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**Series: The Sermon on the Mount**  
**Message: Jesus and Divorce, Part 1**

**Transcribed Message**  
**February 18, 2018**  
**Matthew 5:31-32**

Someone once said that there are a couple things that should not be entered into prematurely, one of which is embalming. The other is divorce. In the case of embalming, we have some built-in protections. You have to have a doctor who certifies that somebody is deceased. There are procedures that evidently are followed. A death certificate is written up and then the necessary steps are taken to begin that process. I'm not so sure that you couldn't argue that in the case of divorce we have removed a lot of the protections that might very well be in place in keeping a marriage together. We have perhaps seen the shift in public opinion. We have seen in many instances the accommodation of theology. We've seen too often the church that is either silent or says little if anything at all. We have now in all 50 states what we call no-fault divorce. Here is the striking thing. In our culture today, 21<sup>st</sup> century and in the culture of Jesus's day in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, there are striking similarities for what we're going to encounter in our study for the next couple of weeks. The day and time in which Jesus lived divorce had become surprisingly easy. In Matthew chapter 5 in verse 31, Jesus challenged the thinking of His day and He brings us to understand that marriage in God's eyes is viewed very often much differently than it is in our eyes.

We're back this morning to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. While technically we're not going to spend a lot of time in Matthew 5, it is going to be the launching point because in this 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel in verses 31 and 32, Jesus brings before us this matter of divorce. Every time I come across a passage in the Bible as we go expositionally through a passage or book or whether we go into the topic of marriage itself and we're confronted with the subject of divorce, there is always a desire on my part to balance out two things. I want to be very certain that as I teach what the Bible says about marriage and divorce that I lift up and exalt and honor and value what the Bible teaches about marriage. That's where we have to begin for sure.

We have to always see marriage from God's vantage point and God's viewpoint. At the same time I know that every time I address the subject, I'm speaking to a room of people who have been touched either personally or in some not too distant relationship with the matter of divorce. I'm not going to do it but I assure you that if I asked this morning everybody in this room to raise their hand if they have gone through a divorce personally, if somebody in their family has, if their parents have, if their children have, if their extended family, some good friend, I can assure you that there would probably not be a hand that would not be raised in the room this morning. That is always the challenge when we come to a passage like we do this morning. We want to give value, exalt, honor what God has said about marriage, but we don't want people leaving under a greater sense of condemnation than the Word of God would ever call us to do by way of personal examination. We're going to try to do that. We're going to try to balance those two things. We're going to do that by broadening our study because again when I come to a subject like this and we have these two verses in 31 and 32 it didn't seem appropriate to just jump in and try to take on this topic in one Sunday. So we're going to do it in two.

As we look at this passage this morning as we want to see marriage holds a unique place in the Bible. Nothing else joins two image bearers together as one, serves to display the relationship between Christ and the church, and gives the married couple the opportunity to display God's glory like marriage. That, my friends, is to exalt and value and place in high esteem the greatest institution that God has given to the good of mankind. God has given us marriage. He has given us government. He has given us the church. He gave us marriage first and foremost.

Let's do a very quick review. Those of you that haven't been with us as we've gone through the Sermon on the Mount, I think we need to appreciate the context even though we're not going to dig into this specific passage, but Jesus is calling us in the Sermon on the Mount to live life the way He did. That's what these chapters are about – Chapter 5, Chapter 6, Chapter 7 of Matthew that we call the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest sermon ever preached. It is really Jesus's call for us to live life the way He did. If you do that, what is the first thing that is going to be true? We're called to be different. Whatever topic is before us, and this one happens to be marriage and divorce, we're

called to be different. The whole beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, the Beatitudes, the similitudes – if you lived life according to the standard that Jesus puts forward, you know what? You're going to look a lot a lot different than the world, aren't you? Your life is going to be very different than the culture that you find yourself living in. At the end of that section, remember Jesus says we're called to be salt and light. We're called to be salt and light.

