

Matthew 21-08-08a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We continue our study in Matthew chapter 19. We'll read our passage.

This is something of a problem passage. Um, I know any number of people near and far in my family and beyond them where divorce has been an issue. And whenever you get to a divorce passage in scripture and you think, well, what if people are going to feel bad? What if, you know, there's a divorce in the past and is this going to be some kind of fire and brimstone raining down, uh, mistake, mistake on, people who have gone through that experience.

So the, that's good. Just turn it down. It's green.

It should be red. Yes. Okay.

Well, Matthew, you'll have a, have a fun editing process here. As I said, um, this subject therefore, uh, can be, uh, awkward shall we say, especially for the presenter. And so, uh, there is a tension between not wanting to, uh, make anyone feel bad or, uh, go back and, uh, dig up old bones or, uh, problems in the past that, uh, might've been experienced and, uh, do a good job of communicating the word of God.

Thankfully, uh, the truth of the word of God is such that we need not, uh, go back and agonize or, uh, cause ourselves undue problems. And the overarching, uh, reminder in regard to things like this is a, everyone has things in their historical past that they wish weren't there. Everyone, everyone has made mistakes or missteps, bad calls, bad judgment, small and large.

Everyone. This is the reason Jesus came and died on the cross to deliver us from our sins, not just to bear the penalty, but to deliver us. He will deliver his people from their sins.

This is not just the fact of sin or the penalty of sin, but also the consequences of our sin, the consequences of our fallen nature and our inability in our own strength to live in a way that pleases God. So there are different ways you can look at, uh, those things in the past that make us wince and make us cringe and, uh, make us feel bad. Uh, and it's one of these glass half full glass, half empty kind of things.

Um, and you remember our memory verse to the extent that things are good, to the extent that they are noble, that they are lovely, that they are, uh, of good report. Think on these things. And we can always find something about ourselves to feel bad about.

We can always look around and find something about others to criticize or look askance at. This is not the biblical perspective. This is not God's way.

Uh, God does not look at us and see our history. God looks at us and sees our present and our potential for the future for getting those things, which are behind we pressed or the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. But we're going to find that, uh, we're not just going to dive into Matthew 19 and Jesus talking about divorce and say, boo on divorce.

And if, if any of us have been in one near one had one, uh, that, that it's, uh, it's going to be a dark, bleak morning. Um, we're going to see this morning that this passage has much more in it than meets the eye. So let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study.

And we'll get started. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together to seek to understand your word better to learn and to grow and to, uh, look forward to those wonderful potentials that are ours in Christ. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy spirit will help us to understand it and to see how it pertains and how it applies in our own lives, uh, both in its, uh, in its literal sense and in its spiritual import, uh, for all of us, uh, regardless of our, uh, marital situation or marital history.

We, we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. Having, uh, given the introduction, let's go ahead and read our passage.

This is Matthew chapter 19, beginning at verse one. Uh, we have a note that Jesus is doing some traveling at this point. Uh, he has been in Capernaum and the things that we've seen in the last few chapters, basically, uh, all took place in a single day.

It was a very extended, busy, uh, time. And with the conclusion of that, it came to pass chapter 19, verse one of Matthew, when Jesus had finished these sayings. And we have a confirmation and affirmation that these sayings were finished in a day.

He finished these sayings. He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. Great multitudes followed him and he healed them there.

The Pharisees also came to him, testing him and saying to him, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason? He answered and said to them, have you not read that he who made them at the beginning made them male and female and said, for this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh. So then they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate.

They said to him, why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away? He said to them, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality and marries another commits

adultery.

And whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery. His disciples said to him, if such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, all cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given.

For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb. There are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men. And there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake.

He who is able to accept it, let him accept it. Let's begin by looking at the context and the audience and the location where these words are delivered. It came to pass when Jesus had finished these sayings that he departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

There is no region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And this is something of a mistranslation. What this indicates is that Jesus is leaving the region where he has been, which is Capernaum and Environs, and is starting his trip toward Jerusalem.

This is going to be the final trip to Jerusalem. In so doing, he is not going to go through Samaria. So the beyond the Jordan phrase does not attach to Judea or the land of the Jews per se.

