

# How Jesus Got Marriage So Perfectly Right

## Thinking Christian Podcast

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Matthew 19:1-10:

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

“Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

“Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

### How Times Have Changed

My, how times have changed. And one big sign of that is the way a pastor preaches a passage like this one. It used to be that you’d read a passage like this and talk about how to keep a marriage strong and faithful. That’s still very relevant, and a very important topic to cover based on this passage.

But times have changed, as I said, and a whole new question has come up, with this passage at the center of it. It seems before you can even talk about how to keep a marriage strong, you have to talk about what marriage is.

Because marriage has come under enormous pressure, even the definition of what marriage is, and what it means, and what it's for.

And that's what I plan to cover today. We could talk about how to keep marriage strong, but how are you going to do that when you don't know what marriage is supposed to be in the first place.

And I'll bet some of you, when you hear me say that, you're going to think the question is about same-sex marriage. Actually, the problem is a lot older than that.

## **B Track**

So this isn't a talk about same-sex marriage. It's a talk about marriage. It goes back years, even decades before anyone ever mentioned same-sex marriage, at least in public. I don't recall anyone talking much about it until well after the year 2000. But we've had trouble figuring out exactly what marriage is, and what it's for, since at least 30 to 40 years before that. fff

## **Previewing the Structure**

So here's what I want to do in today's message. I'm going to talk about what marriage is from four angles:

1. Jesus View of Marriage
2. Challenges to Jesus' View: Did he really know what he was talking about?
3. Answering the question by looking a look at reality from a direction you've probably never considered it before
4. Marriage is loving like God loves
5. Conclusion: Jesus knew exactly what he was talking about.

## **Problems Way Before Same-Sex Marriage**

Seriously, How many of us think marriage was doing just fine before the gay marriage debate, or before the Supreme Court decision that made it legal in 2015? I could cite statistics on divorce, but I don't need to. Many of you are living it, and it's tragic. It's painful. Some of you lived it when your parents' marriage broke apart. Some of you are feeling the struggle in your own marriage: It's hard, you're not sure how you can make it together, and you wonder what to do about it. Others of you see it in your kids' marriages, the tragedy of watching their hopes and dreams turn into pain and loss.

So as I said, I could cite statistics, but what would that tell you that you don't already know. You know that marriage hasn't been what it ought to be. I know some of you may even have reached the point of giving up on it. You've seen too many failures, felt too much betrayal, too much loss.

But some have been, well, luckier, you might say. By God's grace, I'm one of them. My dad and mom stayed married and in love until Mom died, and my dad loved her just as much and longed to be with her until he passed away

years later. My wife, Sara, and I are still crazy in love with each other. I proposed to her on Valentine's Day 35 years ago, and we're still going strong.

## **Jesus' View of Marriage**

Marriage can work. It takes work to make it work, but it can work. And this passage tells us God meant it to work. It's clear what Jesus thought marriage was meant to be, for he obviously saw it as a permanent, living relationship between man and woman, husband and wife.

It's a strong, exclusive relationship. The man leaves the home of his birth and creates a new one, where he lives with his wife in unity, so close that we can even call them one flesh. It's permanent. Divorce is in the picture sometimes, but Jesus tells us it's not supposed to be. It happens, but it's not a part what marriage is meant to be. Marriage is meant to be for life.

And we've got to take note of the sequence here. The man leaves home. He makes that lifelong commitment to the woman. And only then do they become one flesh. Jesus is reinforcing a teaching you find everywhere in the Bible: sex is for married persons.

## **Did Jesus Know What He Was Talking About?**

Now, did Jesus know what he was talking about? I'd say he must have. He was God in the flesh, the one true Logos, the living Word of God. What he taught was true.

But I know a lot of people think they have a better idea. They think trial marriages are a good idea. They think marriage can have all other kinds of shapes and forms. They think sex doesn't have to have anything to do with marriage.

