

[The pastor of the church Pastor Eddie Wee, is giving a series of sermons on the Gospel of Mark. He wanted me to preach on Mark 10, on marriage and divorce]

A sermon from Mark 10

Given at Western Sydney Christian Chinese Church

By Bob Mendelsohn

6 May 2006

IS IT WORTH IT?

Values are funny things. The axiom is ‘one man’s trash is another man’s treasure.’ I see that every time there is a council rubbish collection in my neighbourhood. People will put out their old chairs and lamps, their brooms and you guessed it, people come by over the next two days and remove the items to their cars and eventually to their homes.

What about the value of a human life? Has anyone asked how much the city of Beaconsfield is spending on getting two miners out of their 12-day trap? What about state or federal governments? The Australian newspaper yesterday reported “Macquarie Bank caved in to intense pressure over its handling of the Beaconsfield goldmine and walked away from a contentious debt deal by promising to share future returns with workers.

“But with the mine likely to shut down after the disaster that has claimed one miner and trapped two others 1km underground, the bank was accused yesterday of cynical damage control in deciding to set

up a trust for workers, with union bosses describing the move as potentially "worthless"."

Wow, worthless. It's really a word meaning worth nothing.

One man's trash in this case really is another man's treasure.

Accident victim five-year-old Sophie Delezio has certainly won the nation's heart. She was a burn victim in Fairlight in that horrible accident three years ago. She lost both feet, her right ear and we cheered for her recovery. Now she has multiple fractures from another driver in French's Forest and may not recover all that well. And as one, the nation is praying for miners and minors.

But usually children are less of a concern. In fact often unwelcome in parts of today's adult world. There are areas, whole subdivisions for 55 year olds with steep penalties for visiting children, and there are restaurants that recommend children are left elsewhere with a child minder. The values the restaurant maintain are not the values of a family.

In our chapter today, some of Jesus' followers, must have bought into that very values process.

¶ And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, "Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all." And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them. "(Mark 13-16)

So Jesus (or may I call him Y'shua?) corrects this bad information the disciples shared. Y'shua wanted all people, old and young, Jewish and non-Jewish to have access to him, to know him and to enjoy life together. He valued children and we should as well.

Y'shua certainly manifested that characteristic and taught by example and by word his nature of welcome and love.

So you might wonder, how does the first part of the chapter communicate the same concerned value? There for a dozen verses, Y'shua is confronted and answers questions about marriage and divorce. Some Pharisees are aiming to test, but really to trap Jesus, to see if he is one rabbi who is against the other rabbis, and thus against the Law.

What they didn't know is that Jesus wrote the Torah, so he's not going to go against it.

But how would they know that? They had to run experiments, flagrant misuses of their right to question, but they self-assigned such rights. And they carefully chose a spot to conduct their experiment. "the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan" This is probably Perea, Herod Antipas's territory, the ruler who had put John the Baptist to death because John had denounced Antipas's marriage to Herodias. It seems the Pharisees hoped that Messiah, by his statements on marriage and divorce, would get himself into trouble with Antipas and would suffer the same cruel fate as John. Clever laboratory venue, eh?

But remember Y'shua has just left comfortable Galilee on his way to Jerusalem and the cross. His privacy and seclusion is over. It is a self-denying journey and he knows he will encounter trouble at nearly every turn. He is ready to bear his cross and to die for our sins. He must take the heat from triumphal testing Pharisees.

So here they come, and the verse tells us they didn't really want to learn; they wanted just enough information so they could charge him in a court of Jewish law.

Most Jewish people then and now have little trouble with the idea of divorce. It has been allowed since the days of Moses. You should also know there were two basic schools of Pharisaic thought, one entitled the school of Shammai, the other the School of Hillel. Both of these rabbis lived a generation before Messiah. These men gave interpretations of most biblical concerns including marriage and divorce. The school of Shammai was the stricter of the two schools, and understood divorce to be allowed for moral indecency, in particular, adultery. The school of Hillel interpreted the words much more freely. Just about anything in a wife that a husband did not find to his liking was suitable grounds for divorce—even if she burned his food! [HE Turlington, Broadman Bible Commentary, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1946, p 346) So where did Jesus stand in this? That was their question.

[Rabbi Eleazar commented in Gemara, “When a man divorces his first wife, even the altar sheds tears. (Mishna :Gittin 90b). There is a Jewish

tradition that in messianic times the stricter rules of Shammai will become the standard. It's all related to the term 'indecency in a matter'. Is the emphasis on indecency or 'in a matter.' Shammai the first; Hillel the 2nd.]

The duplicity and deceit of the Pharisees appear in this answer, which actually quoted Moses inaccurately. They are citing Deuteronomy 24. where Moses is teaching about bringing sin and resultant separation into Israel. If a man divorces his wife and then she marries another, and he divorces her, then "her former husband who sent her away is not allowed to take her again to be his wife, since she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring sin on the land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance."

I think the issue of divorce is subtly discounted in the text of Moses, and not the point at all. The point is once gone, she is gone, and don't get re-involved. It really is about maintenance and not about divorce. Or so I see it.

Now, of course Moses allowed it and Y'shua teaches that the reason Moses allowed it was 'hardness of heart.' (v. 5) He is not upset at Moses, but rather at the people who had such a heart of opposition to God's obvious plans. As always, Y'shua elevates Moses above the people, and then elevates his own views and values far above Moses.

How does he do that? By citing the original plan. He moves the discussion from the book of Deuteronomy to Genesis, from Moses to God, from divorce to the purpose of marriage, from that which is permitted to what is obviously intended by the Almighty, ‘from the beginning.’

The NIV commentary says, “Moses’ permission to divorce was an accommodation to human weakness. It was an attempt to bring some sort of order in a society that disregarded God’s standards. But that is not what God intended in marriage. His original design in creating man and woman was that marriage should be an unbroken lifelong union (Ge 2:18-24). Marriage was not a temporary convenience that could be terminated at will.”

Y’shua teaches that the standard, the original family value, the model of a family is one father, and one mother. Not a biological sperm bank/donor for a gay couple so a child can have three parents, not a multi-partner open marriage, but one man and one woman. This is God’s usual and sacred original intent.

And Y’shua won the conversation again. He didn’t condone divorce nor did he speak against Moses. He simply went beyond the commandments to the original intent.

So the Pharisees were missing it; they were looking at the escape clause; God was looking at harmony and relationships and love and family values.

One of our major troubles is the hardness of our hearts. We all sin; we all fail. We all fall short of God's standards. God wants us to be in relationship with him, but our sin prevents that. Only his grace allows us back in!

[Judaism teaches marriage as normal. "The unmarried person is not fully a man" (Yevamot 62b-63a)]

BACK AT THE HOUSE

All this took place publicly. Then after this confrontation, the disciples and Y'shua took some repose. When they were back inside, the disciples asked for clarification. He gave a fuller answer, this time with greater clarity about the 10 commandments #7, "You shall not commit adultery." Even though the rabbis had an understanding that a husband could not be said to commit adultery against his wife, Y'shua once again goes beyond rabbinic law by saying a husband *could* commit adultery against his wife. [CEB Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark*, (Cambridge: University Press, 1966) p. 321.] In fact in most patriarchal societies and cultures, this would be a dramatic table-turning for acknowledgement of sin against women.

So once again Y'shua elevates the role and honour due to women in general, and certainly divorcees in particular here. The value of the family is still intact and the love we should have for all people is clear.

WORTHY IS THE LAMB

Let me gather some remarks together as I draw to a conclusion. What you consider worthwhile, is really worthy of your attention. All from the word ‘worth’. And what you value is what you deem worthy. No wonder John the Revelator used that adjective to describe the Messiah, in Rev. 5 we read of the living creatures and the 24 elders singing, “Worthy are You to take the book, and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” (v 9)

Then angels and throngs in heaven joined in the chorus, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.” (v. 12)

Y’shua was and is worthy of everything we own and everything we know.

Many Christians gather on Sunday to worship. The word *worship* comes from the old English meaning one who is worthy of receiving praise. It might be heard in those days as ‘worth-ship’.

And on what is that based? On his dying for us, John said, “for you were slain”. His death on the cross opened up our capacity to know God. We are able to enter heaven because Jesus died. We are able to have good families and to know God’s intent because Jesus died and rose again.

So what do you value? Your wife, your marriage, your children, other's children? The values God values? What matters to you? What do you consider worthy of your time and energy?

INVITATION

Perhaps you are ready today to give your life to Jesus. You have heard about being born again and accepting Christ as your Saviour, and you have seen him in contest with rabbis today and you found yourself cheering for him to get the answer right.

I think you are ready. Have you any good reason not to accept Christ? If not, pray this prayer and receive His love and grace. Father, forgive me in the name of Y'shua for all my sins. He was the Savior and the fulfillment of all prophecies about Messiah. He is the one and the only one who can save me from my selfishness, from my sin. I acknowledge Y'shua as that one who wants to free me, and who alone can free me. I repent of my sin and accept Y'shua as my deliverer. By faith I am now born again by the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Final thanks to pastor

If you prayed that prayer, please talk to me after the service is over, so we can talk about growing in this knowledge and this relationship with God.

For those reading this sermon online and who have just prayed that prayer, please email me straightaway so we can ‘talk.’ My address is bobmendo@aol.com

Mark 10.1 ¶ And rising up, He went from there to the region of Judea, and beyond the Jordan; and crowds gathered around Him again, and, according to His custom, He once more began to teach them.

Mark 10.2 ¶ And some Pharisees came up to Him, testing Him, and began to question Him whether it was lawful for a man to divorce a wife.

Mark 10.3 And He answered and said to them, “What did Moses command you?”

Mark 10.4 And they said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”

Mark 10.5 But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment.

Mark 10.6 “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

Mark 10.7 “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother,

Mark 10.8 and the two shall become one flesh; consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh.

Mark 10.9 “What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.”

Mark 10.10 And in the house the disciples began questioning Him about this again.

Mark 10.11 And He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her;

Mark 10.12 and if she herself divorces her husband and marries another man, she is committing adultery.”

Mark 10.13 ¶ And they were bringing children to Him so that He might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them.

Mark 10.14 But when Jesus saw this, He was indignant and said to them, “Permit the children to come to Me; do not hinder them; for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

Mark 10.15 “Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it at all.”

Mark 10.16 And He took them in His arms and began blessing them, laying His hands upon them.