

# ON THE MOVE WITH JESUS

## IN MARK

### (DAY 40)

*A unique, verse-by-verse,  
life-application commentary  
by Terran Williams*

#### DAY 40 – MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE (10:1-12)

##### COLOUR-CODE SUMMARY (THE FOUR MAIN WAYS GOD SPEAKS TO US THROUGH THE GOSPELS):

- **Blue** - something about Jesus' uniqueness and Lordship that shows he is worthy of our devotion, trust and surrender
- **Green** - something about Jesus' character or ministry that we can imitate
- **Red** - something Jesus taught that we can understand or apply to our lives
- **Orange** - insights we can apply based on the way various people responded to him

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?"

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."

5 "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied.

#### **A major reason people get divorced is that their hearts are hard.**

- From Mark 10:1 onwards, Jesus moved his ministry from Galilee in the north to Judea in the south. (The city of Jerusalem was in the province of Judea.)

- There was a popular debate amongst Jews at the time. There were two schools of thought about divorce in the sight of God. The most popular school of thought was that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all — even if he found a more attractive woman than his wife, or if she burnt the food, for example. The second school of thought was that only sexual unfaithfulness warranted a divorce. The Pharisees wanted Jesus’ opinion, asking him: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” (Matthew 19:3 adds the words “for any reason”).
- In response, Jesus pointed them to the Scriptures, asking them what Moses had commanded (the first five books were written by Moses). In response, they quoted Deuteronomy 24:1, where Moses permitted a man to divorce his wife, provided he gave her a certificate of divorce.
- Notice that Jesus didn’t ask them what Moses permitted, but rather what he *commanded*. We will see in verse 6-9 what he commanded, but for now Jesus comments on Deuteronomy 24:1. In verse 5, this is effectively what Jesus said, “Divorce was not at all what God or Moses wanted, but because it was so common (with people’s hearts being so hard) Moses allowed it, but did his best to protect the rejected woman by insisting that she get a certificate of divorce.” It seems that men were simply “kicking their wives out” without the dignity of a certificate, without any bother of setting her free to carry on with her life in any way. Moses and God were not saying that divorce was fine, just that if you must get divorced then do so in the least damaging way.
- But the main point Jesus makes is that divorce happens because people’s hearts are hard. For example, hardness of heart is what causes one spouse to neglect, stop loving or abuse the other. And it is hardness of heart which causes the wounded spouse to refuse to forgive, or to insist on revenge.
- Another related thought: Jesus is implying that in his kingdom it is possible to have a change of heart, which enables husbands and wives to stay together rather than end their marriage. (Ephesians 5:21-33 explains just how Christ’s coming makes this new softness of heart a reality in marriage.) Moses permitted divorce because the heavenly resources to keep hearts soft were *not* available in the old order of things. But Jesus does not permit it because the heavenly resources to keep hearts soft *are* available in the new order of the kingdom! That’s why Christian married couples should very intentionally send their roots down deep into Christ’s grace and keep their hearts soft and tender towards God and one another. This is the best way to avoid divorce.

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 no one separate.”

**Since marriage is a living union of two people, divorce is a kind of amputation.**

- In verse 3 Jesus asked them what Moses commanded them regarding marriage and divorce? They then quoted Deuteronomy 24:1, written by Moses where he *permits* divorce. After briefly commenting on why Moses permitted it, he then answered his own question by quoting a combination of Genesis 1:27 (“at the beginning of creation God made them male and female”) and Genesis 2:24 (“For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh”).
- Notice how Jesus shifts the conversation from divorce to marriage. In other words, we will never understand the nature of divorce until we understand the nature of marriage. So what do we learn about the nature of marriage according to Christ?

*1) Marriage is originally God’s idea.* This is implied by “in the beginning”. It’s his institution, and therefore he’s the one who has the authority to say both what it is, and how it is to work.

*2) Marriage is between a man and a woman,* where maleness and femaleness come together to complete the image of God (v6).

*3) Marriage creates a bond greater than even the blood-bond between parents and child.* This is why a man needs to leave his own parents (v7). It’s a way of saying that one’s own spouse should be more valuable and cherished than even one’s parents.

*4) Marriage is the union of two people into one new entity.* This entity is more than a legal contract or partnership between two people. It’s the deepest bonding humans can experience, so much so that they are now together described as “one flesh” (v8), which is another way of saying “a new human being”. Jesus hammers home this same point with his powerful words, “so they are no longer two but one”. Marriage is becoming one with another person, not just sexually, but also emotionally, spiritually, financially, in terms of identity and in other ways too.

*5) Marriage is God joining a man and a woman (v9).* God himself appears to be the “glue” that makes this one-flesh union.

- In verse 9, Jesus makes his main point: “What God has joined together, let man not separate.” He is saying that when you understand the profound one-ness of marriage, where two people becoming a living union, you understand why

divorce is like cutting a person in two. Divorce, far from being a mere legal procedure, is an amputation!

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.”

### **Divorce may be legal, but it's still wrong.**

- In light of marriage being a profound union of two people, we cannot merely dispose of a spouse, even though it is legal to do so, and think we got away with it. To divorce and remarry, which can also be restated as ‘to divorce in order to remarry’ may be legal, but it’s not right in the sight of God. It might not be a crime in our country, but it’s a sin in God’s eyes. It is wrong. Remarriage is a form of adultery, because a legal divorce certificate cannot sufficiently separate two people who were joined in marriage into a living union. The certificate may say we’re divorced, but the union is still a reality in God’s eyes.
- Why did Jesus not just say verse 11 and 12 publicly to the Pharisees? The reason is that he was in Judea near the Jordan (see verse 1). This is exactly where John the baptizer used to speak out against the way Herod murdered his wife, and remarried Herodias, who had divorced her previous husband (see 6:17,18). In other words, the Pharisees were trying to trap him (notice how verse 2 above says they were testing him). Jesus could see the trap and therefore didn’t directly speak out against it, but made his point just as well anyway in verse 9.
- Sadly, then as now, married people would dispose of their spouses for whatever reason, and move on and marry another. More tragically, many people, then and now, would divorce their partner because they found someone they deemed better. They would divorce in order to remarry. In that culture, if a woman was divorced she became almost worthless in society. She was seen as “used goods” and would often resort to prostitution as a means of survival. So divorce was even more cruel then than it is now.
- Eaton adds some pastoral comment to these verses, “Mark is obviously allowing generalization in his account of Christ’s teaching. Matthew adds an exception (namely adultery) to his account (see Matthew 5:32, 19:9). And Paul will accept that sometimes (rightly or wrongly) separation takes place (1 Corinthians 7:10,11,15). And it must be remembered that divorce is not an eternal sin (see Mark 3:28,29) — it can be forgiven, just like other sins.”