The True Meaning of Marriage

Mark 10:1-12

Key Verse:10:9 “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

When I married, I was 30 years old. At that time people called me an old bachelor because most men got married before the age 30. But today it is a different story. My nephew is 34 years old, but he doesn’t think about his marriage. Not only him but most Korean young men are in the same situation as my nephew because they have a negative viewpoint of marriage. Before they marry, they worry about housing, children education, and retirement plans. They also worry about their conflicts with their spouse-to-be and divorce because they see many divorced couples around them. Statistically speaking, 15 % of newly-wed couples in Korea and 45 % in America today end with divorce. I heard that divorces among seniors are increasing in the world. Then, what’s wrong with this world? Why can people not keep their marriage and family? In today’s passage Jesus answers for all. He teaches us the true meaning of marriage in response to the question about divorce.

First, the certificate of divorce (1-5, 10-12) Jesus left Capernaum and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Jesus must have prepared himself for returning to Jerusalem for the day of his crucifixion. Again, crowds of people came to him. Jesus did not avoid them, but as was his custom, he taught them. (1) At that time some Pharisees came and tested Jesus by asking, “***Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?***” (2) They asked this question to test Jesus and to find a basis to accuse him. Jesus replied, “***What did Moses command you***?” (3) Jesus knew their evil motive in this question. So, he counter-questioned about Moses’ law. They said, “***Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away***.” (4) They answered this based on Deuteronomy 24:1, which says, “*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeased with him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house*.” This verse shows that Moses allowed divorce. But when we read it carefully and prayerfully, the motivation for writing a certificate of divorce was to protect women from evil and abusive men. Moses’ day was a male-dominant society. Women and children were not even counted in number. Wives served their husbands as slaves served their master. If a husband found something indecent about his wife, he could divorce his wife. We don’t know what indecent things exactly were. If she burnt her cooking, she could have been divorced. If she overslept, she could have been kicked out of her house. Whatever displeased her husband could be an excuse for divorce. Weak and vulnerable wives became only victims from their evil, violent, and abusive husbands.

Jesus knew men’s evil motivation for divorce. So, he said in verse 5. “***It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,” Jesus replied.***” Jesus meant that Moses permitted the certificate of divorce because the motivation for their divorce was evil and that he wanted to protect women from their evilness. Today there are many reasons for divorce. When I checked them on the internet, they were about financial difficulties, incompatibility, domestic violence, infidelity, and so on. I believe that among them, infidelity is the most common. People divorce because they have sinned. They are not responsible for their marriage vows. They divorce because they are selfish. Some divorce because of their children, but most divorce for themselves. The result of divorce is painful and costly. Mainly their children hurt. I had a Bible student named David while I was in Chicago. His parents divorced when he was five years old. Since then, he had lived with his single mother until he became over 40 years old. I asked him why he didn’t marry. He answered that he was afraid of being divorced like his parents. He suffered from depression and other mental illnesses. A family is the most basic and important unit for society. If a family is broken, the foundation of a society and a nation are shaken.

The Bible says that God hates divorce. (Mal 2:16) This is because our God is faithful. He wants to see a husband and a wife to be faithful to each other. God wants them to keep their marriage vow, to protect their children, and to contribute to their society. Divorce does not come from God, but from men. God allows divorce because man's heart is hard and their motivations are evil. Look at verses 10-12. “***When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery***.” In these verses Jesus judges their motivation for divorce. If they divorce to marry another man or woman, they commit adultery. Their motivation for divorce is wrong and evil in the sight of God. Jesus explained more in Matthew 5:31-32, “*It has been said, ‘Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery*.” Jesus allowed an excuse for divorce under marital unfaithfulness, but he still hates divorce. I ask all our families here not to divorce in the name of Jesus Christ. If you are already divorced, remain as a single unit and be devoted to God who is faithful. Amen.