Beyond the Jordan attaches to he departed and came beyond Jordan. And all this indicates is that he is in the area known as Perea, P-E-R-E-A. Now Jesus was in Perea some months earlier.

If you will turn to Luke chapter 16. We need to see some of what went on when Jesus was last in Perea. In chapter 15 of Luke, the beginning of that chapter says, All the tax collectors and sinners drew near to him to hear him.

The Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. These are the same Pharisees that we see in our Matthew passage. There are Pharisees throughout the land on both sides of the Jordan.

These Pharisees see Jesus. And so he then gives the parables of lost things. We've studied those in detail when we went through Luke.

But skip down now to Luke chapter 16, verse 14, which is after the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the lost son, the unjust steward. We just saw the unforgiving servant in our Matthew chapter 18. In chapter 16, on an earlier occasion, Jesus had talked about the steward that was in trouble with his master.

And so he called in his master's debtors and reduced their debts to try to make friends before he gets kicked out of his master's house. Then Jesus went on to talk about

faithfulness in stewardship in verses 10 through 13. No servant can serve two masters.

He will either hate the one and love the other or the other way around. You cannot serve God and mammon, God and materialism, God and money. Now, this again is months earlier.

The last time Jesus was in Perea, this was the standard route people would take to go from south to north and north to south to avoid Samaria. So the last time Jesus was there in verse 14 of Luke 16, the Pharisees who were lovers of money also heard all these things and they derided him. He said to them, you are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.

For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time, the kingdom of God has been preached and everyone is pressing into it.

You remember we saw those words in Matthew many chapters ago. That was back in Matthew chapter 11. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail.

Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery and whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. And then he goes on to tell the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Luke 16, a very famous landmark in Luke is chapter 16 and the rich man and Lazarus story. But just preceding that, the Pharisees in this region of Perea didn't like Jesus talking about their materialism, materialism, condemning it through the parable of the unjust steward.

And Jesus rebukes them and calls them out for esteeming among themselves what is an abomination in God's sight and trying to force their own standard of righteousness as a claim on the kingdom. It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tiny detail, one tittle, one corner of a letter of the law to fail. Then seemingly out of the blue, Jesus says, whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery.

Whoever marries her who is divorced from her husband commits adultery. Why does he suddenly say this in the Luke 16 context? It is a species. It is a prominent example of their self-justification without reference to the spirit of the law of God.

They are trying to force their way into the kingdom by leveraging wording and what they see to be loopholes in the law or opportunities in the law to justify what they want to do. Does this ever happen today? Do people vindicate and justify their behavior by proof texting, finding a verse of scripture and using that as justification for what you really wanted to do all along? And you want to try to be thought of as righteous, declared righteous. You want to convince yourself that God's going to be pleased because it's in the Bible somewhere.

That's what these Pharisees in Perea were specifically guilty of using the law as an excuse to do what they wanted to do. Remember in other places, Jesus said, you use the law to excuse yourselves and declare all of your possessions. Corban, you can't support your parents because I've dedicated my estate to God and the temple when I die.

And so I can't be spending what I've devoted to God on you people. So live in squalor. I'm not going to do anything for you because my money, I can, of course, spend it on myself, but I can't spend it on you because whatever's left when I'm gone is going to go to God.

And this kind of awful, evil thinking permeates these people. So why does Jesus go in verse 18 to the subject of divorce amongst these Pharisees? Well, you could get this from Alfred Edersheim, and I think it's in the Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah. It's a huge compendium.

There's a wealth of isagogical information of cultural and historical knowledge that's been gleaned from rabbinical writings from Josephus and elsewhere. And if you consult Edersheim, and I encourage you to do so on this subject, if you go to, I believe it's book four, chapter 22 in Edersheim, he talks about the cultural situation and the practice that was prevalent in Jesus' day regarding divorce. I'll try to summarize it for you.

Briefly, there were, and not all of this is in Edersheim, but most of it is, but here it is in a nutshell. There were two basic schools of thought in the religious world of the Pharisees, the rabbis, the chief priests and scribes, and so on. And they were essentially represented by Shammai and Hillel.

