

Matthew 21-08-15a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 15th day of August 2021. We continue our study in the gospel of Matthew chapter 19.

Matthew chapter 19. We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and then we'll begin. Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to spend time together in fellowship and in the study of your word.

We pray that your Holy Spirit will superintend, will guide the delivery and the reception so that all of us can together grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.

As we have seen, context is so important in understanding, interpreting, and applying any given passage of scripture. We have the words of the Lord Jesus that we have seen in chapter 18 looking at the importance of unity. Unity by definition requires self-sacrifice and this is the theme.

We have to give something up. We have to, in many cases, compromise. Not compromise morally, not compromise ethically, but we generally have to give up our agenda, our preference, our most wanted outcome or experience in the interest of love.

The very definition of love is that it is sacrificial to self. We give something up because we love and we do not seek our own way. We don't seek our own goal, our own purpose at the expense of others.

It's fine to have goals. It is fine to have preferences. It's fine to enjoy things and feel like, wow, this was a great day.

I got to do exactly what I wanted. People who have retired tell me that they enjoy retirement because they can sleep as late as they want. They can get up and do what they want.

They can not do what they don't want. It sounds like a virtual paradise on earth in some ways. But even then, if you're retired and married, you're going to look out not only for your own interests, Philippians chapter 2, but also for the interests of others.

You can't be a complete hedonist and be a Christian. You can't. The pursuit of satisfaction and pleasure, self-satisfaction, self-gratification cannot be our first goal.

You cannot love without sacrifice. You cannot express the love of God who sacrificed his son on our behalf, who sacrificed his perfect divine order. We cannot be followers of God.

We cannot be imitators of Christ. We cannot be holy as he is holy or love because he first

loved us if we do not understand this discipline of setting aside our first best hope, dream, aspiration, and so on. This is pretty clear in the abstract.

What Jesus has done is begin to give concrete examples of this in chapter 18. And without going back and reviewing that material, you think back to what he said about causing a little one to stumble. How would you cause them to stumble? Because you're not paying attention to them.

You're not looking out for them. You're not putting their interests ahead of your own. This is not only unloving, but it is divisive.

It creates schism. It disunites. It de-unifies for our situation, the body of Christ.

And if we find someone driving us away from our spiritual unity, we have to make a choice. Am I going to try to preserve my hand or my eye or my foot at the expense of spiritual growth, spiritual priority, advancing and being prepared for the kingdom of heaven for this earthly relationship or not? There are times when it is inevitable that we will be divided. You know, it is a surety that sometimes division will happen, but woe to him by whom the division comes.

And if you cause a little one to stumble, it would be better. You might circle that word better because it comes up again in our passage this morning. It would be better.

This is sumphero, S-U-M-P-H-E-R-O. Pharo, P-H-E-R-O, is the verb that means to carry. And soon is with.

And when you put soon on the front of pharo, the end becomes an M. And so you have sumphero. And it literally means to carry with, to bring things together, to unite them and to carry with. And it's interesting that this is the word used in Greek.

I'm sure Jesus taught this in Aramaic, but God superintended the translation into Greek and it is an inspired text. And with that, we have this idea of bearing something together. And so in the secular sense, it came to mean that there is profit.

It is more profitable. When you do an action, when you perform a service, when you leverage a purchase and a sale, and there is profit, there is advantage. You have done a thing that in and of itself was good, but then there is an advantage.

There is added with. The with comes into the carrying of this task or burden. So sumphero comes to mean things that are expedient, things that are advantageous.

It means to be more profitable. And that's the word that's used in chapter 18, verse six. It would be more profitable to a man.

It would be uniting things together in a profitable way. We think that building is better than tearing down. We think that gathering is better than scattering.

We think that storing is better than losing and dispersing. And all of this is wrapped up in sumphero. This is very important.

I'm going over this verb for a reason. Better than a millstone be put around the neck. There would end up being more that is born together.

There would be more unity. There would be more cohesiveness. If this stumble-causing person, this scandal-causing person, scandalizo, to cause to stumble, it would be better if that person was sunk to the bottom of the sea because everybody else could be more united.

This is the sort of background idea. The foremost idea is just simply it would be better, advantage, more profitable. But sumphero, very interesting word.

