

# Interrogating Jesus: Marriage, Divorce, and Kids

Thomas Robinson, *Wide-Eyed – Listening to Jesus 2*, January 11, 2015

## **Matthew 19:1-15** (ESV Adapted; Cf. Mark 10:1-16)

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. <sup>2</sup> And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

<sup>3</sup> And **Pharisees** came up to him and tested him by asking, **“Is it lawful for a person to divorce his wife for any cause?”**

<sup>4</sup> He answered, **“Have you not read** that the one who created them from the beginning *‘made them something **male** and **female**,’* [Gen 1:27] <sup>5</sup> and said, *‘For this reason a man will leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’* [Gen 2:24] <sup>6</sup> So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

<sup>7</sup> They said to him, **“Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to divorce her?”** [Cf. Deut 24:1-4]

<sup>8</sup> He said to them, **“Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup> But I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”**

<sup>10</sup> The disciples said to him, **“If such is the case of a man with his wife, **it is not good to marry.**”**

<sup>11</sup> But he said to them, **“Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. <sup>12</sup> For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. **Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.**”**

<sup>13</sup> Then **children were brought to him** that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, <sup>14</sup> but Jesus said, **“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for **to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.**”** <sup>15</sup> And he laid his hands on them and went away.

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## **Matthew 5:27-32** *Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount*

<sup>27</sup> “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ [Exod 20:14] <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman to covet her already committed adultery with her in his heart.

<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into gehenna. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into gehenna.

<sup>31</sup> It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ [Cf. Deut 24:1-4] <sup>32</sup> But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

## **John 4:16-19** *Jesus speaking to a Samaritan Woman at a well.*

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, **“Go, call your husband, and come here.”** <sup>17</sup> The woman answered him, **“I have no husband.”** Jesus said to her, **“You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; <sup>18</sup> for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”**

<sup>19</sup> The woman said to him, **“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”**

## **Matthew 21:31-32 Jesus speaking to the Chief Priests and Elders in the Temple**

<sup>31</sup> Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup> For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him."

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### **What Did Jesus Just Say?**

Jesus' teaching had a distinctive and often very surprising character. People were used to hearing debates about interpreting the Law of Moses and knew there were various points of view rigorously held – Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and their schools. But when Jesus taught, it was different: "*he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*" (Mt 7:29). Jesus didn't join the debates but taught in a way that made legal application impossible – anger, sacrifice, desire, oaths, non-resistance, loving enemies, etc. (Mt 5).

The problem is that the disciples, Pharisees, and we want rules, clear laws that we can apply. The church through the ages has struggled with turning Jesus' teaching into laws. Jesus speaks with irony and vast hyperbole. He gives us credit for being intelligent hearers, who can discern ironic language and figures of speech, but we're caught in legal thinking.

### **The Law and the Intention of God**

The Pharisees ask about a 'person's' (*anthropos*) right to divorce his wife at will. That was the law as applied. Men had the rights, wives did not (Dt 24:1-4). The power structure was clear. Jesus ironically asks if they've ever read Genesis. God made the person/human both male and female. Gen. talks of a man leaving his parents to join his wife and become one flesh.

Divorce is a function of human sinfulness (hard hearts). Don't do it. The pattern of men having the right to throw away their wives (unless the marriage was immoral from the start) is an adulterous pattern. As Jesus saw men looking at a woman to covet/control her (Mt 5:27).

Jesus is calling people to a new/old way of thinking and acting. But he is not making a new law that makes divorce into adultery (a capital offense). He doesn't change the law at all but calls people to think and live by a vision of life that cannot be enforced by law courts.

### **Taking the Complexity of Human Life Seriously**

The disciples embody people's amazement: If men lose all their power, it's not profitable to marry. Remarkably, Jesus responds that not all people 'have room for' this 'word.'

(Not the disciples' dismissive remark, but Jesus' statement about God's will in Genesis.)

The law was still there, and half the population – women – had no power to stop divorce.

But human life was also complicated even for men. As an obvious example Jesus talks about eunuchs who can't follow the teaching or men who choose not to marry (?) for the sake of the kingdom. God's will sets an ideal that disciples will take very seriously but does not define a legal requirement into which every life must fit. It was this attitude that made it possible for Jesus to call disciples to such high standards while at the same time having sinners, tax-collectors, even prostitutes come to him with an anticipation of acceptance. Jesus called everyone to perfection! But he was creating God's grace for broken sinners.

### **Bring even the Kids**

People flocked to Jesus. They sensed his authority and holiness and wanted his blessing. They brought their little children for his touch and prayer. The disciples again don't quite get it.

They rebuke the people. Jesus welcomes them. The children stand in contrast to the Pharisees and even the disciples at this point. They receive the blessing. Jesus says God's kingdom belongs to such ones. Jesus calls people to live toward God's gracious, excellent rule.