guy asked me if I know when human civilization invented marriage. He assumed that marriage was a human invention, maybe around a few thousand years ago. But, you know what, every human community had some form of marriage, whether they are civilized or not. Why? Because marriage is not a human idea, it is God's idea. And the designer of marriage wants to teach us the core design principle of marriage.

So, whether you're married, divorced, single, or whatever, I think it's really important to know God's design for marriage and sex, and see the beauty of it.

Read Mark 10:1-16

1 Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them.

2 Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

- Now, there was a controversy about this subject at the time of Jesus. The assumption behind the question is that the Mosaic law is the controlling authority. So, Jesus goes along with them, and asked:

3 "What did Moses command you?" he replied.

4 They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away."

- If you look at Deuteronomy 24, it permits a man to write a certificate of divorce if a man finds "something indecent about her." So, there was a lot of debate about what "something indecent" meant. There was one school of thought called *Hillel* that believed that anything could be indecent—even burning a dinner. There was another school of thought called *Shammai* who believed it had to be some kind of sexual offence. But, the issue was about how to interpret this phrase. They wanted Jesus to enter into the debate.
- How did Jesus respond?

5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.
6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

- He didn't enter the debate about how to interpret that phrase. He went to the heart of the law. He went to the original intent of marriage, as designed by God. He said that the law about divorce was only given because of the hardness of the heart. In other words, he is saying: obeying the letter of the law is NOT the issue; we have to get to the heart of the law.

10 When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

13 People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14 When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15 I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

This passage tells us: (1) The heart of marriage and sex; and (2) where to get the power to live like that.

III. First, the heart, the intent, the original design, of marriage and sex.

In verse 10:6-9, Jesus said: 6 "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' 7 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, 8 and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. 9 Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

This passage tells us a great deal about God's design for marriage. We are to leave our parents and "be united" to each other and two will become one flesh. *God's*

design for marriage is a one-flesh union. The word for flesh in the OT where this passage originated can be translated as “person.” So, Jesus is saying that marriage is two people becoming one person, or one organism. It’s no longer two people. It is one person.

This is in contrast to the view that marriage is a contract between two people. That’s not the Biblical view. A contract lays out the duties of each person and what he or she has to do to perform the contract. Contracts are a conditional relationship. I’m willing to do this and that if you are willing to do that and this. But, contracts can be breached when it makes economic sense. Legal scholars often argue that that it is not wrong to breach a contract. It’s reasonable for people to breach a contract if it makes economic sense to do so. You have to deal with the consequences of the breach, but it can be done when something better comes along. It’s okay to breach the contract of marriage if someone better comes along and the cost of getting out of your current arrangement is not too high. But, Jesus is saying that marriage is not a contract. It is a creation of a new organism. It is two becoming fused into one being.

Now, what does it mean to be one-flesh, one-person, one organism? This does not just mean physical union (sex) but it means union at every aspect of life and personhood.

It means you are one-flesh spiritually. It means you are on the same path spiritually. You worship together, you serve together, you pray together, you talk about God together. You see, marriage is not just a lateral relationship between two persons; it is a triangular relationship. The more you get closer to God, the more you get closer to each other. God must be at the center of your marriage. That’s why it’s very important for you to marry not only someone who shares your faith, but also someone who’s spiritually compatible. If you are seeking to marry someone who does not share your faith, how are you going to become one-flesh spiritually? Your spiritual life is the driving force of every part of your life. If you don’t have unity here, you are going to run into trouble in every area of your life.

One-flesh union also means you are one-flesh socially. Marriage is coming together of two sets of relationships into one set of relationship. You have to be careful about leading two separate lives. You need to have fun together. You need to hang out

together. You need to make sure that your relationship to one another is more important than your relationship with your friends or even your family members. You are not one with you parents; you are not one with your friends; but you are one with your spouse. This means that if you family or your friends criticize your spouse, you have to defend your spouse. People have to understand that they can't talk about your spouse like they are closer to you than you are with your spouse. Now, *before* you get married, you shouldn't be so defensive when your friends criticize your boyfriend or girlfriend. When you are dating, you are *not* one-flesh. You can still back out. It is still a conditional relationship. You may be blinded by your own emotions and your friends and family members may be able to help to discern your boyfriend's character and compatibility. But, after you get married, don't let anyone undermine your one-flesh union.