So this is the theme. When you think about Matthew and Jesus' ministry in Perea, where he has gone back over to the region of Decapolis, he's gone back over. This is his last sweep through a region before heading to Jerusalem for his final days, his final week.

And these are occasions where Jesus can do two things. He can appeal to the last of the people who maybe have not heard or who have not made up their minds. The bulk of the nation has already made up its mind because Jesus has been in Galilee.

He's been in Judea. He's been to Jerusalem several times. He's even been to Samaria.

He was in Perea earlier and was accosted by the Pharisees and they're all hung up on their standards of righteousness. He's coming back through a last time. So it's a benefit to those people in that region.

It seems as though Jesus visited the various regions of Israel at least twice, and in most cases, three times. And you can imagine that when he went down to the region of the Gadarenes, the Gergesenes, the Gerasenes, for the man with the legion, actually the two men, that that was sort of a southern attack on the region of Perea. Now he's in the northern part of Perea.

And so this is a second or third appeal in the mouth of two or three witnesses. Now you go to someone who has something against you two or three times, as Jesus has just described in chapter 18, to try to achieve cohesiveness that everyone is bearing with. A load is lighter when everyone puts a shoulder under it.

We all bear it together. We're united in a common purpose and a common goal. Those who cause someone who's trying to help carry that load, you trip them.

Have you ever been to a funeral I have where you've got the pallbearers and one of them trips? And the casket goes wildly out of level and it's disruptive. You start thinking about the contents and it is a real despoilment of trying to honor someone who has

passed away if there's some mishap with the casket. And I have seen this, and you could imagine the idea that Jesus is bringing here.

If you cause someone to stumble who is endeavoring to bear with, this is catastrophic. And it would be better if you had never showed up. If you'd had a boating accident and they had a different person helping to bear the load, that would be better for the overall purposes of God, the overall blessing of those who are seeking to live a life that's pleasing in his sight.

That is the thrust. That is the impetus of everything that has preceded. So when these Pharisees come to him asking about divorce in chapter 19, have you not read that the original unit of unity, the original example of unity was Adam and Eve? And someone who disrupts that unity is guilty of breaking one of the commandments, which everyone recognizes as sacred, definitive, the highest standards of morality.

Thou shalt not commit adultery is a direct prohibition of attacking and breaching, breaking, disrupting marriage. Now, interestingly, the common understanding of this passage, what Jesus says here and a couple of other places about divorce has been wildly misunderstood. It's been approached as the legal dissolution, filing for divorce, going to court and achieving a divorce.

Whoever files, they're the bad guy. And a careful reading of these passages teaches otherwise. And we saw that last time, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives.

In response to their second question, Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, it was not so. It is an accommodation.

Remember, marriage was instituted before the fall. Divorce came after the fall. God didn't sit down and say in the garden before they ate the fruit.

Now, Adam, if you get tired of Eve, why you come let me know and I'll make another one and you can be one flesh with her. Divorce, like much of the law of Moses, is an accommodation to our inability to meet God's ideals, God's righteousness, God's justice to fully express love. We end up being selfish.

We end up going our own way. We end up having a hardness of heart. Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, he didn't say because of your sinful nature, did he? He didn't say because of the fall.

He didn't say because so many of you are rascals. He goes specifically to hardness of heart. Thinking about what I've just reviewed, what we looked at together in chapter 18, do you see the link between a hard heart and creating disunity, insensitivity to the well-being of others? Hardness of heart and love, when they're pointed at the same object, you can only have one.

You cannot be hard hearted and love at the same time. You can either love or you can be hard hearted. Who's the classic example of hardness of heart in the Bible? Who's the first person you think of that had a hard heart, hardened his heart? The Pharaoh in Egypt.

Was he thinking about himself and the nobility that supported him in Egypt, or was he thinking about the hardships and the oppression of the Israelites when he would not let them go? It would have been a wonderful expression of looking out for the interests of others rather than his own interest to say, these people have served, look at all the things they have built. They were our guests originally, look at history. This is a terrible come to pass that they are now in servitude and in bondage and in hardship.