I hope you noticed those of you that were able to be with us last week when Clarence and Alicia Hill were with us and talked about racial reconciliation and I hope you noticed how many times the idea of salt and light got put into their comments. I think sometimes we make things too difficult. There is a complexity to issues that we face today, but sometimes there can be a simplicity that needs to be brought to some of those things and part of that is if we would just live life the way Jesus has called us to live, if we would live out these truths to be salt and light. My goodness, what impact that would make. As we do that then, Jesus makes these comparisons. The comparisons that He draws out for us make it clear how our life is to be different. So not only are we not to commit physical acts of murder, we're not supposed to hate people. Jesus says they're both wrong. Don't pat yourself on the back because you never killed anybody but all the while you hate people. Don't give yourself so much credit because you never committed an act of physical adultery but you lust in your heart all day long. That's what He's doing here. So when we come to this one, marriage and divorce, He is going to draw some of these same pictures that cause us to see that we are to live life in such a way that we reflect the life of Christ, keeping both the spirit of the law and the letter of the law, not being so consumed with external performance and understanding what God wants to do is to change us from the inside out.

So let's look at God's perspective on marriage and divorce. This is kind of a 30,000 foot flyover but I wanted to set the table for what we'll look at, Lord willing, next Sunday as we dig into that specific passage in 31 and 32. I bring before you what it is that we know about marriage. What does the Bible teach? What will enable us to have a high and exalted view of marriage? The first thing that we would say is the foundation of marriage is the Bible. The foundation of marriage is the Bible. This is where we find God's will and purpose. Everybody views life from a particular perspective. I don't care

who you are or where you come from, you have a worldview. You have a perspective of life. A lot of things have gone into making up your worldview. Your upbringing, your family, your parents, your education -- all of those things have informed the way you look at the world. The single most important factor in your worldview and how you look at the world we live in is how it is that you see God. Your understanding of God, your view of God is the most impactful thing for how you answer the biggest questions that life brings to us. Where did I come? Where am I going? Why am I here? All of those questions God answers for us. He also answers for us what it is that we are to understand about the matter of marriage. What God has given to us in His Word is both an operating manual for life and in that sense for marriage. It is an evaluated standard for how it is that we're doing. We're told what is that we're to do. Here's an operating manual. Then the Word of God as it comes into our lives helps us to evaluate. How am I doing? How am I measuring up to what God has said? In effect, what we do is we place ourselves under the authority of this book.

When God says in Genesis 2 and verse 24: "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and they were not ashamed." That is God's commentary on marriage. As you study the rest of the books of the Bible, they always come back to Genesis 2:24 and 25. This is the foundation for everything else that God has to say about marriage. As soon as we detach ourselves from this book, because it is this book that defines for us God's perspective of marriage, and as soon as we take ourselves out from under the authority of the Word of God, then marriage can go wherever the culture wants to go. My friends, that's exactly what we're seeing today. Marriage is built on the Word of God.

Secondly, the hope of marriage is the gospel. The hope of marriage is the gospel. The thing that breathes hope into all of our marriages is the gospel. The gospel is at the heart of the story. What is the story? The story is God made it. Genesis 1 and 2. We broke it. Genesis 3. God is fixing it. Genesis 4 to Revelation 22. You have in that picture the hope that God has given to us for every marriage. That hope is the gospel, the good news of God's rescue. God made it. Genesis 1 and 2. God put Adam and Eve into a perfect place. They enjoyed for however brief a period of time that was a perfect

relationship and a perfect marriage in a perfect environment. Then, foolishly listening to the serpent instead of to the voice of God, they stepped outside and from underneath the authority of God's Word. In rebellion against God, they decided they go their own way. Genesis 2 and Genesis 3. And what happens? They immediately realized they messed up. They went and looked for God and said how can we make this right? Not exactly. They knew that they had messed up. They went, the Bible says, and they covered themselves as best they knew how. Now they were not naked and unashamed; they were naked and ashamed because that's what sin does. They went and hid themselves.

And what do we read? God began the process of injecting into this the rescue of mankind. He went into the garden and what does the Bible say? God went and He called out. God seeks. That's the point. God is the rescuer. That's exactly what we need to be doing every day. Whether single or married, we need to be preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. What does that mean? To preach the gospel to yourself every day? It means to remind yourself every day that God is the one who has come to you and He is the one who has rescued you. He is the one who has saved you and He has done so apart from any effort or work that you have contributed. You remind yourself of that every day that it is the overwhelming grace of God that has broken into your life and injected your life with hope. Do you know what happens when you do that? You much more naturally extend that to somebody else. You much more freely are able to share that perspective with somebody else.

