

## Mark 10

### An Outline

- I. Divorce (Mark 10:1-12)
- II. The Little Children and Jesus (Mark 10:13-16)
- III. The Rich and the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:17-31)
- IV. Jesus Predicts His Death a Third Time (Mark 10:32-34)
- V. The Request of James and John (Mark 10:35-45)
- VI. Blind Bartimaeus Receives His Sight (Mark 10:46-52)

### Issues for Discussion

1. **“What God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:1-12)** – Jesus taught the permanence of marriage contrary to the Pharisees’ speculative understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, where Moses taught that if a man divorced his wife and she married another man, who also divorced her, she was not to remarry her first husband. Moses spoke more to the matter of remarriage than divorce. Jesus answered by making it clear that God’s original design was for the permanent union of one man with one woman (Genesis 1:27 with 2:24). When the disciples inquired further about this, Jesus clarified Moses’ teaching by signifying that any remarriage after divorce, whether by the man or the woman, was tantamount to committing adultery. Luke 16:18 carries the same teaching.

The challenge comes in Matthew’s account (5:32; 19:9), where he includes what has been termed the **Exception Clause**, namely, “except for sexual immorality.” The popular understanding of this clause is still very limiting, for it only leaves room for extramarital sex or sexual deviance as a permissible cause for divorce (Matthew 5:32) and possible allowance for remarriage (Matthew 19:9). I have argued for a minority perspective, which is also espoused by John Piper (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/divorce-and-remarriage-a-position-paper>). This perspective reasons that Matthew includes the exception clause because he is addressing a Jewish audience, who practiced a one-year betrothal period, prior to sexual consummation of marriage, where a couple was considered married but where the marriage could be annulled if sexual immorality or deviance was discovered within this period. This very situation describes what Joseph was intent to do with respect to Mary when he discovered she was with child during this one-year betrothal period (Matthew 1:18-19). Since most of us do not practice a betrothal period, this exception clause could not be applied to marriages today.

Romans 7:2-3 and 1 Corinthians 7 are the other major New Testament passages that teach on divorce and remarriage. Both passages allow for remarriage upon the death of a spouse (Romans 7:2-3; 1 Corinthians 7:39). 1 Corinthians 7 provides the additional allowance for a divorce by an unbelieving spouse if *they choose* to divorce the believing spouse, but the believing spouse is not to divorce their spouse, whether they are a believer or an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:12-13).

Divorce is never permitted because of what is commonly called “irreconcilable differences.” It must be remembered that marriage pictures Christ’s relationship to the Church (Ephesians 5:25-

33); therefore, marriage is sacred and indissoluble. But we live in a generation not much different from Moses's day, where there was much "hardness of heart" (Mark 10:5) and where there was a culture of divorce such that not only was divorce popular, every divorce made the next divorce easier (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:2). Just as Moses warned against this "detestable" decline in morality, Paul also counseled his generation against remarriage, even for those who were doing so on biblical grounds (1 Corinthians 7:39-40). In other words, if you have divorced, it is better to remain single than to remarry. However, for most of us, we tend to choose what is easier than what is better for us. I am just as guilty as the next man.

I do not see any biblical basis for a lingering curse for those who divorce or remarry. However, whatever situation you are in, I always counsel to do right from now on. Stay pure from now on. Don't divorce again. Don't remarry again. Turn the tide of unrighteousness in your life by the grace of God.

2. **"Let the little children come to me... for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:13-16)** – Mark does not tell us in detail what Jesus meant by "the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:15), but Luke writes, "anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Luke 18:17). Also, remember Matthew 18:4, where Jesus taught, "Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. These texts suggest that Jesus was commending the humility and absolute dependence represented in children. The kingdom belonged to those who were humble and totally dependent on God. Jesus was eager to bless the children because they so naturally depicted the attitude required of those who desired salvation. Right after this, the account of the rich young ruler would provide the contrast to humble, totally dependent faith.
3. **"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Mark 10-17-31)** – A rich young ruler (see parallels in Matthew 18:16-30; Luke 18:18-30) came to Jesus, fell on his knees, and asked, "**Good teacher**...what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Matthew puts the word "good" with the question: "Teacher, what **good thing** must I do to inherit eternal life?" The ruler likely spoke of these things. Jesus questioned the man's use of the word "good": "Why do you call me good? Only God is good." Rather than differentiating Himself with God, Jesus sought to unveil whether this young man understood Who he was addressing, namely, God in the flesh (John 1:14), for if he understood this, he would see that Jesus was not simply a teacher but the LORD, and he would immediately obey whatever Jesus asked of him. But the man was self-confident, saying that he had kept the bottom five of the Ten Commandments since he was a youth. Notably, Jesus did not mention the top four and the last commandments (1 – no other God, 2 – no graven image, 3- not take God's name in vain, 4- keep the Sabbath, 10 – do not covet), which one might consider the hardest to keep.