One-flesh union also means emotional union. You need to share your feelings with one another. If something makes you feel uncomfortable, you have to talk to each other about it. One of the most frustrating things about some soap opera or dramas is that they don't share what they feel with one another. Marriage is not just an institution for a stable family; it is a relationship where feelings for one another abound. I once heard a talk that said that love, true love, is something you decide to do. It's got nothing to do with emotions. He argued that agape is self-sacrificial love. So, it is something we decide to do, not something we have to feel to do. Yes, it is true. But, love in marriage is more than that. There are feelings. If you don't have feelings for one another, you are in trouble in your marriage because marriage is an emotional bond. So, you need to respect that. If you are losing your feeling for one another, you should consider going into counseling before you get to a stage where you can't stand each other. It's not to say that if you don't have the same feelings for one another, you should leave your marriage. That's the last thing. But, if you don't have feeling for one another, that's not exactly how God designed the one-flesh union to be either.

One-flesh union is also an intellectual union. You must respect each other intellectually. You should be reading books together. You should be learning things together. You must listen to what the other person is saying. You need to talk about what bothers you, what your thoughts are about every issue you can imagine. You don't have to agree on everything, but you need to know each other thoughts. I think it is very

important for men, in particular, to know that they are respected intellectually. If you think your spouse is stupid, that's a problem. You need to help your spouse. You need to encourage your spouse. You need to be talking to each other all the time. Do you see why communication is so important in marriage? There is no way you are going to become one-flesh unless you communicate.

One-flesh means economic one-flesh union as well. It means there are no "mine" and "yours." Everything is *ours*. It doesn't matter whether one person makes more money, whether the other person is unemployed. Everything is ours. You share everything. I remember watching a movie called Joy Luck Club, and there was this one unhappily married couple who counted everything. This is my meatball, this is my milk, this is my cheese. And they had to ask each other permission to eat. That's what roommates do. But, that's not what one-flesh married people do. Both of you have to walk into marriage understanding that marriage is a financial union. Your influence on decision-making is not determined by how much money you make. This means you have to have a joint account when you are married. I see so many weird things happening here. [I'll tell you as a lawyer that even the State of California recognizes this financial union. It's called community property law. Everything you make in marriage is the property of both of you. There is no mine and yours.] Now, I am not saying you can't have separate accounts; but, that has to be minimal, and only for practical accounting purposes, not for keeping mine and yours separate. That's not what marriage is designed to be.

One-flesh also means physical union. It is coming together in sexual intercourse. This is such a misunderstood area of Christianity.

One mistaken view of sex: Some people think that somehow sex is dirty and if we really want to be spiritual we need to avoid sex. Not true. That's not the biblical teaching regarding sex. That line of reasoning actually originated with a Greek philosopher Plato who believed that anything that is material like our body is bad, and anything spiritual or immaterial is good. That's dualism. That's not Christianity. God became a human being, a material being. Sex is a beautiful thing. God is not up there saying: "my my what would they think of next?" He invented sex! He thought of sex. He wants us to enjoy sex.

- In 1 Corinthians 7:5, the Bible commands us to have sex. Would God command us to do something that is dirty?
- In Proverb 5:19, it says man must be ravished/intoxicated/filled with his wife's breast.

Sex is a beautiful thing when done in the context that it is designed to be done.

But there is also an opposite mistake about sex: some people think that sex is just an instinct. So, just as we need to eat when we are hungry, we should have sex when we are horny. But, the Scripture tells us that our natural biological desire/instinct is messed up because of sin. Just because we feel like getting a fix doesn't mean it's right. Just because we feel an urge for it does not mean it is right. Our nature/instinct is not a good guide sometimes. Some food are bad. Just because we are hungry does not mean we should just eat indiscriminately. We have to properly choose the food, wash it and cook it.

*Now, did you ever think about **why** did God invent sex?* Of course, having a baby is probably one of the most important purposes of sex. But, there is more to it than that.

Jesus is teaching us here that sex is the act of the one-flesh union. Sex is a powerful thing, and the way God designed it, it actually means something. It's not just a physical sensation. *It means something. As God designed it, sex is a non-verbal communication to say: I belong completely and exclusively to you. It is a non-verbal communication to say: we are one-flesh, one organism, one person, spiritually, socially, emotionally, intellectually, economically, in every way. It seals this one-flesh union. It literally does that. It's a perfect act for it.*

So, physical union (sex) with a person without any other kind of union is an act without the meaning. It is hypocrisy. It's like giving a present without anything in the box. It's empty. It hurts. We know that deep in our hearts. We get naked physically without getting naked in any other way. It's very fake. It's not that God doesn't want us to have fun, he says that if you don't use it the way it was intended to be used, you'll break it, you'll break your heart, you'll break her heart.

If you use sex in the way it was designed to be used, it strengthens your one-flesh union, your marriage. Sex is a commitment apparatus. It seals your commitment only if you use it in that context. Otherwise, you can lose your ability to commit.

But, if you use sex not in the way it was designed to be used, it's going to hurt you and your partner.