And instead of trying to kill their baby boys and have them make bricks without straw, I ought to look at them as an oppressed group. Even secular thinking, you look around in the modern day and somewhere in the politically correct, what is it that matters in society has somewhere in its thinking, I think this oppressed group should be better treated, which in and of itself is not a bad idea. If you see oppression and you have a heart of love, a policy of looking out for the interests of others, if there's someone who is genuinely being oppressed, that ought to be fixed.

And to the extent that it is up to us, we can support that. Slavery in the United States should never have been supported by believers. Christians lost sight of this teaching.

Lost sight of that. Now there were Christians who were in a situation where they had slaves and legally could not get rid of them, George Washington being one, but you don't see oppression. It was more like employment in his case.

And he looked out for them. He was kind to them. He spoke well of them.

He did his best to free the ones that he was allowed to free without being irresponsible financially or breaking the law with regard to the ones that came through his wife and were not actually his to free. But God is not looking at the legalities, and this has pertinence when it comes to marriage. There's such a thing as legalities.

Divorce, you go to court in our society. But the legalities of achieving the dissolution legally of a marriage is not what Jesus is talking about. He goes back to the beginning.

What was God's design? God's design is that when a man and a woman cleave to one another and the two become one flesh, man should not divide what God has joined. This is God's design. Hopefully the marriage is something that is a part of God's plan and purpose.

It wasn't done frivolously or for the wrong reasons. It is a permanent union that should not be dissolved. This is the ideal.

People marry for the wrong reasons all the time. People are deceived in various ways. People can put up a good front and appear to be one thing.

Once you get married and the mask drops off, this is not the person that was advertised. They didn't reveal themselves. They were not honest.

You find out after a marriage has come into being that all was not as it appeared. There are instances of hardness of heart. Let's say someone presents themselves as being an interested, God-fearing, growing believer.

They love church. They love Bible study. They love the Lord.

They love you and share your faith. You get married. Subsequent to the marriage, you find out that they were just putting on because they had some reason or other why they wanted to enter into this marriage.

It comes to light that they are actually not interested in any of those things, including being married to you. They go out and do things that break the marriage bond, that break the marriage vow. This is attitude.

It can express itself in adultery. It can express itself in fornication. But the word that Jesus says, except in a case of, except for the cause of, and it's usually translated fornication.

We saw that back in Matthew, the earlier occasion where Jesus was talking about that. We see it in, in this context, except for sexual immorality in verse nine, the word here and previously is *pornaya*. *Pornaya* is breaking a vow, breaking a promise, breaking an understanding.

This is why it can be used in the spiritual realm and often is in the New Testament. Just as it is a picture in the Old Testament of Israel's unfaithfulness. It is unfaithfulness.

It doesn't have to be physical unfaithfulness. Can you imagine trying to hire some detective or spook to peek through windows and take pictures and document that, that some physical action has actually taken place that violates the marriage bond? You, you know, when this has happened, you know, when someone has betrayed the faith, betrayed the truth that they plighted, the truth that they pledged, when you, by whatever means entered into this union. It's confusing because we have legalities, we have formalities, we have licenses, we have judges, we have certificates, we have courts, but for a believer, marriage happens when two believers look at each other and promise, pledge, unite themselves in love of an exclusive nature as husband and wife.

When that understanding passes, that's a marriage. You can have ceremonies, you can have celebrations, you can have licenses, you can have judges, you can have pieces of paper all you want. But when those two people look into each other's eyes and pledge

their unity, I am united to you exclusively and to no others.

Now, if either one of those people break that unity, this can be by revealing that, that unlike you, they weren't really sincere. They were shallow. They were impulsive.

They were not prayerful. They were not doing it as unto the Lord. And it comes out that this did not match the advertisement and the promise.

That person has broken the marriage. That person has disrupted the unity. That person is at fault.

And usually there is one person who goes first. Now you can begin to wish that you had not married somebody who suddenly is a turncoat, who suddenly is causing you to stumble, is dragging you down in the direction opposite of the narrow way through the straight gate, who isn't interested in God or his kingdom, who doesn't appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ. And if those are the things that define you, then the person that is not moving toward God is the one breaching the marriage.

That is what Jesus is speaking against. Now, the offende, the innocent party, may be the one who has to end up initiating legal proceedings to get disentangled from this person who has already broken the marriage. There's a big misunderstanding that whoever files for divorce, they're the bad guy.