You've heard those names before. There was the school of Shammai. It's kind of like, are you a Calvinist or are you an Arminian? And there were people who would say, wait a minute, I don't agree with Hillel on everything, or I don't agree with Shammai on everything.

But there were these sort of formal schools of thought. One was attempting to be very conservative. The other was very liberal.

So the school of Shammai, they were the nitpickers. You had to be really nailed down in point of fact, with regard to the law. This was the school of Shammai.

The school of Hillel, the easy way to remember it is, Hillel is from the same root as Hallel, where we get hallelujah. And I always remember that the Hillel school was the liberal school because they're just rejoicing in the fact that they can use the law to do whatever they want. They were very lax.

They were very liberal. They would find all kinds of loopholes and just do whatever they wanted and not worry too much about the details. So the law that pertains here is in Deuteronomy chapter 24.

So let's take a look at that because this is the substance of the test that these Pharisees are going to bring before the Lord Jesus. So go back to Deuteronomy, Deuteronomos. This is the explication of the law after its initial delivery.

When a man takes a wife, this is Deuteronomy 24.1. Man takes a wife and marries her. It happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, some fault in her. And he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house.

When she has departed from his house and goes and becomes another man's wife, if the latter husband detests her and writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies who took her as his wife, then her former husband who divorced her must not take her back to be his wife after she has been defiled, for that is an abomination before the Lord. And you shall not bring sin on the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance. This is what the law of Moses has to say about divorce.

In both Hebrew and in Greek, the word translated divorce basically means put away. It means it's apoluo. Luo means to loose and apa means to be from.

Apa is away from. So apoluo is to loose away, to send away. It's a fascinating word.

We'll take a look at it here in its other uses in a moment, but it is used for Joseph's contemplations about what to do with Mary. And the gospels are replete with references to Joseph being a righteous man. And yet he was considering putting Mary away when he found out that she was with child.

So what we discover is in Deuteronomy 24 and in other New Testament allusions, the dissolution of a marriage is not intrinsically forbidden or condemned. Deuteronomy 24 doesn't say thou shalt not divorce thy wife. It says in the case where it happens, here is something that should not be done.

It's kind of like, you can eat goats, you can boil goat's milk, but you don't boil a kid in its mother's milk. There are specific combinations of circumstances that are forbidden in the law. What does Deuteronomy 24 say? Does it say what God has joined together, let no man cleave asunder.

Once you are married, that's it for life. You just get it out. It doesn't say that.

It doesn't cast any aspersion on the act of dissolving the marriage itself. It says if the marriage is dissolved in the first case, that woman is married to another man. And then that marriage is dissolved by either divorce or death.

The woman is not to return to the original husband. That introduces evil into the camp. That's what it says.

And that's all that it says. Well, the rabbinical schools poured over this and the school of Shammai looked at that phrase in Deuteronomy that said, if he finds fault or uncleanness and interpreted this to mean that she had committed adultery or had had sinned against the marriage specifically. And this is why you see Jesus talking about if a man divorces his wife, except for fornication or except for pornography, you know, he commits adultery and causes her to commit adultery and so on.

We'll look at those passages momentarily. But the school of Shammai said this is the only legitimate reason to divorce a wife is for sexual immorality. Anything else isn't comprehended in Deuteronomy 24, because it specifically says he has found some uncleanness in her.

So they had a very narrow interpretation of what this word translated uncleanness means. Well, what do you think the school of Hillel thought? Rabbi Akiba famously, he's from the school of Hillel. He's a liberal.

He said, if the wife burns the breakfast, you can dissolve the marriage. He put that, it's in writing. Rabbi Akiba from the school of Hillel, you know, any fault that you find.

Others in that same school take this to mean he finds her unpleasing. She's unpleasing. And they read this to mean if a man is married to a woman, but he meets another woman who's more attractive.

Well, the first woman is no longer pleasing, not as pleasing as this new woman. So if you meet a more attractive woman, you're free to divorce the first one, you know, upgrade, trade up type of thing. And this was a common understanding and a common practice in Jesus' day.

