



GracePoint: A Weekly Sermon Discussion

59 – Marriage, Divorce and Singleness

Announcements:

2/21 @6:30 -

Women's

Bible Study

2/15 @7:00 -

Prayer

2/16 @6:30 -

Grace Group

2/19 @8:30 -

Sunday School

2/26 @5:30 -

Joint Service With

La Luz Bible

Church

2/27 @6:30 -

Men's Discipleship

- Question 8

ICE BREAKER: Which would you prefer: an evening all alone, or a loud and rambunctious party?

READ: Matthew 19:3-12

Pastorally speaking, this is an extraordinarily difficult passage to preach and talk on. You can feel yourself being torn in many different directions on a topic that is not without its share of controversies. How can you maintain the correct balance of understanding that marriage is a precious gift from God while not OVER emphasizing that to the point where we are unable to see the blessing that singleness should be as well? How much effort should be focused on *just* this passage? Because we should also understand that on all of the topics discussed by Jesus here, namely marriage, singleness and divorce, there are a whole host of other passages and thoughts that Scripture gives us. Finally these topics are deeply personal in a keenly particular way. Understanding that we are all called to different paths in our lives means that not all marriages are going the way we dream they would; not all lives are free from the pain of divorce (either directly or indirectly!); and though some are called to singleness, that is not always the deep desire of the heart of the single person. When you mix this all together it is pretty clear that this can be a very thorny set of topics! So today the hope is to have an honest discussion on these three topics, using the thoughts here of Jesus as a guide to frame our discussion.

Let us first start with the topic of marriage. There is a lot said by Jesus here in just a few short verses. First he highlights the *exclusivity* of marriage. Contrary to how the world would try to define marriage, Jesus makes clear a few things. One is that it is between a man and a woman. Secondly it is between **A** man and **A** woman. It is an exclusive and beautiful joining together of two people by God himself. The Pharisees approach Jesus with a question about divorce (and we will get there...) but he starts by showing the beautiful gift that marriage is. Going further than just this passage we can see that marriage is (one of the main) solutions to the problem that "it is not good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). I once heard a pastor call marriage the perfect pressure cooker for your sanctification, and I think that is an appropriate description as marriage can draw out some of the best and worst in all of us. But most importantly marriage shows us the picture of Christ's love for us. Paul makes clear in Ephesians that in marriage we have a picture of the church, God's love, our service to God and ultimately the hope of the Gospel (Ephesians 5:22-33). What a precious blessing Marriage is!

DISCUSS: In what other ways can we see marriage as a blessing from God? Which of the above do you see most clearly?

Moving on from the *blessing* that is marriage, we should note the *blessing* that is singleness. If I am being completely honest, I see as one of the great recent tragedies in Modern American Christianity the losing of the thought of singleness as a blessing. Marriage is a good gift for some, but it is often presented as a requirement for all, and the truth is far from this. There are people that are called to be single. In his speech on the eunuchs Jesus notes that "not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given." In other words, singleness is, for some, a gift that is given by God. We can note, it is not always an easy gift, it is not always a painless gift, but a gift for you, for your sanctification, and most clearly in this passage, a gift "for the sake of the kingdom" nonetheless. It would be wise and correct for us to develop a robust theology of marriage in general that has room for singleness!

DISCUSS: In what practical ways can we see the blessings of singleness? What responsibility (if any) do we all have to those called to singleness?

Finally we can turn our attention to divorce. We should note that divorce is an imperfect solution in the face of the brokenness that is sin. In this particular passage the heart of the issue here is a "certificate of divorce" which had at its heart a desire to make sure that no (particularly women) were being taken advantage of. But even this is not ideal, for Jesus notes that "from the beginning it was not so". Much debate and thought can and should be put into the last verse ("whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery") but honestly that is a heated thought that we just don't have the time or room to cover here. Instead I think we can note a few principles to take from this passage: First, Divorce is only part of the perfect gift that is marriage because of our sin, So God allowed it for our good. Secondly, Like all things there is restoration and healing in the power of the Gospel. In some circles divorce is treated like no big deal, which is wrong, it is always a great tragedy, but in other circles it is seen as an unforgivable sin, which is also wrong. In all things we should all be led by love and charity!

DISCUSS: Can you think of anything that is like divorce (in that it is not ideal but allowed by God because of our own brokenness)? What is the best way for us to minister to a world (and possibly a church) that struggles with this issue?