Here's a newsflash. Marriage is hard work. Marriage is hard work. That's why David Tripp entitled his book What Did You Expect. What did you expect. Our culture causes people to believe that when they get married it is just one big joyful fun time. We know that's not life in a fallen world. So he writes a wonderful book called what did you expect? Martin Luther had it right when he said: "What a lot of trouble there is in marriage. Think of all the squabbles Adam and Eve must've had over the course of those 900 years. Eve would say you ate the fruit and Adam would say you gave it to me and on and on it went." Grace steps into our marriages, into our lives, and it brings the hope of the gospel. It allows us to persevere. It allows us to forgive. It allows us to

extend grace. It allows us to be more patient. It allows us to start over again and again and again and again. That's what it does. Marriage is oiled by the grace of God.

Thirdly, the goal of marriage is the glory of God. The goal of marriage is the glory of God. The foundation for it all is the Bible. The hope is the gospel. The goal of marriage is the glory of God. When we build our marriages on Biblical truth, we see that marriage is not only something that God designed and invented and thought up, but He owns it. It belongs to Him. It's His. He has a direct claim on it as He does in every part of our life. We exist for Him. We don't exist for ourselves and to please ourselves. We exist for Him. Marriage is not about you. Marriage is not about your spouse. Marriage is about the glory of God. That's why He brought us together. That's why He wants us again, whether we're single or married, to realize that it all belongs to Him. His goal for marriage is His glory. That's why the greatest single picture of the redemptive work of God that we have in the New Testament is in the snapshot of Ephesians 5 when Paul says your marriage is to be a reflection and a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. What is that? His life lived for the glory of God. What is that? That's marriage that has been rescued by the gospel, that has infused hope into your life in a way that nothing else possibly can, that glorifies and exalts marriage in a way that nothing else can.

The Bible tells us that marriage is a part of God's refining process. It is a part of sanctification. It's the very tool that God uses to run those rough places off of our lives and He uses each other in that process, in the good times and in the bad. But here's the bottom line. It is all about Him. It's all about Him. It's not about us. It's about His glory, not my happiness. That is a hard thing to remember when I want my way. It's a hard thing to remember for a very selfish self-centered person like myself. It is not about me and it's not about my happiness. It is about God and about His glory and how can I most effectively reflect the relationship between Christ and the church. JD Greer has written a very challenging and difficult, but I believe very accurate, article entitled this: "Marriage is Not About You; Divorce is All About You." That is not a blanket condemnation, but he says some things in there that are I think easily forgotten and neglected. One of those is that marriage is God bringing two people together to reflect the greatest glory that they can back to Him.

So there we have it. The 30,000 fly-over of marriage. The foundation is in the Bible. The gospel is the hope. The goal of marriage is God's glory. Let's do the same thing with regard to divorce. What does the Bible say about this matter of divorce? We're going to jump in again much more specific to this passage, Lord willing, next Sunday. But what do couples do when things go bad? Let's start there. What do couples do when things go bad? I don't know how many options there are that we could list, but in my mind I have narrowed it down to what I think are probably the three basic ones.

When a couple gets so cross ways with the very things that we just laid out – forgetting that the Bible is to be the guiding principles of their life in their marriage, that the hope of the gospel is that they would see themselves as who they are and draw on God's grace every day and extend that grace to each other. They forget that. They forget that the glory of marriage is to be reflecting back that glory to God. They get so cross ways with each other they respond in one of three ways. They make the decision at some point just to maintain. It's just the status quo. They kick into some kind of a survival mode and they're just determined to stay the course, to grit their teeth, to really do nothing to improve their state but just hang on. The second thing they frequently do as we've already commented is they seek a divorce. There's got to be a way out of this. The third thing they could do is they could work to save the marriage.

We already said marriage is hard work. It can get even more difficult when things are left untended. But here's what so often happens. When you look at those three choices, here's what so often happens. Couples wait too long. That's just our natural human tendency. We tend to postpone. We can procrastinate and think we can do this, we can handle this. Sadly, very often couples get so far down the road in dealing with things in their marriage that what frequently happens is these three choices begin now to look like this. Staying together seems intolerable. It's not doable. This is not manageable any longer. Working on it is even more impossible. There are way too many hurts, way too much pain, way too many words have been spoken, too many deeds have been done. It seems absolutely impossible. So what does that leave us? In their minds, it leaves just one choice and that one choice is the last one – divorce. But what if we just rewind that a bit? What if we said there really aren't three choices.

