

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church,
10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 28A

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

Jesus withdrew from Jerusalem to Perea after the Feast of Dedication in winter because the Jewish religious leaders wanted to arrest Him. He escaped because the hour for Him to lay down His life as a ransom for many had not come. At this juncture, He was nearing the end of His ministry and would soon be making His way back to Jerusalem, and it would be His final entry into the Holy City. He concentrated on teaching His disciples, preparing them for the eventuality of His suffering, death and resurrection.

On this return trip to Jerusalem Jesus used His different encounters with the Pharisees, mothers who were bringing their little children to Him, a young rich ruler, and the bold and presumptuous request of two of disciples, to teach some valuable and pertinent principles concerning marriage, attitude towards children, the love for money and possessions, and our aspirations and service for Him. This week's lesson will focus on the first two encounters.

OUTLINE

1. Arrival in Perea: Marriage and Divorce (Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12)
2. Jesus and the Little Children (Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17)

COMMENTARY

Arrival in Perea: Marriage and Divorce

Jesus was now in Perea, which was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, the younger son of Herod the Great. He was the Herod who imprisoned John the Baptist because the latter charged him for the sin of divorcing his wife and his adulterous marriage to Herodias, who was at that time the wife of his half brother Herod Philip (Mark 6:17-18).¹ John was subsequently beheaded by Herod at the instigation of Herodias.

Against this backdrop, one can understand why the Pharisees raised the matter of divorce with the Lord Jesus Christ. They asked Jesus: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" The Pharisees' question was a reference to the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24): *When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in*

¹ Mark 6:17 For Herod himself had sent forth and laid hold upon John, and bound him in prison for Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife: for he had married her. 18 For John had said unto Herod, It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife.

his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house.

This was another trick of the Pharisees who were not sincere in wanting to be enlightened by Jesus. We know that they could not be sincere because they had not changed their antagonistic attitude toward Jesus. In fact they had met earlier and are now bent on seeking His death. Hence, they raised the question to entrap Jesus whose answer would incur the wrath of Herod Antipas who might arrest Him and put Him to death like John the Baptist.

There could be an added reason to trap Jesus. The Pharisees were divided in the matter of divorce. There were two schools of thought. Both schools agreed on divorce. But they disagreed on the interpretation of the grounds for divorce. The school led by Rabbi Shammai allowed divorce solely on grounds of adultery, whereas the school led by Rabbi Hillel allowed divorce over any reason, such as a wife burning her husband's breakfast! Jesus' response would set Him to side with either one of these two schools. Worse still, He will be at odds with the Herodian government for His stance against what Herod did.

Jesus knew the hearts of men. He would not be entangled by their evil intent. Instead Jesus reiterated the fundamentals of marriage (Matthew 19:4-6): *Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them*

male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. Jesus' answer teaches some very important truths about marriage.

Marriage was first designed by and instituted of God. Marriage is a God-given ordinance. It is not a social contract. The church did not invent it. The law of the land did not initiate it. It was not the act of sin that brought it about. God ordained the bonds of marriage before the Fall of man.

It is a vow solemnly made by a man and a woman before God! Marriage between two persons of the same gender or any one or both with a gender enhancement is an abomination in the sight of God. God made Man, male and female. Marriage is meant to last a lifetime. It is clear from God's Holy Word that there is no sanction for any form of homosexual relationship. Marriage is about "leaving" and "cleaving."

A man's dependence on his parents will be transferred from them to his wife. He is now the head of his own family where he will experience interdependence. He will depend on his wife and his wife will also depend on him. The husband is to love his wife who in turn submits to her own husband. Marriage is to be exclusive, one man one wife, and the two "shall be one

flesh.” There should be no extra-martial relationship. Any form of sexual intercourse outside of marriage is a sin against the Holy God. There is no excuse or justification for fornication and adultery.

Marriage is to be permanent for “what therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.” We see that there are spiritual, social, and physical aspects of marriage: spiritual in the sense that it is sanctioned and blessed by God; social in the sense that there is a legal binding demanded by the society and physical in the sense that there is willingness for physical union of the sexes.

Jesus explained that Moses gave a bill of divorce because of the hardness of man’s heart. God’s will is that marriage is to be for life. Marriage and the family is the basic unit of a society. When families and marriages in a society are in a healthy state, the nation is strong and stable. This is God’s gift to Man.

The disciples asked Jesus to explain further His teachings concerning marriage and divorce. Jesus explained that “Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery” (Matthew 19:9). Note that Jesus gave a definite comment on the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 24:1). Jesus gave only one ground for divorce, and that is, sexual infidelity. A man may divorce his

wife or vice versa only on the ground of sexual sins or an act of infidelity that breaks the marriage union. Although this exception clause is not recorded by Mark (10:11-12) and Luke (16:18), it is recorded by Matthew.² If a husband and wife are separated or divorced on any other grounds, and marries another, he or she commits adultery. He breaks the will of God and God is displeased.

