

2 separate messages today:

The first one's, really short.

Matthew 5:³³ “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' ³⁴ But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; ³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. ³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. ³⁷ Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Do I need to explain that? Keep your promises. Always tell the truth. Never lie. There is no such thing as a white lie. If you're driving a truck, do not fudge your logbook. If you're putting in a timesheet, don't claim a few extra minutes. If the truth will get you into trouble, tell the truth and bear the consequences.

Be men and women of absolute integrity. Don't even try to mislead someone, without technically telling a lie. Say what you mean. Mean what you say.

Bending the truth is what the devil does. Where as Jesus Christ is the truth, and His people live by truth.

Questions?

Fred was leaning on the bar & confided in Bill that he was going to get a divorce. "She hasn't spoken to me in 5 months - not a word" he said.

Divorce

Bill pondered this & said, "Don't be too hasty, Fred. Wives like that are hard to find."

In 2011, there were just under 122 000 new marriages in Australia.

In the same year, there were just under 50 000 divorces.

So, there was one divorce for every 2.5 marriages... And who could guess at how many de facto marriages ended in a de facto divorce in the same period.

*Today, 78% of couples live together before they get marriedⁱ. And many people **never** get married, and live with multiple de facto partners over their life time.*

When God instituted marriage, He intended a life-long union, between a man and a woman, at the exclusion of all others. Genesis 2:²⁴ **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and **hold fast** to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.**

But today, we've become a country, with an epidemic of divorce. *The median duration from marriage to divorce (for divorcing couples), is 12.2 yearsⁱⁱ. 12.2 years... Most of us make our cars last longer than that.*

The [Family Law Act 1975](#) established the principle of no-fault divorce in Australian law. This means that a court does not consider which partner was at fault in the marriage breakdown. The only ground for divorce is the irretrievable breakdown of the relationship, demonstrated by 12 months of separation.ⁱⁱⁱ

That's how marriages get ended today. If you can live apart from each other for 12 months, you can get a divorce.....

But you know what??? In Jesus' day, it was even **easier** to get divorced. In a world where men ruled, and women were sometimes seen as 2nd class citizens, *Jewish husbands could divorce for virtually any reason. Even if his wife burnt the bread she was baking^{iv}*, this could be grounds for divorce, and the only requirement on the man, was for him to give his wife a certificate, so that she could legally get married again.

That was their practice. Marriage had become cheap. Marriage no longer required commitment. ... When you get married, you are entering a covenant – a covenant to a life-long union.

A marriage between a man and a woman, is meant to be a sign and a witness of the relationship between Christ and His church. Just as we – the church – belong to Christ, husbands and wives belong to each other. Just as we honour Christ, and He forgives us, when we fail Him, Husbands and wives must honour one another, and forgive each other, when they fail each other. Just as we make a commitment to Christ, and to Him alone, husbands and wives, make a commitment to each other, at the exclusion of all others...

That's what marriage is supposed to be – a witness and a sign of the relationship between Christ and His church...

One of the last things God said in the Old Testament, He said through the prophet Malachi 2:¹³ **Another thing you do: You flood Yahweh's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.** ¹⁴ You ask, "Why?" It is because Yahweh is

acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

¹⁵ Has not Yahweh made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

¹⁶ "I hate divorce," says Yahweh, God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says Yahweh Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

There's some passion in there, and that's the word of the Lord, on marriage.....

That's God's standard. That's what He requires.....

I'm a bit disappointed with myself, because I really wanted to include this section on "divorce", when I preached last week, but I ran out of time. Last week, we were confronted with some impossible standards to keep. "If you're angry with someone, you're a murderer". "If you lust after a woman in your heart, you've committed adultery." ... Impossible standards....

And the only outcome from it, is to come to the realisation that "I am a sinner". "I need to be saved from my sin".

And the 2 themes that I picked up, last week, were “mercy” and “transformation”. We have all failed. We have all sinned, and we all need God’s mercy. *God loves us, just as we are (that’s mercy)*, and while we were still sinners, He gave us Jesus Christ to save us from sin... *but He loves us too much to let us **stay** as we are (that’s transformation)*.

God forgives us, not for us to go on sinning, but for us to be transformed, with the help of His Spirit.... You don’t want to stay the way you are, do you? You don’t want to have lust in your heart. You don’t want to have anger in your heart...