Not necessarily. It depends on who is trying to live their life to please the Lord and who has peeled away from that. There is no grounds for dissolving a marriage between two people who are both genuinely moving toward the Lord.

You can overcome any issue, be it, you know, I didn't realize that your favorite color is blue and my favorite color is red. I didn't realize that you like Westerns and I like dramas. You like country music.

I like rock. None of that matters. Two people who are both moving toward the Lord are inevitably going to move toward each other in the same way that in a church, people who are all growing in grace and knowledge of the Savior are going to be drawn together by that common spiritual goal.

God gives more grace. God resists the proud. God gives grace to the humble.

Those who are moving toward the Lord do so in humility. Those who wind up in every marriage is going to have its tough times. We are human.

We are fallen. We can have temporary lapses of judgment, self-control, whatever it may be, but this is weather and we're talking about climate. When it becomes clear that there is a climate of spiritual apathy, indifference, outright rejection, that person who is that way is the one who has made it impossible for the marriage to be a union in sight of God.

Eve made a big mistake when she ate the fruit, but that was not climate. That was weather. Adam did not divorce Eve.

God didn't make a second wife for Adam just because Eve messed up and dragged Adam into sin. That did not dissolve the marriage. Mistakes are not the same as a heart that is set against God and the things of God.

That's a different thing. Is that clear? It needs to be clear as we go forward because the disciples are going to ask a question after the Pharisees asked the question and then ask a second question. We've got three questions here.

The first one in chapter 19 is, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason? And Jesus gives the example of Adam and Eve. They are no longer two but one flesh. What God has joined together, let no man separate, including the two parties in the marriage.

If someone in the marriage peels off or reveals that they never were truly dedicated to the things of God, they are the ones who have already broken the marriage. And we'll see in first Corinthians chapter seven, when we go to Paul's parallel concomitant and exactly harmonious words about marriage in that passage, Paul says exactly the same thing as the Lord Jesus. He says it in a slightly different way.

He uses different examples, but it's exactly the same. There is no distance between Jesus and Paul on marriage and the dissolution of marriage in the same way that there's no distance between Jesus and Paul in the first part of first Corinthians talking about disunity in the church. And then Paul will go on to talk about disunity in a marriage in all in first Corinthians.

Jesus has talked about disunity in God's people in chapter 18. And he's talking about disunity in the marriage in 19. And Paul and Jesus are exactly coincident.

They are, there is no contradiction. There is no difference. The emphasis and the truth are exactly the same in both cases.

Well, this comes to light now when we get to the second question of the Pharisees, why did Moses command this? You have to be careful about this. Don't accept a false premise. If you're in a discussion, whether it's friendly or, you know, not, don't let someone hand you a false premise.

Why did Moses command a bill of divorcement? Moses didn't command a bill of divorcement. There is no command. There is no imperative in Deuteronomy 24.

And we saw that last time. You have to examine a premise. Don't let someone suck you into a debate over a faulty premise, correct the premise.

And that's what Jesus does here. Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts permitted you, he did not command you. He permitted you to release the word divorce.

This sounds too formal. It sounds too legal. It carries a lot of baggage in our day.

Scratch out divorce. It is release. This is exactly the same word that is used for the forgiveness of sins.

Your sin, those whose sins you release, they are released. Those whose sins you retain, they are retained. You remember that it's, it's basically the same word to release your wives from the beginning.

It was not. So, and I say to you, verse nine, whoever releases his wife, except for pornography, the only legitimate basis to no longer be married to someone by in whatever form that takes is if they have broken the trust, not temporarily, not as a lapse or a mistake, but they're no longer interested in you or the things of God, one or both. Maybe they're interested in your money.

Maybe they, they like what you can provide. Maybe they like that. You're a wonderful housekeeper or a great mother to their children or whatever.

But for a believer, you cannot be, and we're going to see this in Corinthians. You cannot be unequally yoked together. You know where the command is.

The command is not to divorce your wives. As these guys want to say from Deuteronomy 24, the command is be not unequally yoked with the faithless. You don't have to ascertain whether they're going to heaven or not when they die, i.e., you know, at some point, did they accept Christ as their savior? That's known only to God in a lot of cases, in cases where people have made no further progress after that decision.

