**MINDING WHAT MATTERS**

**(Matthew 19:1-12)**

I am glad that I live in Oklahoma. Oklahoma is wonderful state. We have beautiful sunsets. Unlike some states, we have four seasons. Unfortunately, however, we experience all four seasons in one week. Despite the many wonderful things about our state, we do have our problems. Of the 50 states, we rank #2 in divorce. The only state that has more divorces per 1000 residents is the state of Nevada. Nevada is a place where you can get married on whim. After doing so, many realize they made a mistake. In Nevada you can get divorced almost as quickly as you can get married.

When marriage doesn’t mean much, divorce doesn’t mean much either.

Today, we are going to look at a passage in which Jesus discussed the matters of marriage and divorce. According to Jesus, marriage means something, and because it does, divorce is a weighty matter, too.

Today, as we examine Matthew 19:1-12, we are going to look at, “Minding What Matters.” In this text, Jesus tells us there are three things that matter: Marriage Matters, People Matter, and God’s Will Matters.

1. **SINCE MARRIAGE MATTERS, LET’S FOCUS ON GOD’S INTENT NOT OUR DISCONTENT.**

It is clear that the religious leaders were trying to draw Jesus into a controversial and hotly debated, theological issue.

Jesus had spent the bulk of His ministry in the Galilee region. In v. 1, we see that Jesus and His 12 disciples leave the Galilee and will not return until after Jesus’ death and resurrection. The Gospel of Matthew ends with Jesus and His close followers on a mountain in the Galilee, and Jesus commissions them to go into all the world and make disciples.

Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea on His way to the City of Jerusalem. The Passover Celebration is nearing. On the way, the Pharisees ask Him an interesting question. They do not ask Him, “Is it okay to get a divorce?” They knew that their OT Law gave some instructions concerning divorce, and nowhere did it prohibit divorce. Their question had to do with the grounds for divorce. They were asking, “Can a man divorce his wife on any grounds he chooses, or are their only specific circumstances under which he can divorce his wife?”

In Jesus’ day, there were two schools of thought. One school took a very conservative approach and said that unfaithfulness is the only just grounds for divorce. The more permissive school of thought taught that a man can divorce his wife for just about any reason—she burns his dinner, she talks too loudly, she insults his parents, he finds someone else more attractive, and on it went.

They ask Jesus, “Where do you come down on this issue? With which school of thought do you side?”

Basically, Jesus says to them, “You’ve picked the wrong starting point for this discussion. You are starting with your discontent. You need to start with God’s intent.”

Jesus doesn’t start with what Moses wrote in the 24th chapter of Deuteronomy. He takes the people back to Genesis 1 and 2. We read in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Then, Jesus noted what Moses wrote in the next to the last verse of Genesis 2 after God presented Eve to Adam, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” This verse talks about leaving, cleaving, and becoming. A husband and wife are to leave all other prior, earthly attachments. They are to let God cement them together physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The end result is they will be one.

God uses an odd math. The equation of marriage is 1 + 1 + 1. There is one husband, one wife, and one God who brings them together. Strangely, the sum of 1 + 1 + 1 is 1.

I remember hearing about an elderly couple who were recounting the early days of their marriage. Those first few years were tough. The wife explained, “We knew we were supposed to be one, but we just couldn’t agree on which one we would be.”

I think that is the central problem in most marriages. The problem is one of self-centeredness. You want what you, singular, want to the detriment of what you, plural, really needs. When you get married you are no longer you singular, you are you plural.

The goal of marriage is to experience the true, one-flesh relationship. This is far more than sexual union. In the one-flesh relationship you can anticipate what the other person wants even before he/she asks. You can tell what the other person is thinking. Sometimes, you can finish the other person’s sentences, but don’t keep doing that because that gets annoying. Becoming one-flesh takes time. It doesn’t happen easily nor automatically. In fact, it will, likely, take years to experience the beauty of your oneness.

We need to keep moving towards one another instead of away from one another. For many, intimacy is a scary thing.

One person said:

* To be loved but not known is superficial.
* To be known but not loved is our greatest fear.
* To be known and to be loved is life’s greatest joy.

That is what God offers us, and that is what is ours in this one-flesh relationship called marriage.

The Greek philosopher Plato taught a legend that claimed mankind was once physically much larger than we are now, and we were much more capable of handling challenges and solving problems. Because our size and strength had made us arrogant, the gods decided to cut us in half.

Now, when a man and woman fall in love, they are overjoyed at having found their other half, and they become what they were meant to be. That’s the one-flesh relationship.

Not all marriages reach that ideal. Many marriages are mired in acrimony and bitterness. Others become stale and unexciting. Such marriages will never become what God meant for them to be for one of two reasons. Either, they quit striving for God’s ideal and just settle for what they have, or they give up altogether, call it quits, and choose to separate what God has joined together. We call that divorce.

Divorce becomes more likely when we focus on our discontent. Instead, let’s become acquainted with God’s intent, and then strive to realize that in our marriages.

The Jewish leaders tried to take Jesus to Deuteronomy 24.

Look at v. 7. Jesus claimed that passage of Scripture was just a concession that was made because we have hard hearts that make us cruel to one another. An allowance is made for divorce, but divorce is a deviation from God’s divine purpose for marriage. Jesus draws us back to God’s intent. “Focus on that,” He urges us in v. 8.

Then, Jesus gets very direct in v. 9. Jesus said essentially the same thing in Matthew 5:31-32. There are additional exceptions that make divorce permissible, and Paul discusses those in 1 Corinthians 7. Here, however, Jesus is emphasizing that marriage matters. It matters to God, and it should matter to us. That being the case, we need to make what God wants the starting place, not the problems we are having.