But I believe I can help you see how Jesus had it right after all, and one way to do that is by taking us back in time, back in time, just 100 years or so, but back to a time when it wasn't so easy to say that sex didn't have anything to do with marriage. We're going to spend a few moments here now talking about life in general. I'll bring it back to the scriptures again before I finish, and I think you'll see things in a whole new light by then.

## **Answering the Question by Going Back in Time**

But some of you are going to have to use some imagination here. What you'll be imagining isn't imaginary, it's real; it's just a reality you have trouble picturing in your mind. Compared to the whole scope of human history it wasn't that long ago, just an eyeblink, but oh, how times have changed since then. And here's the change.

Imagine you're in love with someone. Deeply in love. The two of you are crazy for each other. You want to be close. You can hardly stand to be apart. You want to be closer yet. But this isn't today, this is 1922. Today the only question

so many people ask is, “Are we consenting adults?” Back then the question would be, “What if we conceive a child together?”

That question wouldn’t just be in the back of your mind. It would be right up front. You’d know, just as much as you know you love each other, that going all the way with each other might mean going all the way to parenthood.

The mom would be ostracized. She might have to go into hiding. One of my own aunts had two daughters that *no one* in our family knew about. She put them up for adoption. They went to two different families. Both of them decided in their 40s that they wanted to find out the truth about their birth mothers. They got the records, they contacted us, and all of a sudden I have two more cousins I never knew I had. Aunt Mary had kept it hidden, because women just didn’t have babies if they weren’t married. I know, I know, it’s unfair that didn’t happen to the men, and I agree. I’m just saying that’s how it was.

Here’s the thing about having a child, though. That child will need parents. Those parents ought to be married to each other, so the child can grow up with the best possible future.

By the way, did I mention to you that there’s absolutely tons of research showing that kids really do have a better go of life, if they grow up in a stable home with a mom and dad who love each other?

### **Marriage, Children, Sex — The Inseparable Triad**

So you’d really want to think twice before you messed with nature that way. Sex and children and marriage were a triad. They went together. They couldn’t be separated. Of course we all know that sin isn’t such a recent invention, so people had affairs and premarital sex, but they did it at great risk.

So if you were smart, if you were that couple in love, you did things in the right order. You waited until you’d already made that marriage. You did it even if you didn’t believe in the Bible. And by the way, it really was smart. Even financially. Research today still shows that the number one biggest predictor of financially healthy life is to take things in this order.

- Graduate (at least high school)
- Get a job
- Get married.
- Have kids
- In that order

### **That’s How It Was, But Which Way is Better?**

So now, here’s the key question we ought to be asking: Is it better the way it was then, or the way it is now? Is it better to keep marriage and sex and children connected, or is it better that we can kind of separate them now, that sex doesn’t have to mean children, and it doesn’t have to mean marriage, and that even marriage doesn’t have to mean you have children.

Which way is better? Better for whom? You'd better be sure to ask that part of the question, too. Who might it be good for?

If you're the guy or the girl right now, you might think it's pretty limiting. You have to wait. That's hard. It's always been hard, but it's even harder now, with all the expectations people build up, in the media and in peer pressure, and with the idea that, you know, sex doesn't have to mean any responsibility, it's just for your pleasure. Just for your pleasure — that's a thought I plan to return to in a couple minutes, because it's not all it's cracked up to be.

### **Better for Whom?**

But yes, the couple might think it's limiting. You know who it's better for? *Obviously* better? *Unquestionably* better? I mean, the whole idea of being married, then having kids, and then staying married? It's better for children. It's wa-a-a-ay better for kids.

I could cite you research again. Hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of studies. They're consistent: Kids who grow up with a mom and dad who are married and love each other end up with a better go at life than kids who don't. I tell you, I have great respect for single parents who do it well. I have great respect for anyone who grew up in a single-parent home or a blended family, and who overcame the obstacles to become a person of strong relationships and strong character. But make no mistake: They had obstacles there.

