



MONDAY 28 MAR 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 5:31-32

Plug In...

Nowhere in the Old Testament does it command divorce. The closest is Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The scenario at first seems laughable, but if reality, then tragic and even cruel behaviour. Notice, no command for divorce is there, nor even a command to write a certificate. Rather, the command assumes people are already divorcing and writing these legal notes. God steps into Israel's messy world and gives a command to stem the chaos before it gets further out of hand.

Chew It Over...

Israel's mockery of marriage isn't too different from today's world (think recently, Rupert Murdoch; Geoffrey Edelsten). Jesus' command, if taken seriously, would next to eradicate the reality of divorce within the church.

To refrain from divorcing a spouse, except for the exception, what would we need to grasp about marriage? How do we get such resilience?

[NB: We'll undertake deeper reflection on this demand from Jesus in this weekend's *Daily Bible Reading Email*.]

Prayer Suggestion

Pray that the Australian church's divorce stats decline. Ask the Lord to fill us with more love, more compassion, and more forgiveness in our marriages. Praise God as you recognise He has not divorced us.



TUESDAY 29 MAR 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 5:33-37

Plug In...

This is the clearest example that Jesus is not merely correcting misunderstandings of Old Testament commands, nor only deepening original meanings. Here, Jesus completely sweeps away the entire vow system.

The Old Testament never command a person to *take* vows, but did provide commands about follow-through once you had made a vow.

Chew It Over...

Imagine being a person where your word is not contingent. What is it that drives us to have fine print against everything we say?

Specifically acknowledge upcoming commitments and interactions you'll have today. Resolve with God's help to answer carefully with a 'yes' or 'no'. Resolve to follow-through.

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God to make you a "yes-man" or a "yes-woman". Ask Him to make you a 'no-man/woman' too. Ask God to give us wisdom to weigh our response. Ask God to help you carry the cost some following-throughs entail.



WEDNESDAY 30 MAR 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 5:38-42

Plug In...

The eye-for-eye law was not a revenge law, but a justice law. In the first instance it was given to Israel's judges so that justice was taken out of the hands of the aggrieved – whose sinful heart could make them overreach in their retaliation.

What follows in vv. 43-47 is the best commentary on what Jesus is commanding. The call to love enemies and praying for those who persecute you (v.44) is grounded in modelling the character of God (v.45).

What this *doesn't* mean, is that we by-pass the justice system in Australia, or push wrongs under the carpet. Rather, it is taking a posture in the middle of being wronged that seeks to be a peacemaker (v.9) – to repair, to restore. In doing so we act like God.

Chew It Over...

Reflect on where you have recently been wronged. Resolve to neither fight nor flee, but turn and face the situation cheek-on. Call it what it is (this may mean speaking frankly with someone seeking their repentance), yet reflect on how you can absorb the damage in order to enact/model what God has done for us through Jesus.

It is worth honestly exploring how we sneakily use passive-aggression to 'get back', 'get even', 'make them pay', 'teach them a lesson'. We might not articulate it like that, but what is that gesture, silence, roundabout speaking, etc, really doing?

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God to shift our default setting from retaliation and retribution to repair, restore, reconcile. Ask God to help us transfer any loss we incur in doing this to Jesus for we know he has provided for it.



THURSDAY 31 MAR 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 5:43-47

Plug In...

Jesus is asking us to stop and notice what God does. At this moment in time, regardless of who a person is, or their standing with Him, He nevertheless provides them with tokens of His love.

His love stretches beyond a little people group called Israel, or The Lakes Church, or you, me, and our families. We are to have this character trait like our Father in heaven. We've seen elsewhere if the children have this trait, they end up pointing others to the Father (see: 1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Chew It Over...

Do a quick break down of your time and the spaces you inhabit. This will audit where you are located and who you hang out with. What are some tiny changes you could undertake today that would locate you with people who are not your 'own', not your normal circle? How could you stretch yourself? How can you go on to stretch your love? Maybe start by identifying the person you would find the most difficult to love. Stretch out there.

Prayer Suggestion

Pray for those people who are hostile to you because of Jesus. Pray again for them tomorrow, then the next day. Don't forget them.



FRIDAY 01 APRIL 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Matthew 5:48

Plug In...

Jesus has given six ethics:

- Deal with anger and settle matters quickly with adversary;
- Undertake heart surgery so it has eyes only for God;
- Hold marriage with the tightest possible grip;
- Have complete integrity with your word, with no hidden caveats;
- Forget retaliation, actively absorb loss because of the gospel;
- Stretch your circle of love, include your enemies.

Rounding this out is the most staggering ethic: Be like God!

The NIV11 leaves the emphasis on being perfect with us, i.e., 'you guys, now, be perfect!' The original is a future-tense verb: 'you *will be* perfect'.

If Jesus had set before us only a series of impossibly high bars to reach, then the Sermon becomes pointless to listen to. However, the larger context of Matthew shows Jesus is 'making' disciples (4:19), making blessed ones, making salt & light. This means each ethic is a gospel-promise that Jesus will make us to resemble the Father.

Chew It Over...

Consider how every command in the New Testament, while surely a '*you must be*', is transposed by the work of Jesus on the cross and his gift of the Spirit into also a '*you will be*'.

Over what area of your life has the Sermon on the Mount grabbed you most vigorously? God's word here pushes and pulls you. Meditate on that area God's word is churning you - by His Spirit - into what you will be.

Prayer Suggestion

Give thanks for the fruit of the righteousness of the Kingdom of Heaven that we so often see in the lives of one another at The Lakes. Pray that we will be filled with more of it through Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God. Keeping asking God for His Divine help as you press towards the outcome of being perfect like our Heavenly Father.



WEEKEND 02-03 APRIL 2016

SERIES: GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

Read: Hosea 1-3 & 11

Plug In...

Putting all the Bible has to say on marriage and divorce together, one can conclude it seems that Jesus is not completely ruling out that divorce is permissible for a Christian. Nevertheless, it is not a command, nor does it say this is the path one *must* take even in the event of sexual immorality. It is a concession, an option given how messed up things are in this world; at the point of sexually immorality the marriage bonds may be so disintegrated that divorce is a mercy to both partners.

That understood, The Sermon on the Mount is not given to provide definition as to when divorce is legitimate. The Sermon on the Mount is about Jesus *making us* like how God is.

It is well worth spending time in the chapters of Hosea, as it gives us deep insight into the emotions and character of God. He uses the metaphors of marriage, adultery, divorce, husband and wife to convey how He will pursue the unfaithful, how He will pull out all stops to save the marriage. Matthew has already picked up on this commitment from God to pursue His bride; seen in the sending of Jesus (Matt. 2:15 cf. Hosea 11:1).

Chew It Over...

Think how the metaphors of Hosea help us understand what God is like. How should that pulsate through our marriages?

To process further, consider the following quotes:

[D.A. Carson] "In God's Word, marriage and love are for the tough-minded. Marriage is commitment; and, far from backing out when the going gets rough, marriage partners are to sort out their difficulties in the light of Scripture."

[Timothy Keller] "The reason that marriage is so painful and yet wonderful is because it is a reflection of the gospel, which is painful and wonderful at once. The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. This is the only kind of relationship that will really transform us."

Prayer Suggestion

Ask God to give us gospel-commitment within our marriages. Ask that the gospel-dynamic emerges even more amongst Christian marriages, especially where there is pain, mess, and hurt. May it be that when both partners take the name of Christ as their Lord, their understanding of the gospel drives them to repent, repair, and restore their marriages. Pray for marriages you stand close to at The Lakes.