The Hillel school in particular, marriage was just kind of like it is in parts of our society today where, well, we'll do it for taxes or we'll do it to, you know, please grandma or something. But, you know, the Hollywood marriages famously can last as little as a few months. It's just a done on impulse and dissolved on impulse type of thing.

Well, the school of Hillel was big on this and the school of Hillel was popular because people like freedom. They like being told that the Bible supports doing whatever they want to do. So there was this disagreement.

Well, come back now to Matthew chapter 19. It's no accident that we are given this notation at the beginning of the chapter that when Jesus had finished the sayings and he departed from Galilee and he's not going to the borders of Judah beyond Jordan, he's going beyond Jordan so that he can travel down to the borders of Judea, but Judea does not extend east as I said. So he is back in Perea.

This is the trans Jordan. This is where he was in Luke 16. So as soon as he gets there, the Pharisees came to him, pay Rod's owing him.

You will remember, I think that there are two Greek words for test. Doki mazo, D-O-K-I-M-A-Z-O almost sounds Japanese. Doki mazo, D-O-K-I-M-A-Z-O.

This is assaying. This is testing to verify something as genuine. You take gold in and have it assayed and they say, yes, this is real gold.

It's not fool's gold. Here's the quality of the, or you take steel and you put it in a, uh, you take a sample off the assembly line and put it in a test to be sure that it meets the standards test because you want to verify that yes, this is as good as, as it's supposed to be and is believed to be Doki mazo. This is not that word.

This is pay Rod's owing and it's Perea and it's pay Rod's owing. So there's almost a word play here, but this is P-E-I-R-A-Z-O. This is the word that was used for Satan with Jesus the 40 days in the wilderness.

And then Satan came to pay Rod's owing him to tempt, to seek, to trip up, to cause to fail, pay Rod's owing. So the Pharisees came to him, testing him and picking up right where the conversation left off months earlier. They're still rankling under this condemnation of their sensuality and materialism from Luke 16 and he nailed them with their lacks and inappropriate self-serving, self-gratifying practices regarding marriage.

And he condemned them. He said, what you're doing, it's adultery. That's what you're doing.

Well, they're having all kinds of debates and how can we, how can we push back on this damning accusation that he left us with last time he traveled through the region. So they show up and they want to pick up right where they left off. You can just draw a line from Luke 16 to Matthew 19.

And so what is their motivation here? Are they really seeking truth? Are they trying to find the better way and please God and reflect righteousness and shine a light to the Gentiles, many of whom live in the trans-Jordan area. Remember Decapolis is over there. What is in their hearts when they come to Jesus? It is pure evil.

They are out to discredit him. They want to trap him in his words and they're rankling because he called them out and shined a light on their evil practices regarding marriage. So to begin with, and this is really the first point of observation to help us navigate this passage.

This is really not about divorce. This is about the evil in men's hearts that results in rationalization and self-justification and vindication by any and all means. They feel like if they can discredit Jesus publicly, his notice, his condemnation of their behavior will be discredited.

If you can't discredit the message, discredit the source. So his words on the last occasion

they met stung them and exposed them. And they haven't gone to God in confession.

They haven't realized from the word of God and from the lips of the second person of the Trinity, the son of God, that they need to change their ways. No, what they want to do is at a minimum, destroy his credibility, destroy his sway with the people and notice great multitudes, verse two, followed him and he is healing his credit. His credibility with the people is just going up and up and up.

And they are there as those whom Jesus discredited and condemned in the previous visits. So they want to fix this. This is all about self-interest.

So they want to trap him in his words. They want to be able to lodge grievances against him and call him out as not obeying the law and so on. It's all about winning the debate, trying to gain power and influence over these people again, which they have lost because of Jesus speaking truth about who they are and what they do.

They claim to be experts in the law. Pharisees, you know, wear the clothes that say, I am a defender of the law of Moses, whatever their understanding of it is. So they say, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife and see just any reason? Just is not there.

In fact, the word is from the root pan, you know, pandemic, it's everywhere. It's all things, Pontus divorce his wife for all reasons. Any reason that a man picks from the group called all reasons, can a man do this? So in other words, do you throw in with the school of Hillel? Now, what is their plan? You can kind of deduce this.