So like I said, I could cite you research, but again, I don't need to. I could just ask you. Some of you were lucky like I was: You grew up in a stable home with parents who loved each other, and had a lasting, healthy, caring relationship with each other and with their kids. I'll bet you're glad, right? A lot of you didn't have that. I'll bet most of you wish you had. Because we all know that's how it ought to be, how it's better.

It's better for the couple, too, believe it or not. Living responsibly is good. Putting sexual intimacy on a higher level is good.

### **Loving Like God Loves**

And putting love on a higher level is good. This isn't just love for each other. This isn't what I call a "just you'n'me, babe" relationship. This love overflows. It grows and multiplies as you have children, as you love your children. The more you love, the more joy you have. And this love overflows not just into your family but beyond. You start caring about more than yourself, more than each other, and even more than your children. You care about their schools, their friends, their athletic teams and clubs. You care about the community they grow up in.

And here's where we must bring it back around to the Scriptures, just before we close. I want you to think about the character of God. Which kind of love do you think is more like God's love? The kind that cares for others? The kind that sacrifices? Or the kind that's just you and me, babe?

God is three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all living in a perfect eternal relationship of love. And God decided to let that love overflow into a creation full of other people to love. To give to. To sacrifice for, as Jesus did so greatly when he came to live with us, die for us, and rise again for us.

Now, can you imagine why this might be the kind of thing God had in mind when He created marriage? Do you think it's any accident that he designed us so that our biology would point us that direction? God is not a god of "just you'n'me babe" relationships. He's a God of overflowing, self-sacrificial, joyful, giving, expanding love. He's a God who creates.

You have to understand this is a package deal. It works when we see marriage, children, and sex as all being connected. Take one of those and make it optional, and the whole thing falls to pieces. And above all else it falls on the children.

So if you are married, think in terms of what God intended for marriage. That it be lasting. Loving. Giving. Self-sacrificial. If you're struggling in it, find help. Commit to growing as an individual and growing together as a couple. Commit to making it for the sake of your kids.

If you're not married, plan to do things in the right order. Graduate. Get a job. Get married. Let the physical intimacy happen then, not sooner. It's better that way. Better for you, better for your kids, better for your community.

## **A Closing Story**

I must close with a story. It's a strange one, but it happened, in fact it happened to me. It's one of those "I wish I'd said that stories," and you'll see why when I'm done.

It was about 30 years ago. I was in the gift and book shop at the airport in Orange County, California. I was probably buying a chocolate bar for the flight or something. And this man came up to me, probably about 30, 35 years old, balding, wearing what I call California creative clothes: a leather vest, beads, and so on. And he pointed toward the back wall, the magazine rack where the magazines were half covered with brown paper. Playboy. Hustler. I don't know what else, because I didn't take time to study them. He pointed toward them, and he said, "You should buy one of those."

That was weird. I mean, who does that in an airport gift shop? I know how weird it must sound, but it happened. I said to him, "No way, I'm a happily married man." He said, "You don't know what you're missing." I said "No" again, and I got away from him as fast as I could.

It was only later that I realized how I'd missed my chance. I should have whipped around and said, "NO. *You* don't know what you're missing. You think it's great looking at pictures. I know what it's like loving and being loved by a real woman. Someone who knows me. Someone who loves me for keeps, who loves me as a whole person, and who I can love as whole person. I know what

it's like when you can trust the person you love, too. You think I don't know what I'm missing? I think I do, actually, and I wouldn't trade it one second for what I have. You're the one who doesn't know what he's missing."

Doing it God's way is better. Better for the couple, as I wish I'd told that strange guy in California. Better for being a whole person, a real person, a person who can give and experience love. And better for the children, too. Way better. The parents have to give. They have to sacrifice. But how much better it is that way!

Did Jesus know what he was talking about? I know he did, because he was God in the flesh. And I also know it because I can see it with my own eyes. It was true then, it's true today. And we're a whole lot better off if we live it out his way.

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