And I really wanted to hold this section of “divorce”, together with what I preached on last week. Mercy, and transformation... Divorce, is **not** the unforgivable sin. Nor is it **the** sin...

Last week, we talked about how adultery and murder, aren’t the sin – they’re simply the outworking **of** the sin. The sins are “lust” and “anger”. Sin is what’s in the heart.

And if we start reading this passage as a legal requirement, we’ve missed the whole point of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount... Jesus is proclaiming that we need to have pure hearts. It’s not **just** what we do – it’s what we think and feel and harbour in our hearts.

And the principle that Jesus is driving home is: “Husbands, do not betray your wife. Divorcing her is betrayal. She deserves better than that, and you committed to **give** her better than that. And it’s not just what you do – it’s what’s in your heart. Cling to her. Hold fast to her. Love her. Cherish her. Hold

her above all other women in your heart and mind. Let her be your desire.”

“And women, do not betray your husbands. Cling to him. Hold fast to him. Love him. Cherish him. Honour him. Hold him above all other men, in your heart and in your mind.”

Marriage, is life-long. There is one exception that Jesus gives – Adultery.... But this exception, is *not given as an excuse to escape a difficult marriage – it’s not an “out” clause. What it does, is it exonerates those who genuinely wished to save their marriage, but were unable to do so because their spouse’s unrepentant abuse of the marriage covenant*’....

You realise, that in Jesus' day, if this was taken as a rule – adultery being the **only** grounds for divorce, there would still be no divorces... Adultery was punishable by death – male and female... If you divorced your spouse, on the grounds of proof of adultery, by law, they would be stoned to death.

And so Jesus sets this up as another impossible standard – no divorce.

So, what if you **are** divorced? What then? ... Well you need to hear, “Divorce is **not** the unforgivable sin”. Confess your sin. Confess whatever part you’ve been responsible for in your marriage failure, and receive the mercy of God.

But if sin is a matter of the heart, it’s not only those who have actually gone through the legal process of divorce, who need to repent.

- It's married couples who live distant lives – rarely talking to one another.
- It's when you take your spouse for granted
- It's when you deny the other, the intimacy that cements your relationship
- It's when you desire another person to be in the place of your spouse
- It's when anger drives your attitude, or selfishness your desires
- It's when you dish out the silent treatment, or give them a piece of your mind
- It's when the husband doesn't love his wife as his own body, or when the wife doesn't respect her husband....

We all need to repent of these things, and receive the mercy of God.

That's mercy. But also, be transformed. Part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ – part of Kingdom living, is transformed marriages.

Husbands, look at your wives. Wives, look at your husbands...

If you're not married, watch and learn.

Look into each other's eyes. Don't look away. Look into them. Do you want to see the transformation of God in your marriage? Do you?

Let's pray together:

Lord Jesus Christ, merciful God our saviour,
We made vows on our wedding day, and in so many ways we have failed to keep them. We have not loved our wives as Christ loved the church. We have not respected and honoured

one another. We have not held fast to one another. We have not cherished and forgiven one another. ... Lord forgive us. Lord, forgive us for when we have desired someone other than our spouse, and for breaking faith with the wife or husband of our youth. ... Lord forgive us.

Heavenly Father, please fill us with your Spirit, and transform our marriages, so that they will truly be a sign and witness of the relationship between Christ and His Church.

Lord, deepen our love. Strengthen our bond. And fill our marriages with joy and peace.

And Lord, we pray for those here today, who are not yet married. Lord, may they even today, be preparing for the one they will marry, by honouring marriage in society, and by keeping themselves pure, in preparation for their day of marriage.

In Christ's name
Amen.

Questions:

ⁱ<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/3327AE72B9B7BB75CA257AC50011308D?opendocument>

ⁱⁱ<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/A180106877C39F25CA257AC500113195?opendocument>

ⁱⁱⁱ<http://www.familylawcourts.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/FLC/Home/Family+Law+Principles/No+fault+divorce/>

^{iv} Keener CS. A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew Eerdmans 1999 . p.192

^v Keener CS. A commentary on the Gospel of Matthew Eerdmans 1999 . p.192