Second, a happy marriage (6-9) Now Jesus turns his topic from a sad divorce to a happy marriage. Jesus teaches us the true meaning of marriage and happy family. He starts with the first marriage in the beginning. Look at verse 6. “***But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female***.’ No doubt that Jesus teaches us that a marriage should be done between a male and a female, not between a male and a male or a female and a female. Jesus continues in verses 7-8. “***For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh***.” Jesus teaches that a marriage starts with being independent from their parents to commit to each other. Before they get married, they depend on their parents. But after they marry, they become independent from their parents and depend on each other. The words, “*The two will become one flesh. They are no longer two, but one flesh.*” has deeper meaning than just a physical union. This means they make every effort to be one for their perfect unity. Indeed, it is difficult to expect perfect unity because a marriage is done between two imperfect human beings. I heard one lady complain about her husband saying, “My husband was not like this when we got dated. He has changed.” But, in reality he has not changed but has remained the same. Her eyes were blinded when she dated. If a woman expects perfection from her husband, she has to study Genesis 2 again. When God initiated the first marriage, he had compassion on a man who was alone. God said, “*It is not good for a man to be alone*.” (Ge 2:18) God himself admitted that he made man imperfect. It was not good for a man to be alone. So, God made a woman to be his suitable helper. (Ge 2:18) Because man is not perfect, God made a woman to make him perfect. So, all women must remember that there are no perfect husbands on this earth because they were born imperfect. If she wants a perfect husband, she will remain single until Jesus comes again. Therefore, what is a married life? A marriage life is a process of making perfection between the imperfect male and female.

Marriage is sacred because it is done under God. Look at verse 9. “***Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.***” Jesus teaches us about the seriousness of a marriage vow. Marriage is not child’s play. It is not allowed for them to easily set apart. This is because a marriage is like a covenant relationship with mutual commitment. A covenant is more than a promise, but a sacred contract before God and before people. When I married, I came to realize that a marriage is a public proclamation for being one before God and people. At that time, not only my parents, but also many relatives, friends, and co-workers attended to bless my wedding. A marriage is not only a promise between two, but also between God and them and between their families and all people around them.

God initiated a marriage and officiated the marriage. “What God has joined together, let no one separate.” is God’s officiating message. What God has joined together, let no one separate. A marriage is not a one day date, but eternal commitment. There are two kinds of marriages in this world. One is an ungodly marriage and the other, a godly marriage. Ungodly marriage is done by their own choices and decisions according to their human condition. Godly marriage is done by God’s divine sovereignty and providence. The godly couple acknowledge God as the head of their marriage. They believe that their marriage came from God and admit that God joined them together. They make every effort to make one in Christ. They admit that they are imperfect, so they help each other to make perfect in God. They bear each other's weak points with the love of Christ and pray for each other to grow in the image of Christ. They love each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. They respect each other as servants of God. They believe that children are gifts of God and fruits of their marriage. Children grow as people of God under their parents’ prayer and care. They worship God as the center of their family and head of their marriage.

While studying about house churches in the Bible, I had a chance to compare each family among the patriarch such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Among three Isaac’s family was exemplary for us. Abraham’s family had conflicts since Abraham got Hagar, a maidservant of Sarah, as his concubine. Sarah was not a spiritual woman. Jacob’s family, Abraham’s grandson, was not peaceful at all. Jacob had 4 wives and 12 children. There was not even one day without tension and conflict among Jacob’s family. Isaac’s family was different from them. Isaac had only a wife Rebekah, who obeyed to marry him even though she had never seen him before. Isaac’s marriage was initiated by Abraham who had wanted to have Isaac’s wife from a godly woman. So, he sent his servant to find a godly woman among his relatives to Paddan Aram. Abraham’s servant prayed for God’s providence and guidance. Isaac’s marriage started with prayer. After their marriage, Isaac and Rebekah prayed for their children for 20 years. There was no scandal or conflicts between the two for those years. This is because their marriage started with prayers of God’s people. God blessed this godly couple in many ways.

God wants to bless a marriage. He loves to see the increase of happy families. Jesus performed his first miracle in the wedding banquet in Cana Galilee. Jesus changed water into wine. By changing water into wine Jesus blessed the wedding and all the guests. Jesus wants to bless each family today. He wants to perform one miracle after another in our family. Let us welcome Jesus in our marriage and family. Above all, let us welcome Jesus into our heart as our Lord and Savior. He will change us and bless us. He will make each marriage and family blessed. When a couple marry, they exchange their rings as a sign of commitment. Their rings are not only for each other, but also for God. We must remember that our marriage is created by God, officiated by God, and blessed by God. Let us pray that God may establish many godly and happy families and house churches among us and in this country. Say ‘Yes for a happy family,’ and ‘No for a sad divorce.’ Amen. Let us read verse 9 again.