

A Different Direction – Pr Jim Sprengle, Pentecost 18, October 3, 2021

- I. **Mark 10:9** - ⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.
- II. **We love to do things on our terms...**
 - a. Isn't it just human nature to always look for the ways we can make something our own?
 - i. For example, little kids... as parents we try to give our kids choices so they can do things on their terms (within our care of course.)
 - ii. So, we lay out the clothes for school and say these are the choices...
 1. What happens? Why can't I wear PJ's? What about my dinosaur costume? How about this Wonder Woman outfit with a cape and golden lasso? Why not the Spiderman shirt I've been wearing for 36 hours straight?
 2. We try to explain that these are the rules, and you have to abide by them... and then they say, well how about if I wear the top you picked for me, but I wear the pajama bottoms?
 3. We explain that the choices are only on the bed, and no others... so they say, okay, how about I wear this outfit but the dinosaur slippers... you never put what kind of shoes I have to wear on the bed!!
 - iii. Now, can you feel my pain here? Can you relate to the way that our kids will look at a boundary, poke all around to see how firm it is, then try to exploit whatever possible weak points there are?
 - iv. Even at the earliest ages we try to make something our own... our own way... our own terms... our own opinions... our own design.
 - b. It is the same with the institution of marriage.
 - i. People have not honored God's desire for marriage since sin and evil entered the world through Adam and Eve.
 - ii. I suppose that Adam and Eve had the perfect relationship and connection before they sinned against God, but the institution of marriage has suffered from sin and selfishness and pride since the first two people decided they knew better than God.
 - c. Now, when I'm talking about marriage, I don't assume everyone agrees with a single understanding or definition.
 - i. Unfortunately, a great deal of energy has gone into changing public opinion about what marriage is and whether it's important or not.
 - ii. When public opinion defines marriage... or right and wrong versus what God intends... it's time to stop and reorient our thinking.
 - iii. Here's the problem though, we are a lot like the kid picking out their outfit for the day... God has placed the right things before us, and we begin looking for some way to make it our own... to do it on our terms.

- d. I'm sure you've heard phrases from other pastors or Christian speakers like, "traditional marriage is under attack," or, "traditional family values are falling apart," or maybe, "marriage is no longer important and highly regarded as it once was."
 - i. If you are like many people who hear these things... you might roll your eyes and think – broken record... I've heard this a million times... tell me something new already!
- e. I'm not here to tell you something new, I'm here to tell you something true.
 - i. Marriage is not ours to define, change or adapt to our way of thinking – marriage is God's... He instituted (started) it at the very beginning of creation, and we are not the ones who get to define how it works.

III. **Jesus will not let us off the hook in the past several weeks...**

- a. He just keeps teaching these challenging lessons about God's will – whether it be trusting in God above all things, being humble and a servant, or the terrible toll that sin plays in our lives.
- b. Today, Jesus has traveled with His followers toward His fate on the cross – we are seeing Jesus in His last few stops before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- c. It was pretty normal for Jesus to run into Pharisees and teachers of the law when He got closer to Jerusalem and the surrounding towns.
- d. In this instance, they seek to test Him – they are probably trying to get Jesus to contradict God's commands, and then they can discredit Him throughout the crowds.
- e. They ask a difficult question, "is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?" vs 2
 - i. And Jesus takes control of the situation by asking a question in return... "What does the Law of Moses say?" vs 3
 - 1. Moses wrote in Deuteronomy 24 that a man can just give a certificate of divorce and be on his way.
 - 2. Yes, Jesus says, but that was not the way God wanted it from the beginning... it was because of the hardness in our hearts that these things happened.
 - ii. Jesus then clarifies the will of God –
 - 1. From the beginning God created and established marriage for one man and one woman to live together forever in a covenant.
 - 2. God does not want anyone to take apart what He puts together.

IV. **The hardness of our hearts...**

- a. In our sinful nature, we harden our hearts to God's will and deal with relationships on our terms.
- b. We have all these standards about how our needs should be met by others in relationships, but lower the standards when it comes to what we do.
- c. And I know all you single people out there are might be thinking, I'm sure glad Pr Jim isn't beating me up today – but it goes for you too, because God's will is that we love others as we love ourselves... all of us fail.

- d. Isn't that the trouble? We have a terrible time loving others... and it goes back to sin.
- e. It is the hardness of our hearts, but God has a beautiful picture of our hearts turning from stone to flesh – of reconciliation...

V. **God gives us a different direction.**

- a. In Ezekiel 36, God says, “And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ez. 36:26-27)
- b. Paul also tells us in 2 Corinthians 5, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; [as it was] For our sake [the Father] made [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Cor. 5:17-18; 21)
- c. Jesus paid... Jesus was crushed... Jesus died in our place.
 - i. Jesus paid for that divorce. He paid for that terrible relationship. He paid for the hardness of heart and doing our will instead of His. He paid for all broken relationships and selfishness and living life on our terms rather than His.
 - ii. And... in return... He gives us new hearts and fills us with the Spirit.
- d. He reconciles and gives new life, and enables us to live in His way.

VI. **Marriage and relationships need God's direction.**

- a. I want to be very clear today, that sometimes a broken marriage is unavoidable – when there are patterns of abuse and violence, sexual sins, or criminal behaviors among other things, a divorce might be unavoidable.
 - i. When one person abandons their marital vows and covenant and chooses not to fulfill them anymore, it might lead to a divorce.
- b. Yet, for every divorce that is justifiable, many more are based on selfishness and an unwillingness to forgive or reconcile.
- c. Instead of looking for the “out” – I think we can do better than coming up with all the reasons why a divorce might be okay...
 - i. Instead of being like the little kid wanting to see just how far the boundaries can be pushed, it is much better to see it God's way and walk in His will.
- d. God wants marriage to reflect Him in this world... and it is possible.
 - i. As married couples live in forgiveness, sacrificial love, and fulfill the covenant that ties them together by God's hand... we are like little microcosms of Jesus and the Church (His bride – Eph. 5:24ff).
 - ii. People look upon a godly marriage and see God at work in the world.
- e. And regardless of our marital status, we can hold up marriage and support it the way God defines it in His Word.

- f. And remember, all of this is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts... and because we are new people in Christ, we don't need an out – because we are “all in” – Amen.