There are in fact only two. The two choices are you either stay together, maintain, whatever that might look like, or you work on your marriage. What if divorce was simply not an option?

Now again, we're going to get into the specifics recognizing that the Scriptures speak to specific areas related to this subject, but in general what if we just said divorce is not a consideration. To help us think a little bit more along those lines I would ask you to turn to Malachi chapter 2. I want to have you think with me about God's perspective on divorce. The whole idea of divorce first appears in the Bible in Deuteronomy 24. We're not going to go into that passage. It is a challenging passage on a lot of levels but you go from Genesis 3 – we break it and literally all hell breaks loose from that point forward. You have all manner of depravity and behavior recorded from that point from Genesis 3 on. God gives us in Malachi too a prospective.

Listen to what God says beginning at verse 10: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which He loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendent of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts! And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, 'Why does He not?' Because the Lord was witnessed between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did He not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord the God of Israel, covers his garments with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Let me remind you what's going on in Nehemiah. Remember Nehemiah, the cupbearer to the king? He was burdened for Jerusalem. The city is in despair and broken down. He asks to leave. He goes back to Jerusalem and begins to rebuild the

wall. At some point in that story, he goes back to the king. He said he would. He kept his word. He goes back to the king, spends a period of time that's not defined, probably many years, and then he goes back again to Jerusalem. As he comes back that second time, God has raised up a prophet by the name of Malachi. Malachi is confronting in this specific passage what's going on in that context that Nehemiah comes back to. What Nehemiah comes back to broke his heart even more than the broken down walls because what he comes back to is a people who are now divorcing their Jewish wives and they are marrying foreign women and they are becoming involved in all manner of idolatry. Nehemiah is decidedly beside himself because of what he sees happening. In this simple straightforward language, God calls out His people for the behavior and the treating of their wives and divorcing their wives and marrying these foreign wives.

The Hebrew text in verse 16 is difficult. The New American Standard, which some of you are using, actually says God says I hate divorce. If you look in the ESV, even in the notes at the bottom it acknowledges that translation. God says I hate divorce. I hate divorce for what it does in the lives of my people. You note that He says five times in these seven verses he calls them out for their faithlessness which is just a reflection of where they find themselves. Their sin threatens the welfare of God's people. That's what God says. God says in no uncertain terms very simply, very straightforward I hate divorce.

I want you to notice secondly what God does not say. What does God not say in this passage? God does not say I hate divorced people. He does not say I hate divorced people. We acknowledge that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We acknowledge that all of us stand in need of grace. We realize that at the cross there is level ground. God speaks about His hatred for their actions and their sin, but certainly doesn't speak about that with regard to their person. In fact, if you want to be given a very clear picture of the heart of God, just go to the Gospel of John and see Jesus encounter the woman at the well. In the encounter with the woman, remember she had been married five times and the man that she was with at that moment she wasn't even married to but was living with. There is Jesus. He is filled with compassion and grace and mercy. He reaches out and He pursues her just as He pursues us.

Secondly, the Word does not say that divorce is the only thing God hates. Look back again for a very practical illustration of this. Proverbs 6. There are seven things that God says that He hates and divorce isn't even on the list. A proud look, a haughty spirit, someone who spreads dissension among brothers and sister, all kinds of things there but divorce isn't on that list. So we don't say that to minimize divorce, but we don't create some category that says divorced people and the sin of divorce is somehow to be understood in a different way than others.

Thirdly, the Bible does not say divorce is never allowed. It doesn't say it's never allowed under any circumstances. We're going to look at that, Lord willing, again next Sunday. So why then does God say what He does about divorce? I believe it is for this reason. God says what He does about divorce first of all because divorce violates His perfect plan. It violates His perfect plan for His highest creation. That was the intent of the heart of God in Genesis in creating the gift of marriage and giving it to the man and the woman, that they would come together and that they would reflect back on His glory. That was the highest privilege that God gave in terms of calling the man and the woman together. The beauty is that when God gives you the gift of singleness, He gives you that same capacity to reflect His glory and do it in a different way. God says one man one woman for life. When you read Genesis 2:24 and 25, you come away with two very distinct principles. Monogamy — one and one. Permanency. What God has joined together let no one put asunder. That goes against the picture of Christ and the church. Under what circumstance does Christ desert the church? He doesn't. He loves us faithfully no matter what.

