

3 October 2021

Sentence

Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it. Mark 10.15

Collect

Loving God, you have made us in your own image, creating us male and female, and you have consecrated the covenant of marriage so that in it is signified the spiritual marriage between Christ and his Church: pour your grace upon all who are called to this holy state, that, keeping their promise of faithfulness to each other, they may reflect in their lives your love for us all; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Job 1.1; 2.1-10

¹ In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.

¹ On another day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them to present himself before him. ² And the Lord said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered the Lord, 'From roaming throughout the earth, going to and fro on it.'

³ Then the Lord said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.'

⁴ 'Skin for skin!' Satan replied. 'A man will give all he has for his own life. ⁵ But now stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face.'

⁶ The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.' ⁷ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head. ⁸ Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.

⁹ His wife said to him, 'Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!' ¹⁰ He replied, 'You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?' In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

Psalm 26

¹ Give judgement for me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity:

I have trusted in the Lord and not wavered.

² Put me to the test, O Lord, and prove me: try my mind and my heart.

³ For your steadfast love has been ever before my eyes: and I have walked in your truth.

⁴ I have not sat with deceivers: nor consorted with the hypocrites;

⁵ I hate the assembly of the wicked: I will not sit with the ungodly.

⁶ I wash my hands in innocence, O Lord: that I may go about your altar,

⁷ And lift up the voice of thanksgiving: to tell of all your marvellous works.

⁸ Lord, I love the house of your habitation: and the place where your glory dwells.

⁹ Do not sweep me away with sinners: nor my life with those that thirst for blood,

¹⁰ In whose hand is abomination: and their right hand is full of bribes.

¹¹ As for me, I walk in my integrity: O ransom me and be favourable toward me.

¹² My foot stands on an even path: I will bless the Lord in the great congregation.

Hebrews 1.1-4; 2.5-12

¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. ³

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁴ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

⁵ It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. ⁶ But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him?' ⁷ You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour ⁸ and put everything under their feet.', In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them.

⁹ But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

¹⁰ In bringing many sons and daughters to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through what he suffered.

¹¹ Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters. ¹² He says, 'I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises.'

Mark 10.2-16

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' ³ 'What did Moses command you?' he replied. ⁴ They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'

⁵ 'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied. ⁶ 'But at the beginning of creation God "made them male and female." ⁷ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.'

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.'

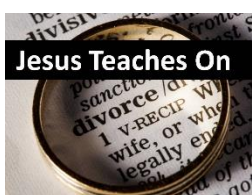
¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.



I wonder if God the Father was reviewing his angels today and Satan turned up, if they would discuss any of us? Are any of us blameless and upright, God fearing and shunning evil? Or to put it another way:

how did you feel reading the Psalm today; did you say, 'yep that's me, put me to the test at any time, I always walk in integrity, and I can cope with whatever you throw at me.'. Or did you perhaps squirm a little?

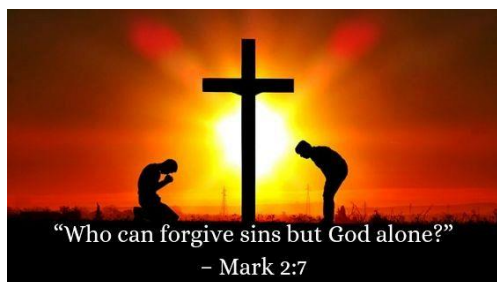
Very few people could quote that Psalm to God, without him laughing in their faces but Job was just such a man. He was truly a remarkable man, perhaps not easy to live with but a virtuous man.



Do you have an uncomfortable reaction to the reading from Mark as well? Jesus very plainly says in this passage that it is not God's will for people to divorce, that anyone who divorces and remarries is committing adultery.

Ouch that hurts. As you know I have been divorced, and although I was trying to make it work and he left me, it was me who initiated the legal proceedings. No matter what way you look at it, I am a sinner. (Even without the divorce, I am far from perfect, but we won't go there today.)

Some of you are also divorced, some of you have children or other loved ones who are divorced, and this passage hurts, we/our loved ones are sinners. Where can we go from here? What a shame there is not someone who would die for our sin and set us free.



Jesus did just that! There is nowhere in the Bible where it says that Divorce or any other sin, except rejection of the Holy Spirit, is an unforgiveable sin. We have not rejected the Holy Spirit; it is through the Holy Spirit that we come to the Father and confess our sins and receive forgiveness. As far as

the East is from the West he removes our sins from us, all of our sins, every selfish thought, every mean word, every moment when we fail, our divorces and every other thing. That is why he came to earth, that is why he died, not just for the 'little' sins but for all of them. *The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*

When God looks at us, he looks at us through Jesus and sees perfection, Jesus is our brother, and we are holy because he made us so.



What was going really going on in this story.

Why was John the Baptist killed? Because he told Herod that it was unlawful to marry a divorced woman. The Pharisees thought that if they could get Jesus to answer a this question wrong Herod might do their dirty work for them. Jesus knows exactly what they are doing and gives them an answer straight from the oldest, most revered part of scripture.

While in other places in the New Testament we find permission for divorce in some circumstances, the present passage is not designed to give detailed case law but to state the rule itself as clearly as possible; the Pharisees are not interested in the law, they are looking to trap Jesus.



The problem is not with the ideal: God designed marriage to be a joyous pairing of two people who could work together and have children and be helpmates all their lives; but with, as always: Israel just like everyone else, was hard hearted., eager to take the precious gift of humanness and exploit it.

Jesus avoids taking sides on the hidden question about Herod's marriage to his sister-in-law. Instead, Jesus' stick with the concerns of the disciples: God's intention in creating human beings.

Jesus was looking at the selfish individualism of the Herodian court when he made his comments in answer to the pharisees question. He was not telling a battered woman that she and her children must suffer physical and emotional abuse every day to avoid divorce.



In those days all an individual needed to do was declare that they no longer wished the marriage to continue, there was no court, no divorce proceedings. What we call separation is what the Bible means by divorce and so marriage was often regarded very lightly and that is why Moses required men to give their wives a certificate of divorce to prove that they were free to marry again.



A failed marriage represents a human tragedy to everyone involved. The church's job, that's us, is to love everyone involved and if reconciliation is not possible to bring what healing and comfort we can, into their lives, including the children. It is so often the children who have no say in the divorce, and who are pulled around physically and emotionally by parents who are using them as weapons instead of looking after them.

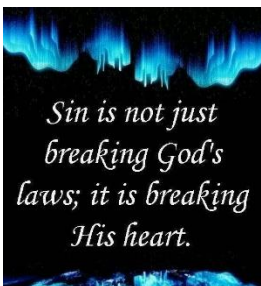


The disciples thought Jesus' time was too precious to waste on children, but Jesus took the children in his arms and blessed them, and we must beware of thinking that kids are resilient or will get over it without making them a priority.

Sure, it's better for children to live in safety and to live with an adult who is not abusive, angry or frightened but sometimes we adults should think again, think of ways to make things work, to be humble and forgiving before we just give up and walk away.

When my ex-son-in-law declared that he no longer wanted to be married, my daughter did everything in her power for over a year to win him back, but nothing could change his mind. It's been several years now, and the kids are Ok but there have been some tough times for my daughter and her girls.

We do need to think about God's best plan for his people, not because we want to trap people by hard-hearted rules but because we want to make Christian families what God intended them to be, an example of loving kindness carried out in the real world.



All of us sin, none of us live perfect lives but no matter whether we have been divorced or done something even worse or merely the little selfish things that we rationalise away, we are all sinners, but our Lord doesn't look at the supposed size of the sin, they are all sins and he died so that we can be forgiven. But we do not go on

sinning knowing that we can be forgiven, we try very hard to follow his way and avoid sin, we are called to be his loving presence to everyone in our lives, especially those closest to us, and we try to please our Lord in everything we do.