What is their plan? If Jesus says, yes, according to Deuteronomy 24, any displeasure that a husband takes in his wife from burning the toast to outright fornication from the pool of all reasons, any reason you pick out of all reasons, it's lawful to divorce. If he says, yes, this is the law of Moses. Now they can increase their condemnations and railing accusations of Jesus for his consorting with tax collectors and sinners and being too lenient.

They can condemn him as being a part of the school of Hillel and they'll switch sides. You can see this in politics today where when it's convenient, Democrats will take a Republican point of view. Republicans will take a democratic point of view.

When it's politically convenient, they'll cross the line. They'll shake hands with people on the other side of the aisle so that they are not accused of being fill in your adjective here. Oh no, I'm not anti this or opposed to that.

Look, I voted in favor of this bill. And so even though these men are perpetrators of the Hillel school of thought, they'll hypocritically condemn Jesus for supporting the very thing that they are doing. And you think, well, that's illogical.

Have you been watching the news? Look around today. Do you not see hordes of people

condemning others for the very thing they are doing themselves? There was an example recently, Tucker Carlson did his program from Hungary and the leader of Hungary has been vilified and condemned and just bitterly criticized as someone who is tyrannical, who rigs elections, who tries to rub out anybody that disagrees with him. These are actually not true, but they are the very things that those critics are doing in our own country.

They are fudging elections and seeking to change the way elections work to their own benefit. They want to silence, rub out and oppress anyone who disagrees with the party line. And so by throwing these accusations against someone else, you hide behind the accusation in a veil of hypocrisy.

That's what these Pharisees are doing. Just look at Luke 16. They, it just burned them up when they got called out last time.

So if Jesus says, yes, that's okay, they're not going to say, look, even Jesus agrees with the way we live. They're going to condemn him for supporting the Hillel interpretation. If he says no, it is the Shammai school that is correct.

And it's only for purposes. It's only if there is actual documented immorality. If you read into this and find out the way things worked back then, to document sexual immorality on the part of the woman, you had to have witnesses.

You had to have at least two people who would come forward and give testimony. I was in the house and I saw them enter and heard this, that, and the other, and it had to be the testimony of two or three witnesses. And it was a very limited thing.

Well, they can come down on the other side of the question and divide his support by dividing along political or religious lines and get him that way. If he says there shouldn't be any divorce at all, then they'll throw Deuteronomy 24 in his face and say, you don't even know the law because Moses supports a divorce under whatever circumstance you believe. So they think they've got him in a three-way situation here where any anticipated response, they're going to be able to discredit him much as they did with the Denarius.

Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not? We've got you either way, but they didn't. Well, Jesus' answer is going to be similar here. But for the conclusion of our first lesson this morning, as we note the introduction and background of this discussion, it's not really about divorce.

Deuteronomy 24 is not really about the pros and cons or basis of divorce. It addresses a specific situation. It's kind of like, you can't go to the example I gave earlier, do not boil a kid in his mother's milk and make any conclusions about should we or should we not eat goats? Should we or should we not boil goat's milk? It is the combination that is

condemned.

Deuteronomy 24, when you read it carefully, it is the condemnation of the situation where there are two marriages and that combination of circumstances where then the first husband wants to try to take that woman back. That's all that passage talks about. So it is important for us to concentrate on what the Word of God is and is not saying.

Jesus is going to give us the divine perspective on marriage and divorce, and he doesn't take it from Deuteronomy 24, and he doesn't take it from this question that these evil Pharisees try to trap him with. And so when we come back from the break, we will see what the divine perspective is, what our perspective therefore should be on the question of marriage to enter into one and to dissolve one. What does Jesus say? And by extension, you can see what Paul is going to say in Corinthians on this same question.

So with a biblical perspective, we will be able to discern, we will be able to judge, and we will be able to follow a path that is pleasing in God's sight, whether we are party to the first part, party to the second part, or onlookers witnessing this in the lives of others. It's important for us to understand. We'll move in that direction when we come back from the break.