How can you know? The word is *apisteia*, be not unequally yoked together with the faithless. And in the same way that there are times when you have to pluck out your eye, cut off your hand or chop off your foot so that you can enter into life because that hand or that eye or that foot, though it is precious, though it grieves you to lose it, there is a higher priority. You can see how important chapter 18 is to understanding these words properly.

Whoever breaches a marriage, whoever breaks a marriage, they're the ones at fault. The only reason to break a marriage is if the other person broke it first. That's the only reason.

What does it mean to break the marriage? That's what we've been talking about. You cannot be united. There's no fellowship between light and darkness.

You can't be sanctified when you are in constant contact with an unclean thing. There

are some that you can save by pulling them out of the fire, hating the garment spotted by the flesh. Others you can't.

And you have to part ways for your spiritual priority. And can this teaching be abused? Of course, anything can be abused. And it has been abused.

This passage has been abused. Jesus' words have been misunderstood and misapplied, just as Deuteronomy was in Jesus' day. You can't find a way to present this where somebody is not going to find an excuse and say, well, I believe that you're not a faithful believer because you listen to Sam Hall and I'm going to the first church of the free and clear, and so I think you're a spiritual rascal, and so I'm leaving.

God knows. God is the one who joins men and women together. What God has joined, Jesus says.

Well, God knows who it is that's breaching what he put together. So whatever is said, all God can do through scripture and through the Holy Spirit is appeal to those who are hearers of the word and then doers of the word. Anybody can take any scripture and do dastardly things with that as justification, and it's done all the time.

That's why we have so many denominations. That's why we have so many perverse quotations of scripture to justify all kinds of things. The people who tried to justify slavery by saying that black people were under the curse of Ham or the curse of Canaan or, you know, curse of Ham.

There is no curse of Ham. It's the curse on Canaan. Ham wasn't cursed.

Canaan tells you their biblical ignorance. But people would say, well, there are cursed people. They will serve their brethren, and so I'm the brethren.

No, you're not. It was just a complete travesty that believers would take their Bible and justify oppressive slavery. But people are going to abuse anything.

All we can do is understand scripture and individually ourselves do our very best to live in its light. There comes a point in some marriages, whether they are real or legal, where a believer realizes that there is no future together making progress toward the kingdom of heaven. We can't do this together.

I want to. I need to. I'm going to.

This person has no interest. That is pornography. That is pornography.

That is a breach of the marriage. If you've got to be right foot, left foot going to the kingdom and this foot won't go, you've got to cut it off. It's just that simple.

That's why Jesus says whoever releases his wife and when you get to Mark and his

message is more to the Gentiles, both ways are mentioned. Here he's talking to Pharisees and it's patriarchal society, but it works both ways. There are times when a woman has got to get away from a man.

If he is abusive, if he's beating you, beating the kids, that's not the path to the kingdom of heaven. That's pornography. You didn't sign up for that.

That wasn't a part of plighting the truth and making the pledge until death do his part is to get smacked around and have kids abused. That is pornography. That is time to leave.

That person broke the marriage first. Anybody who smacks around their spouse, they have broken that marriage. That's pornography and you leaving is a result of their pornography.

It's not by filing for divorce from an abusive spouse. You're the bad guy. The bad guy has already acted and the marriage is already broken.

So that's what Jesus is talking about. So now the disciples in verse 10 say, well, if such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry. This is the turn that this is going to take.

Jesus, as you compare the other gospels, is no longer talking to the Pharisees. They have gone into the house and this is kind of like after Jesus would give public parables and then he would get with the disciples later and explain further because they are those who can understand the interpretation. That's what's going to happen here.

So that's what we're going to look at when we come back from the break. We're going to pause here and when we return, we're going to start at verse 10. If such is the case of the man with his wife, see that word, it is better.

Sumpharo. Sumpharo. The very same word that we saw back in 18.6 with the millstone.

It is better. Sumpharo. You can just write 16.8 right underneath that.

I'm sorry, 18.6. Very same thing. So that's what we're going to look at when we come back, but let's pause here and take our break.