Secondly, I believe God says what He does about divorce because divorce involves the breaking of a covenant. God is a covenant keeping God. This is the language of Scripture. Marriage is a covenant. We don't enter into a contract. Some people do. some people have distorted the idea and the purpose of marriage and literally drawn up contracts. That's not Biblical marriage. Biblical marriage is a covenant. We make vows before God and we make them before man. We do so understanding that this picture that God brings these two together is ultimately to reflect on that covenant relationship that He has established with us.

Thirdly, I believe God says what He does about divorce because it causes such great pain. If the essence of marriage is one flesh, then there's no painless way to tear one flesh apart. There's no painless way to tear one flesh apart. In Matthew 19:6, when Jesus in a different circumstance is asked about marriage and divorce, He says that familiar phrase: what God has joined together, let no man put asunder. Let no man put asunder, which is literally to tear apart. Let nobody try to separate. So in the midst of the pain, there is always the mercy and grace of God. God puts marriage before us in such a way that He wants us to see the uniqueness, the beauty, the glory of the marriage relationship. He wants us to enter into the beauty of a man and a woman coming together and reflecting back the glory of God. Therefore, He exalts marriage. He calls us to uphold honor and protect it.

So what can we take away from this in light of what Jesus says here and then with a view to coming back again next week and picking up the same place. It seems to me we just acknowledge that we're living out our life, and I would want to expand that statement. We're not just living out our marriage. We're living out our life. If you're a single person, you're living out your life as a single person. If you're married, you're living out your life as a married person in a fallen world. We live in a fallen world. What we do in the light of that?

We better be doing two things for sure. There are a lot of things we can be doing but we better be doing two things for sure. We better be alert. We better be alert because our enemy goes about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Who he devours are people who are apathetic and complacent and going through the motions, living life without passion, living life without focus, living life without any sense of goal in terms of reflecting back a life lived for the glory of God. We better be on the alert.

We better realize that we don't wrestle against flesh and blood. Your spouse, as much as you may be in conflict at this very time, is not your enemy. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places. My friend, we better be humble. We better be humble because the reality is we all fail every day. We fail our God every day. We fail each other every day. We fail our spouses every day. We fail our parents every day. We fail

our children every day. That is life in a fallen world. Life in a fallen world is best lived with the spirit of humility because God resists the proud but He loves to give grace to the humble. That is the place that we want to be because that is to live daily in the truth of the gospel.

Let's pray. Each one of us has an opportunity as we reflect on the words that God has spoken into our lives this morning where we might be in our relationship with Him and where we might be in our relationship with others. This is always a good opportunity for us to take a moment for self-reflection and a moment to simply ask God to do a work that is needed in each of our lives. Maybe it is simply for you to review the gospel. When Christ died, He died for you. You have believed that. You've accepted that. You've embraced that, but maybe you've allowed things in your life to crowd that out, to push that out. God just calls us to come back. If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Maybe you're here this morning and you would have to confess and say that you don't have a personal relationship with God. I want you to know that God is a pursuing God. You are here because God wants to speak His Word and His truth into your life this morning. That word and that truth is that He loves you, that Jesus died for you, and that there is new life awaiting everyone who puts their faith and trust in Christ alone. That's what we celebrate in just a moment here as we continue with baptism.

Father, we are exceedingly grateful that You are a God of grace and mercy and love. Father, we acknowledge and we readily confess that all of us have failed. We all fail so very regularly. We are so thankful that Your grace meets us each and every day right at the point of our need. Lord, I pray that the words that You have spoken to us through Your Word this morning would be welcomed and received in each heart, that we would love You with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength and we would love each other the way You called us to. I pray for Your healing mercy in the lives of marriages in this church. I pray that You would pull any back from the edge of considering divorce or separation or giving up, that they would see the hope of the gospel is always there. The good news of a new beginning is always available because of what Jesus has done for us. We are so thankful for Your grace. We pray these things in Jesus's name, amen.