



Matthew

Lesson 19

Jesus has spent much of the time of His short ministry around the region of Galilee. He and the disciples took missionary trips outside the region, but eventually they return to their homebase in Capernaum. From there they take short trips to the outlying areas to spread their message, and they receive varied responses from the people. Jesus' popularity has waned in that region since His declaration of being the Bread of Life and the description of the need for them to eat His flesh and drink His blood in order to have life. But that was actually an intentional call to sincerity of faith. Those who were willing to accept that difficult statement would be those who were convinced that He was not simply a crazy man, but His heavenly identity was beyond their understanding. But His time of ministry and doing the work of declaring the Kingdom is running short. He and the disciples will begin their last journey to

Jerusalem via Samaria and the surrounding area. He will declare the Kingdom to these places before He faces His final destiny in Jerusalem. He will also spend much time in personal teaching with the disciples. Jesus knows His time is running out, and soon they will take over the position of leadership that He now holds. There is much for them to learn, and much previous traditional learning that they have to let go of before they become responsible to be the main shepherds of God's sheep. They experienced the power of Heaven in the time they were sent out in Jesus Name, and that had to expand their faith and understanding of who Jesus really was. But, events in Jerusalem were soon coming that would take them far beyond what they were expecting and would stretch their faith to the limit.

READ CHAPTER 19

1. *What was the Pharisees' question to Jesus, and how was it a test? See also Deuteronomy 24:1-4.*



Divorce was a controversial topic in Jesus' day, with two main schools of thought, centered around two of its most famous proponents. The first was the school of Rabbi Shammai (a more strict and unpopular view) and second was the school of Rabbi Hillel (a more lax and popular view). In theory, the Jews of that day had a high ideal of marriage. Yet they had a low view of women. Their low view of women meant that their high ideal of marriage was constantly compromised, and those compromises were made into law, as with the thinking of Rabbi Hillel. Under the thinking of Hillel, "a man could divorce his wife if she spoiled his dinner, if she spun, or went with unbound hair, or spoke to men in the streets, if she spoke disrespectfully of his parents in his presence, or if she was a brawling woman whose voice could be heard in the next house. Rabbi Akiba even went the length of saying...that "a man could divorce his wife if he found a woman whom he liked better and considered more beautiful." (Barclay)

Each school of thought understood that the Mosaic law gave permission for divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1 When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house. Each side knew and believed Deuteronomy 24:1; the question was, “What constitutes uncleanness?”

The school of Rabbi Shammai understood that uncleanness meant sexual immorality, and said this was the only valid reason for divorce. The school of Rabbi Hillel understood uncleanness to mean any sort of indiscretion, even to the point where for some rabbis, burning a husband’s breakfast was considered valid grounds for divorce.

So in their question, the Pharisees tried to get Jesus to side with one teaching or the other. If He agreed with the lax school of Rabbi Hillel, it was clear that Jesus did not take the Law of Moses seriously. If He agreed with the strict school of Rabbi Shammai, then Jesus might become unpopular with the multitude, who generally liked access to an easy divorce. The religious leaders had reason to believe they had caught Jesus on the horns of a dilemma.

The Pharisees wanted to talk about divorce and rabbinical opinions, but Jesus wanted to go back to the Scriptures and talk about marriage. Jesus began with the first marriage - the one between Adam and Eve.

Divorce cannot be seen as a ready option when things are difficult in married life. Marriage is like a mirror; it reflects what we put into it. If one or both partners has divorce readily in their mind as a convenient option, divorce will be much more likely.

“If marriage is grounded in creation, in the way God has made us, then it cannot be reduced to a merely covenantal relationship that breaks down when the covenantal promises are broken.” (Carson)



*The Pharisees wrongly thought that God commanded divorce where there was uncleanness. One rabbinic saying of that day went: “If a man has a bad wife, it is a religious duty to divorce her.” But Jesus noted the difference between “**command**” and “**permitted**.” God never commands divorce, but He does permit it. Divorce is never commanded, but **permitted** by God in certain circumstances, and God permits it **because of the hardness** of human hearts. It was as if Jesus said this: “Here is the ideal, and here is the allowance of God when human sinfulness and hardness of heart has made the ideal unobtainable.”*

This teaching of Jesus shows us that marriage, as a promise made to God, to our spouse and to the world is a binding promise and cannot be broken at our own discretion. If God does not recognize the promise being broken, then it is not.

(All comments taken from Enduring Word Ministry by David Guzik, commentary on Matthew 19).



The meaning of the word “apolelumenen” or “a divorced woman” occurring in vs. 9 and Matthew 5:28-30 must be understood. It means the innocent dismissed wife of the licentious person described in Matthew 5:28-30 who dismisses his wife because he lusts after another woman and wants to marry her. Dismissing one’s wife for any reason other than her infidelity was forbidden by Christ, but people did it then as they do now. He expresses His concern about the dismissed, “apolelumenen” who is innocent. To clear a spouse dismissed in that way, the Lord insists that the OT provision in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 be adhered to, and the guilty party when dismissing an innocent spouse ought to clear her or him of guilt by giving a bill of divorcement. If the dismissed spouse was guilty, the punishment was death by stoning

(Deuteronomy 22:21), thus there would be no need for a bill of divorcement. The Lord in His pronouncement concerns Himself with the truly innocent and not with the one who may have been able to secure a legal divorce. Only the truly innocent have the moral, Scriptural right to remarry. The bill of divorce cleared the innocent party of the stigma of being considered an adulteress which is what would have followed them without that bill of divorce.

(paraphrase of Key Word Study Bible notes on Matthew 19)

2. *From reading Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12 and the above comments, give your understanding of what Jesus' verdict is on the question of divorce. (This is sometimes a very volatile subject so please give grace to those who differ with your conclusion. This is not to be used as a judgment of others' beliefs but teaching that may help us understand this principle for ourselves.)*

3. *How did the disciples react to Jesus' answer (vs.10), and what does that reveal about their understanding of His answer?*

4. *Why do you think the disciples reacted so negatively to Jesus' blessing the children?*

5. *The man who approached Jesus in Matthew 19:16 apparently led a righteous life but still knew he lacked something. What misunderstandings about salvation did this man have that you can immediately identify just from his question in vs. 16? What answer might he have expected?*

6. *Where would this man have fit in the parable of the soils in Matthew 13?*

Prayer requests:

Group time notes:
