

Title: Back to the Garden?**[Slide 1]****Text: Matthew 5:31-32 and 19:3-9****Divorce****The "D" Word:**

It is astonishing just how much pain a single word can produce – over and over again. That word? *Divorce*. Few words can derail us so quickly. Just hearing the "D" word can bring back a flood of hurt and shame. We immediately start reliving the most painful part of our entire life. So I would like to make a simple but difficult request: Stay with me! We're not going to try to make sense out of the past. We're going to sit at the feet of King Jesus and let Him point the way to His abundant Life!

Few things derail our lives and relationships the way a divorce does. A divorce is like a meltdown at a nuclear power plant. The greatest damage is done to those closest to the divorce: mom, dad and kids. But the toxic radiation spreads across the landscape of families and friends. Of course, I don't need to tell you any of this; each one of us has been touched by divorce in some way or another.

On one level a divorce is an excruciating legal nightmare that seems both interminable and horribly unfair. But laws and settlements only scratch the surface of the pain and hurt of a divorce. Spousal support doesn't heal a broken heart or atone for a betrayal of the marriage vows. Child support doesn't comfort a child who just wants the family to be the way it once was.

The brokenness goes deeper than lawyers and judges. It goes to the core of who we are, and how we wish our world could be.

Jesus and the Pharisees:

One day a rabbi and some religious experts had a discussion about divorce. It started as an attempt by the experts to trap Jesus in a "gotcha" moment. The conversation began like this:

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Matthew 19:3 NIV

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?"

It hinged around that little phrase: "for any and every reason." In the Judaism of Jesus' time *only a man could initiate divorce*. One school of rabbis taught that a man could divorce his wife only in the case of adultery. The other school of rabbis said that he could divorce her if she burned his dinner – in other words, for any reason whatsoever. If the marriage didn't make the man happy, or he had found someone else, he could file for a divorce.

The question was little more than the cynical reducing of a human tragedy to a snarky debate about legal technicalities. As if checking off the right boxes would somehow make everything okay!

Divorce:

Religion has done the same thing ever since: It has tried to codify divorce by creating a set of boxes to check off. Just apply our rules to your situation and you'll find out if you're on the right side or the wrong side of the ledger. Winners, losers.

But the result all too often is simply more pain and injury piled on already hurting people. And what comfort is it really to sit around thinking about how mad God must be at your ex? It's like ending up in a body cast after a horrible car accident, and trying to feel better by telling yourself it was the other guy's fault.

When we, or our loved ones, go through the car wreck of divorce, we don't need more blame and shame. We need to heal. We need to learn to trust again, to love again, to go forward into the life that God has for us.

That's why Jesus refused to nitpick the legal issues. Instead He took the conversation to a totally different place.

Creation Blueprint

Genesis Two:

He took them back to the beginning of the human story:

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Matthew 19:4-6 NIV

"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 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'? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

Isn't that what we hoped would happen when we walked down the aisle and said our vows? With these words Jesus restated the dream, the hope, the ideal: God's original intent for marriage.

So why divorce?

Of course, going back to the Garden of Eden wasn't what the experts were looking for. They appealed to Mosaic Law:

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Matthew 19:7 NIV

"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

Talking about the Garden of Eden was fine and dandy, but Moses was the Lawgiver in the "real world." Didn't his command take precedence? Wasn't Moses the final authority on the matter?

Creation Blueprint:

Jesus challenges their core assumption:

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Matthew 19:8 NIV

Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."

Moses never *commanded* divorce. Moses *permitted* divorce. Why? Because of the brokenness of the world – a world in which people fall out of love, renege on their promises, hurt and abuse each other. Moses' permission to divorce was a symptom of just how far our world has fallen from God's original intention.

"But it was not this way from the beginning."

So Jesus refuses to enter into a tit for tat argument over who is in the right and who is in the wrong. Instead, He points out that the entire world we live in is broken.

To get marriage right, we don't need more rules. We need to live in an unbroken Creation!

Back to the Garden?**"I tell you..."**

It is only from this perspective that we can hope to understand what Jesus says next:

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Matthew 19:9 NIV

"I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

This is essentially the same thing that He says in the Sermon on the Mount. And what He says only makes sense if we live in a restored Creation where both husband and wife do not have what Jesus called hardened hearts.

With the words "I tell you" Jesus is presenting Himself as the new Lawgiver, the One greater than Moses. Moses gave God's laws for people with hardened hearts. Now God's own Son, through Whom He actually created the world, is present to restore God's Creation. Fix the human heart and it

will no longer be hardened. No hardened hearts means no more need for divorce.

New Creation!

Paul reminds us that when we become Jesus-followers, we become part of God's new, restored Creation:

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2 Corinthians 5:16-17 NIV

So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation: the old has gone, the new is here!

Think of it: this is nothing short of an entirely new way of seeing each other. It is an entirely new way of relating to each other. It isn't based upon how hard we try to be nice or faithful. It isn't based upon who is in the right and who is in the wrong. It is based on Jesus living His resurrection life inside us.

We are no longer the same person we used to be. And when a husband and wife both allow Jesus to live through them, then there is not going to ever be a need for divorce. Divorce belongs to the old, broken order of things that no longer controls or defines us.

Back to the Garden?

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Sound too good to be true? How do we live out this new reality – especially if we are divorce survivors? Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Don't' relitigate the past! What happened to you and your marriage was part of the old, broken Creation that Jesus came to replace. The old is passing away. Don't look back.
- Offer and accept forgiveness. Forgiveness is the *key* that opens the Door to the New Creation. How important is forgiveness? It was Jesus' defining work on the Cross. Jesus died on that Cross to forgive us for all the sins of the world, including the sin done by you or to you through divorce. When we forgive, we close the door on the past and

open the door to God's New World. This means forgiving others, and it also means forgiving ourselves!

- What matters most is what you do *now*. Now is the time to let God soften a hard heart and bring His healing. Now is the time to make a current marriage everything God meant it to be.

Sound too good to be true? It is, until Jesus lives His life in you. And that's what God had in mind all along!