- If sex meant something to you in the relationship, when that relationship is broken, you lose a little bit of yourself. There is pain. It's like two cardboards which have been glued together and you try to split it up, there are bits and pieces of the cardboard on each other.
- And if sex didn't mean anything to you, and you segregate giving of your heart and life from sex, then when you come to a relationship where you do want to give your soul and heart, how are you going to make the act of sex, which has been so meaningless, how is it going to be meaningful suddenly? You are not going to enjoy it. You are used to it being at a very superficial level or pleasure. How are you going to change that?

Now, you can see that if marriage and sex is this kind of beautiful one-flesh union, divorce is not an option. Divorce must be avoided if at all possible. It is like cutting an organism into two. He says not to do it. He says no one should separate what God has joined together, and then, he goes on to say even more extreme things: that remarriage is adultery (although Matthew's account creates an exception for remarriage after the other's marital unfaithfulness).

Now, I know most of you are saying: I can't live up to this standard. I've already blown it sexually. I am already divorced. I am already remarried. I want to get remarried. I am already married to someone with whom it is impossible to become one-flesh. We can barely get along. We are just trying to hang on. There is no way my boyfriend is going to go along with this. This is impossible.

Jesus is so extreme in so many ways. He took the standards of the law or morality of that day even when they were based on the law of the OT, and often raised them to the heart level. He did this all the time.

Adultery to lust. Murder to anger/hate. Loving your neighbor to loving your enemies, turning the other cheek. He takes it to the highest level of the heart. He takes it to the level of HIS holiness. He takes it to the level of perfection! He takes it to the level of beauty, the beauty of the Kingdom of God!

IV. Now, where do get the power to live like this?

Jesus understands that there is a lot of brokenness. He understands our hearts. He understands that there is violence. He understands that there is abuse. I don't think this passage is about what constitutes grounds for divorce. That's what his enemies wanted this confrontation to be about, but Jesus gave us the heart of marriage and sex. In Matthew, he includes an exception, in 1 Corinthians, there are more exceptions. Sometimes, you need to cut away a part of you body out in order to survive. Sometimes, you need a surgery. If you in an abusive situation, you need to get out. This sermon is not about when a divorce is permitted or not. The thrust of the passage is more about God's design for marriage and sex.

Jesus never lowered the standard to help us feel better about ourselves. No. He didn't do that. He always raised the standard and took it to the heart level and invites us to Kingdom living.

But, where do we get the power to live like this?

I think one of the reason he raises the standard to the heart level is because he wants us to understand how messed up we are, how much of a sinner we are.

The next story about children illustrates this point perfectly. I think that's why Mark put it there. Verse 13:

13People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. 14When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 15I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Jesus wanted us to learn something about the Kingdom of God from little kids. I don't think he is telling us to be naïve like kids. I don't think he is telling us to just

believe without thinking or analyzing it. There are other places in the Bible where the Lord tells us to think, discern, and be wise. I don't think he is talking about adopting a character trait of kids. Some kids are humble but other kids are prideful and selfish. But, one thing about little kids that caused the disciples to rebuke them and chase them away was that children didn't have any standing in society; they didn't have any rights, they are at the utter mercy of adults.

And that's the child-likeness that Jesus says opens the doors to the Kingdom of God. We don't get into the Kingdom of God, a right relationship with God, through our own actions, through our own perfections, through our own morality, through our own performance; we get into this relationship with God, the Kingdom of God, through coming to him without any standing or rights and at the utter mercy of God.

Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner!

The Kingdom of God is not about lowering the standard of marriage and just surviving. It's about accepting the standard of holiness and perfection, and coming to God for mercy and power, his power to live.

You see, he knows all of us are broken. He knows we can't do it on our own. He knows that we need a new start, a new life, a new power. He knows we need this intimate relationship with God and empowerment of God to live the way we were intended to live.

But, here's something else you need to know. God's graciousness and mercy do not mean it's okay to live in mediocrity. It does not mean it's okay to strive for a lower standard of the law and see if we can get away with it. It does not mean it's okay to mess up sexually, that it's okay to shoot for a lower standard in your marriage, that it's okay to be selfish in your marriage, that it's okay to violate the one-flesh union. Jesus actually wants us to experience the fullness of a happy marriage with an exhilarating sex life. So, he calls us to this high standard.

Living by this high standard in light of his amazing grace creates an interesting dynamics.

One, it makes us realize that we are more messed up than we think we are. If you think deeply about what Jesus is saying, you can't help but to come to this conclusion.

Second, the more realize our sins, the more we realize that his grace is amazing.

Third, when we enter in the Kingdom of God, into a relationship with by his grace, God gives us the power of the Spirit to live by a new standard. He gives us the power to live. It's not an immediately and complete change, but we move toward the standards of the Kingdom of God.