1. **SINCE PEOPLE MATTER, LET’S PRACTICE GOD’S GRACE TO OUR MATE AND TO OTHERS.**

Just as Moses made some allowances to the people, we need to make some allowances to each other. In other words, we need cut ourselves some slack and other people some slack. We need to not be so hard on ourselves and others.

One way we can show grace is by giving the other person the benefit of the doubt. We should believe that our mate is good-hearted and sincere.

The greatest need of a woman is to feel loved, and the greatest need of a man is to feel respected. Wives, when your husband is failing to show you that he loves you, you should believe that he really does love you, but he just isn’t good at showing it.

Husbands, when you are feeling disrespected by your wife, believe that she really does respect, but right now, she is not doing a good job of showing it.

Women, you didn’t marry Hitler. You married a good man. He really does love you, but right now, he’s just not doing a good job of showing it. He is not trying to be hurtful. He didn’t wake up with the goal of being insensitive. Be patient with him.

Men, you didn’t marry Jezebel. She is a good woman; she respects you and cares for you, but temporarily you both are not communicating well, and she’s said some things that were hurtful and disrespectful. Move towards her lovingly.

We also need to show grace to others. Divorce is not the unpardonable sin. We shouldn’t act like it is. No one gets married with the intention of getting divorced. Divorce is painful, and we ought not to ever say anything that will add to that person’s pain or feelings of failure and guilt.

We are to build people up, not tear them down or gossip behind their backs. That person is not only someone’s boy or girl, that person is also God’s child, which makes him or her our brother and sister. Let’s be a caring family to those who are hurting.

The church has the reputation of being the only army that shoots its wounded. Let’s act in such a way to change our reputation.

My parents had four children. They brought their children up in the church. My father was a deacon. My mother was actively involved in various ministries of the church. My father has passed. My mother is in 86, and although it takes great effort, she still attends church every Sunday. She has reported that her pastor has told her more than once, “You’re my favorite.

Her four kids are still active in their respective churches. Of her four kids, two of them have been divorced. That is 50%, and that is pretty much what the divorce statistics are nationwide.

Let’s not write off half our country. Let’s show them grace. When I was younger, I remember reading Malachi 2:16 in which God says, “I hate divorce.” I used to think God was saying God hates the act of divorce. I don’t think that anymore. I think what God was saying was, “I hate the results of divorce. I hate the pain, the heartache, and the wounded-ness that comes from divorce.” That is what God hates. God hates divorce because He loves you.

Let’s pray for, love, and extend grace to those who God loves because we love them, too.

Marriage matters. People matter.

1. **SINCE GOD’S WILL MATTERS, LET’S RECEIVE WHAT GOD HAS FOR**

**US AND THEN ENJOY IT.**

The disciples were blown away by what Jesus had said. We think we live in a divorce culture. The culture in which the disciples lived was no less of a divorce culture.

Since the 1970’s, numerous states have passed “no-fault” divorce laws. In order to get a divorce, you don’t have to prove your spouse is guilty of anything, and you can get a divorce for whatever reason. Apparently, all you have to say is that you want a divorce even if the other party doesn’t.

That was the way it was 2000 year ago. A man could divorce his wife for whatever cause.

The big difference between our culture and that of the disciples is that in our culture, women can initiate a divorce. Back in the Jewish culture of Jesus’ day, only men could divorce their wives. The wives couldn’t divorce their husbands. In our culture, almost 70 percent of divorces are initiated by women.

When the disciples heard Jesus say that the only reason you can divorce your spouse is because of infidelity, they said aloud, “Maybe it’s not worth the risk. Maybe it is just better not to get married at all.”

Jesus took that occasion to teach something that He had not addressed before. He talks about choosing to remain unmarried. Look at vv. 11-12.

When we were younger, most of us just assume that we will get married one day and have a family. That’s what most people do, and we figure we will do that, too.

Jesus says, “Not so fast. It is not God’s will that everyone is to marry. There are some for whom God’s will is that you remain single. If it is God’s will for you to remain single, He will help you to do that.”

To make “themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven,” is not to be taken literally. It simply means that you forego marriage and remain single so you can serve God in ways you could not if you had a spouse and children.

The apostle Paul, for instance, could not have done what he did had he have had the responsibility of caring for a family. Because he was single, he was able to travel across the Roman Empire at great risk to himself, preach the gospel, and start churches. Paul made himself a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom. He didn’t do that literally. He did it figuratively.

I firmly believe that every young person should ask God whether or not God wants him or her to remain single. Don’t just assume that it is God’s will for you to marry. It may not be. If God gives you the gift of singleness, you should receive that gift and then enjoy the gift He has given you. Use it for all its worth.

One man wrote, “Singleness is not a disease for which the only known cure is marriage.” I would add, it may be a calling. It may be gift which should be received, used, and enjoyed to the glory of God.

I close with a quote from Kevin Miller:

Christianity won’t guarantee you’re going to be married. Christianity won’t guarantee that if you are married it's going to be a good marriage. But what Christianity does give you is Jesus. Jesus comes to you in your isolation and He says: “I will never leave you or forsake you. If you’ll give me that bitterness, I can give you peace. I can give you the power to forgive that person who so deeply hurt you. Their wounding you does not have to take over your life. You can be free.

You can be free—free from bitterness, anger, guilt, worry, fear—and free to use your life, whatever stage of life you are in—married, divorced, remarried, single, widowed—God can use you where you are in life to serve Him, glorify Him, and show His live and grace to others. That is what matters.