

Matthew 19:1-6

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. ² Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

³ 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?”

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ 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. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

MONDAY: MATTHEW 19:3-12—WHAT IS ALLOWED?”

In this passage, Jesus deals with a question that had as much relevance then as now: divorce. Jews of Jesus’ time had more than one interpretation of the Old Testament instructions about divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Some believed that divorce was permissible for nearly any reason; others believed that the only acceptable reason for divorce was adultery. The Pharisees’ question clearly presumes this issue, as they ask if a husband can divorce for any reason.

- The question, according to Matthew, is a “test” for Jesus. The Pharisees want to know where he stands on the controversial issue. They want to know ‘what is allowed.’ Does Jesus answer the question of what is ‘allowed’? Where does Jesus redirect the question?
- Does the way Jesus redirects the question shape how you approach the issue?
- Does the issue have to be divorce? What about ‘how far is too far?’ or pornography? Can we speculate about Jesus’ response to ‘what is allowed’ on other issues such as these?

TUESDAY: MATTHEW 19:7-9—HOW DO YOU READ SCRIPTURE?

This is the second part of the scene. The Pharisees counter Jesus’ first response by raising the issue of Scripture: “but Moses allowed divorce in the Old Testament!” Read Deuteronomy 24:1-4 to get a sense of where the Pharisees are coming from.

- Does the Pharisees’ approach here seem faithful to Deuteronomy? Does their approach seem similar to our approach to such issues?
- Jesus makes the issue about our *approach* to Scripture. Describe the sort of way of reading Scripture that Jesus seems to adopt.
- Jesus, citing Scripture, speaks about what God ultimately expects from marriage. By pointing out that the allowance of divorce is to account for the peoples’ stubbornness, Jesus makes a claim. What is the claim? What is the effect of Jesus doing this? If you were asking the questions, how would you react to Jesus?

WEDNESDAY: MATTHEW 19:10-12—WHO CAN ACCEPT THIS?

In this final part of this scene, Jesus’ disciples speak up. They presumably have been listening to the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees.

- Note the disciples’ shock at Jesus’ words. Essentially, they seem to say, “if you can’t get out of marriage, then don’t marry at all!” What is Jesus’ response? How do you feel about Jesus’ response?
- In verse 12 Jesus brings up an apparently unrelated issue in his response to the disciples. What seems to be the point in the saying about eunuchs? What is the point of connection between eunuchs and Jesus’ teaching on divorce?
- Where does Jesus place marriage and sexuality in relation to discipleship in the kingdom?

THURSDAY: JOHN 4:16-26, 39-42—A GRACIOUS GOD

This is the story of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at a well. As he invites her to call her husband, he exposes what she's been keeping quiet and what Jesus already knows. She's been living an adulterous life. Her sexuality has been in conflict with God's purposes.

- As with the woman, Jesus knows all about us. It's no use hiding. According to the story, the conversation keeps moving after Jesus exposes the woman's lifestyle. What does Jesus have to say to this woman?
- Let's do a little 'Biblical theology.' In this story in John, Jesus does not immediately condemn the woman for her adulterous lifestyle. In Matthew, Jesus is clear on his expectations for marriage, and they are high. Can the pieces of the puzzle fit? How?
- In John's story, the woman goes to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah before she even has the time to straighten her life out. What message does that send us? What role does her lifestyle play in her proclamation?

FRIDAY: I CORINTHIANS 6:12-20—THE BODY AND THE INDIVIDUAL

In this brief paragraph, Paul makes the point that believers should "glorify God in [their] body." He relates it to two examples: one a general one concerning food, and the other concerns sexual relations.

- In verse 20, the main point is "glorify God in your body." Notice how Paul puts this. He does not say "glorify God in your bodies." And the "your" in Greek is plural, not singular. What singular 'body' is the possession of the entire believing community?
- The examples Paul gives concern the actions of *individuals*: eating food and sexual practices. This raises a very important issue of how an individual's actions relate to and affect the "body"—that is, the entire community of believers, the body of Christ. How do you see your individual body also as a member of the body of Christ? Have you thought much that your individual actions might somehow impact the larger believing community? Talk about this--and since sexuality is the topic, well, you know...

SATURDAY: I CORINTHIANS 7:6-9; 32-35—BLESSED LIFE FOR GOD

Singleness is difficult. But Paul was single. He thought singleness was actually *good*.

- Why might Paul's words be so difficult today? Is it an issue of idolatry or misplaced priorities? Both? What is Paul's reason for remaining single? Is this not something good? Should we listen to Paul on this point?

Read Matthew 5:10-11. Jesus knew that following him would be hard. But Jesus calls it something to be happy about—a "blessed" life—even though people might find it an occasion for ridicule.

- A Biblical perspective on sexuality is something like snow in June in our culture. But a genuine light and hope can be shined in our world. How can we be *proactive* in giving our children a true, live-giving worldview, rather than on the defensive, responding to culture? Do you envision using the resources of your Christian community (First Lutheran on the large scale; community groups or friends on the smaller scale)?
- Do you believe sexuality within God's intentions is something that can bring out true humanity? True love? Do you think it can even be spiritual?