Mark's text includes the observation that "Jesus loved him" (Mark 10:21), which lets us know that Jesus was not trying to trap or deceive the young ruler. As with Nicodemus in John 3 and the Samaritan woman of John 4, Jesus was trying to draw out humble faith. So He told him, "Go, sell everything you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me" (Mark 10:21). Sadly, we are told, "At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because He had great wealth" (Mark 10:22). Interestingly, and perhaps this should inform some of our evangelism models, Jesus did not chase after him or provide him an easier path. On

the contrary Jesus used the man as an object lesson for His disciples, teaching them, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God...It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:23, 25). The rich young ruler failed the test because he trusted in his righteousness rather than in the LORD. When Jesus showed him where his righteousness did not hold up, namely, his attachment to his wealth, rather than humbling himself and seeking help from Jesus, he chose to walk away. This is why Jesus answered His disciples’ question, “Who then can be saved?” with “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God” (Mark 10:26-27). The Jews considered the rich to be blessed by God, so for Jesus to say it was so hard for the rich to be saved, what hope was there for the rest. Everyone’s hope, whether rich or poor, considered moral or depraved, a ruler or a servant, must be in God alone.

Peter asked about him and the disciples, who left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus answered that whatever they left would be multiplied to them along with persecution in the present age and authority and eternal life in the age to come (compare Mark 10:29-31 with Matthew 19:28-30). The multiplication of family and fields would be realized in the establishment and growth of the Church. As Jesus also said, “Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35). So then, in the Church we have our family multiplied a hundred fold.

4. **“They will condemn him to death...Three days later he will rise” (Mark 10:32-34)** –This is the third time Jesus told His disciples about His coming death and resurrection (1<sup>st</sup> time in Mark 8:31, 2<sup>nd</sup> time in Mark 9:31). While something mentioned twice is confirmed and definite, something mentioned three times is confirmed, definite and pre-ordained (cf. Acts 2:23; 4:27-28). There is no indication that the disciples understood. They were simply “astonished” and “afraid” because they were going to Jerusalem, where they knew the Pharisees were intent to kill Jesus (Mark 10:32; cf. John 11:8).
5. **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:35-45)** – The parallel for this passage is in Matthew 20:20-28. There we have not only the two disciples, James and John (sons of Zebedee) but also their mother coming to Jesus, asking, that one of them might sit on Jesus’s right hand and the other on his left hand in glory. Jesus asked whether they could drink the cup from which he would drink or be baptized with the baptism with which he would be baptized. It is unclear whether they understood these metaphors, which were likely representations of His suffering and crucifixion. They answered in the affirmative, and Jesus confirmed it but also added that the positions of honor were already determined by God the Father. Unsurprisingly, the ten other disciples were indignant with the two, for all of them sought such positions of honor in the coming kingdom.

Interestingly, Jesus did not douse their dreams for greatness. He instead redefined it. There was nothing wrong with desiring greatness; however, greatness in the kingdom will be achieved by servanthood in the present age. When they were arguing about this very thing beforehand, Jesus told them, “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Jesus had also given them an object lesson with a small child, saying, “Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:4). Again, in Luke’s Gospel Jesus said, “It is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest” (Luke 9:48).

John Piper provides this great insight (source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/receiving-children-in-jesus-name>):

Nowhere does Jesus criticize a person for pursuing true greatness or true significance. I think that's because he created us to be great and to be significant—to come to the end of our lives and feel that they were well spent and well invested. But what has happened to this God-given longing for greatness is that it has been corrupted by sin in two ways:

1. It has been corrupted into a longing not to be great, but to be known as great; and
2. It has been corrupted into a longing not to be great, but to be greater than someone else.

In other words, the joy of true greatness has been perverted by sin into the carnal pleasure we sinners get when others praise us and when we think we are greater than others are. Jesus sees this in his disciples and instead of destroying the whole distorted thing, he describes a pathway on which it will be radically transformed into something beautiful.

He says true greatness is not wanting to be first while others are second and third and fourth, but true greatness is the willingness to be last. And true greatness is not positioning yourself so that others praise you, but true greatness is putting yourself in a position to serve everyone—to be a blessing to as many as you possibly can. So Jesus doesn't condemn the quest for greatness. He radically transforms it. Go ahead and pursue it, he says. But the path is down, not up.

Take pastors, for example: the measure of true greatness is not how many people come to his church, or how many books he has written, or how many conferences he speaks at, or how many stations carry his radio program. The measure of true greatness is to what degree has the impulse to self-exaltation been crucified? How much heartfelt desire to serve others has there been? How much readiness and willingness to decrease while others increase?

Beware how you measure greatness in the servants of the Lord. Paul said, "Do not pronounce judgment before the time, until the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then every man will receive his commendation from God" (1 Corinthians 4:5; cf. Romans 2:29).

6. **“Rabbi, I want to see” (Mark 10:46-52)** – The parallel in Matthew has two blind men (20:29-34), but Mark focuses on perhaps the better known Bartimaeus. Though this man was blind, he recognized Jesus was the promised Messiah, for he shouted, “Jesus, Son of David...” (Mark 10:47). He rebuffed peoples’ rebukes and shouted even more. When he came to Jesus, he simply and believingly asked, “Rabbi, I want to see.” He did not ask for alms, which anyone could give, but for sight, which only the Messiah could give. And Jesus gave it according to the man’s simple faith. His sight was restored and he followed Jesus. This man represented the kind of faith that pleases God (Hebrews 11:6).