The disciples recognized that marriage fidelity was very difficult to keep and remarked that it was better for a person to remain single. Jesus explained that not every one can remain single or a celibate. Jesus explained that some are born with this nature; some made themselves celibates, and some voluntarily decide not to marry in order to serve the Lord with undivided interests.³ Jesus concluded by saying: “He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matthew 19:12b). Jesus did

² G. Campbell Morgan, the prince of expositors, comments on Matthew 5:52, “So far as I am concerned, however, I am perfectly clear in my conviction that in the case of divorce on the ground of fornication the innocent party is absolutely free to marry again. I should have no hesitation in conducting the marriage service for such an one. I should refuse to marry the guilty party” (*This Was His Faith*, Revell, Westwood, N.J. 1952, pp294ff). This writer agrees with this statement.

³ 1 Corinthians 7:32 But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: {that belong...: Gr. of the Lord} 33 But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. 34 There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

not place any greater virtue on celibacy as against marriage.

Jesus and the Little Children

While they were in the house, “they brought their little children” to be blessed and prayed for by Jesus. It was customary for Jewish mothers to bring their little children to be blessed by the ruler of the synagogue. Here was a greater than all these rulers of the synagogue — Jesus Christ! It was therefore understandable why the mothers were bringing their little ones to Jesus. It was a happy scene to see mothers bringing their children to be blessed by Jesus, and the children must have loved to be with Jesus. However, it is sad to note that the disciples rebuked the mothers for bringing their children to see Jesus. The disciples might have some good reasons. It might be that they wanted to hear more about Jesus’ teachings on marriage and divorce and were interrupted by the mothers bringing their children to see Jesus. It might also be that they wanted Jesus to have an uninterrupted rest in the house. Whatever the reason, Jesus was not pleased with their action. So, Jesus told His disciples to stop preventing children from coming to Him for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus placed His hands on each child and prayed. It was good for the parents to bring their children to see Jesus and know Him at a very young age. Children are gifts given to us by God and it would be a great tragedy if parents fail to lead their children to have

a right relationship with Jesus. It is a fearful responsibility on the part of parents to attend to the spiritual nurturing of their children in the Lord. Parents today are caught by the ways of the world. This is especially so in Singapore where the demands on our children seem to be much more intense compared to others in some western country. Christian parents are so caught up in preparing their children for junior college and university that they have sadly neglected the spiritual life of their children. This neglect can last a lifetime where the children are worldly in their thinking and way of life. Parents are more concerned with encouraging their children to attend tuition and tennis and the school’s Co-curricular activities than the spiritual activities by the church.

Concerning the little children, Jesus remarked “for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14). The citizens of the kingdom of God must be as a little child. Jesus obviously did not mean that they should be childish, but that they should have child-like qualities. This child-likeness should exemplify the people of God’s kingdom, such as “implicit trust, obedience, humility, and a forgiving spirit.” A child accepts his parent’s love and care, protection and provision, without thinking whether he deserves it or not. In like manner a person who is presented with the kingdom of God should receive God’s invitation gladly, trustingly, humbly without making any demands or thinking whether he deserves it or not. If he

would enter the kingdom of God, he must be like a little child.

PRACTICAL VALUE

There is a need today to view marriage and divorce from a biblical standpoint. Homosexual marriages and parentage are being accepted and even taught in some societies as an alternative to heterosexual lifestyle. But from God's point of view, He who created Man, male and female, the original intention and purpose was and still is, as Jesus propounded to be a one-man-one-woman union.

Divorce is not a solution to the problems arising out of marriage, for marriage should be for as long as the husband and wife shall live. If husbands and wives would submit to God's ordinance and wise laws, the high incidence of divorce would be much lessened if not brought down to zero. As Christians, we must take our marriage vows very seriously. Parents of children who are married happily accept the transference of their son's dependence to his wife, and vice versa. It is most displeasing to God if parents undermine the spiritual, social and physical bond between their son and his wife, or their daughter and her husband.

Children are a gift from God, who is the Source of all life. Jesus loves little children and it is the sacred duty of parents to nurture them in the admonition of the Lord so that when they grow up, they will love Jesus, God

and His church. Many parents have been lacking in this area because they do not trust God and follow God's principles in bringing up their children. Parents should be like the Jewish mothers who brought their little ones to Jesus. Mothers and fathers today should set a good example by bringing their children to worship services and Sunday School to be taught the Word, so that they might grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and love Him. After Sunday School they must be encouraged to progress into the various fellowship groups. To do these, parents themselves must attend the adult fellowship. Indeed, if mothers religiously put this into practice, they will have fewer problems when their children grow up and take their place in the community. They would become the honour and glory of their parents.
AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION
QUESTIONS**

Daily Readings

MONDAY: Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-17

TUESDAY: Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-17

WEDNESDAY: Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7:1-17

THURSDAY: Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17

FRIDAY: Mark 10:13-16; Matthew 19:13-15; Luke 18:15-17

Discussion Questions

1. Are the threefold aspects of marriage, namely spiritual, physical and social, found in the marriage between two unbelievers or when one spouse is not a believer?

2. Is the celibate life preferable to married life? What are the answers given by Jesus?

3. Does the Bible teach that under no circumstance is a divorcee allowed to be remarried? Cite Bible texts to support your view.

4. In what ways must we be like children to enter into the kingdom of God?

5. How are the children in our church being drawn to Christ? Do you think that our parents are doing a good job? If you are a parent, how do you think you would fare in this area?
