



Loving Jesus, Loving People, Plowing a Counter-Culture

SERMON TEXT: Matthew 5:31-32, Matthew 19:3-9

KEY POINT(S): Our views of marriage should reflect those of God as the Creator and Designer for marriage.

FOR LEADERS

- *Apprenticeship! As always, our hope is that every leader of Emergence would be investing in the leadership potential of those whom God has placed around them! As a leader, who is that person for you, and what does a next step for them look like? If you're looking for more insight or suggestion on how to help your people grow in their own walk, reach out to your Coach or shoot us an e-mail at Communities@emergencenj.org!*

GETTING STARTED

- [1] Icebreaker** – “If you could eliminate one food from the face of the planet, what would it be and why?”
- [2] Communities Video** - Watch this week’s Communities video!
- [3]** What were some things that stood out to you from the sermon this week? Was there anything you found particularly impactful or eye-opening?

THE GREAT DIVORCE

In the sermon this week, Pastor Ryan dove into the subject of divorce, challenging both our understanding today, as well as the understanding the people had in Jesus’ time.

- [1]** Why do you think divorce is so prevalent in our culture? How is that related to the way our culture thinks about marriage?
- [2]** What are some of the main reasons for why people get divorced today?
- [3]** In your opinion, how well do you think the Church is ministering to families today? What do you think we’re doing well, and what could we strive to do better?
- [4]** Have you ever personally seen God restore a marriage that seemed hopeless? If so, what did that look like, and what did you learn from it?

Leaders: Remind your folks that the “Church” is God’s people!! It’s US and WE, not “them” or “they.” So the question of “how is the Church ministering...” is really asking, “How are we doing in this, and in what way do our actions and behavior affect the narrative?” In the sermon, Ryan pointed out that the biggest difference between a cultural view of marriage and the biblical view is the difference between seeing it as a contract vs seeing marriage as a covenant.

A BETTER WAY

This week, Ryan also directed our attention to chapter 19 in Matthew, where Jesus further expounds upon our topic and sheds some more light on how God views marriage and divorce.

Ask a Volunteer to read Matthew 19:3-9

- [5]** In the sermon, Ryan mentioned the difference between understanding marriage as a contract versus seeing it as a covenant. What is this difference, and how does it challenge our views of marriage today?

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[6] When asked about His views of divorce, Jesus instead focuses the Pharisees’ attention on God’s views of marriage. How might we do the same when confronted with struggling marriages where divorce is on the table?

It’s clear in Scripture that God has an incredibly high regard for marriage, and according to Ryan this should lead us toward being extremely reluctant to turning toward divorce as an answer to a problem within a marriage. Among other things, this means that struggling couples will need to be challenged to work through challenges and pursue different kinds of help, rather than simply seeking to end their marriage.

Ask a Volunteer to read Matthew 5:31-32

[7] In your opinion, why do you think Jesus cares so much about the topic of divorce, and what does that tell us about how we should view divorce?

[8] What are some examples of conflict within marriage today that are often seen as “grounds for divorce?” Are they? Explain why or why not.

[9] In what way(s) does God often use circumstances of relational struggle or conflict for our good? What kinds of help are available to couples that are truly struggling?

[10] How would you personally counsel someone who is struggling with a spouse who is emotionally disengaged, abusive, or who has had an affair?

[11] How might we (as the Church) better love and serve both married couples who are struggling and/or people who have been through divorce?

Leaders: God’s view of marriage is very, very high. He designed it, and it is beautiful in His eyes, so it should be the same to ours. Regardless of the circumstances of a particular person or couple, divorce should NEVER be the first thought for the Christian, but rather RECONCILIATION. Obviously, there are circumstances in which extreme action may need to be taken – specifically in cases of abuse and/or adultery – but as Ryan said in the sermon, these things are not necessarily, in and of themselves, grounds for divorce. God Himself is a victim of divorce, abuse and adultery as His bride, the Church has repeatedly cheated on Him and gone after other lovers. You can see more of God’s heart to us in passages like Hosea 1, 3:1-2, and Ezekiel 16. Meanwhile, our culture has drifted so far away from God’s design for marriage that almost anything could be grounds for divorce when, in reality, just a bit of communication and conflict resolution might turn their struggles into a powerful source of strength!

To that end, the Church has a responsibility to model this for the world, whether we are married, never been married, or were once married. We should hold God’s design and covenant of marriage as a sacred blessing, and an image of God’s faithful love toward us.

PRAYER

[1] Pray that God would help us to see marriage as He sees it – as precious, and something worth fighting for.

[2] Also, pray that the Lord would open our eyes to couples who are struggling, and give us insight as to how we might be people of encouragement, support, and loving guidance for them.