

September 6, 2015

DIVORCE

Matthew 5:31-32

First, let me tell you what Tom Kingery thinks about divorce.

I believe in second chances. Divorce can be very liberating. A person *can* find life after oppression. God's grace can be experienced in the glorious discovery of love and care in a healthy relationship after having had to suffer through brokenness and hurt. I've seen it. But...brokenness can be mended. Hurt can heal. Marriages can be saved. I've seen it. You don't just give up. I've seen that... too often.

I know, though that there are different ways of dying than dying. If, in a marriage relationship, there is abuse – for example: a wife is beaten by her husband – she literally needs to escape death in order to survive. Divorce can be very liberating! Likewise, if, in a marriage relationship, it is not physical abuse, but spiritual, moral, or psychological abuse, and it seems like you are suffocating, or, dying inside, you also need to escape in order to survive. I've seen it. I've seen it all. But, even so, with therapy and counseling and serious effort, distorted personalities and destructive behavior can change and a positive relationship can evolve, or, re-evolve. I've seen it.

When, in a marriage, vows are broken, love runs dry, or, commitment is neglected, the covenant promise seems to have ended...from the point of view of either partner. Divorce can allow for a rediscovery of hope. I've seen it. But... I've also seen people stay married even when things have broken down, staying with a partner who doesn't love them, who dishonors them, who shows little or no sign of respect or cherishing them... and they just are not happy in their marriage. So... they find happiness in settings other than the home they share. It is possible to stay married, even when it isn't much of a marriage. Is it right to do so? Would this be God's will for us? No!

God's will is that our marriages be grounded in faith. But if one partner is unwilling to walk in grace, too stubborn to change, to work at the marriage, or, just plain indifferent, they are sinning. It is a sin to break your vows. It is a sin to let your marriage just fail, or, to cause its failure, just as it's a sin to be selfish.

That's some of what Tom Kingery thinks about divorce. I will preach about the meaning of marriage some other time.

Now, if what I think about divorce seems to contradict what Jesus said about it, please, understand – I believe in grace in the midst of sin, healing in the midst of brokenness, and in health even in the midst of sickness. I would never refuse to marry someone simply because they had been divorced. I believe in second chances. And I believe in survival. And I also believe in renewal!

Jesus cites a passage from Deuteronomy 24 – *“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife. Then...suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband who sent her away is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you to possess!”* (vs 1-4) Realize that only up until about 200 years ago (at best) women were property. They were the property of their fathers until they became the property of their husband. We do not think this way anymore. The issue Jesus had with divorce seems to revolve around adultery – *“I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity,*

causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” (Matthew 5:32)

Part of what I think we need to do is understand marriage and divorce from God’s point of view. From God’s point of view, the two become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24) The vision implies that once we become “one,” we can’t become two again without some serious pain. To understand this, at least to some degree, imagine the child with his tongue frozen to the steel pole in winter. It is so connected that it would hurt a great deal to pull away and tear apart from it. This is not to say that marriage is only like being stuck together, but, in a way, it is. Divorce becomes adultery, from God’s point of view, when God’s intended oneness and togetherness are abused, watered down to little more than a physical relationship concerned more with physical intimacy than with the uniting of heart with heart. What Jesus says is not unlike the condemnation of the man (or woman) who just wants to trade in for a younger (or, different) model. That’s not true marriage. True marriage is not just about physical intimacy. It’s about being committed – “for better or worse, richer or poorer, in sickness and health... till death do you part.”

The sad thing is that some marriages die before anyone’s dead. I have known a few couples who, within a week, begin to realize that they’re not really a good match. More often than not, it takes a bit longer than that. Part of the problem is that someone was just not being genuine. Or, they just didn’t really take the time to get to know each other. Or, it was all about the thrill of physical intimacy, and when that thrill subsided, they discovered that they actually had nothing in common. They were mis-matched.

First of all, God wants us to make it work! Love is not just an emotion, it is the highest gift. If we are supposed to love our enemies, which seems impossible, we should find it very possible to love our neighbors. Then, love our friends. Building a friendship isn’t always instantaneous or automatic. It takes work. Marriage takes work. It might not always feel easy to cherish one another, but by faith we can always honor one another. But...when someone becomes dishonorable, friendship dies; partners become estranged; and the marriage relationship not only becomes strained, but destructive. The marriage dies.

The good news is that there is such a thing as resurrection. Even a lousy marriage can be revived! Still, if it seems doomed, God is merciful. It is not adultery when it is an issue of survival. It is not adultery when there can grow new loyalty, fidelity, a cherishing that nurtures body, soul, and mind. By faith, we can always find new life. Sometimes... it is with a different partner. Heaven help us!

The good news is that there is such a thing as a resurrection!

And we have a new covenant to celebrate!