

Sermon ✝ October 3, 2021

Mark 10:2-16

Frank H. Maxwell

A son was born to a family. The parents were so proud. The father hoped that he would choose to follow in his steps and be an engineer, and the son did grow up to be so inclined. He was good at mathematics and loved to build things. To this end the father saved for his son's education and looked forward to the time when he would go off to school.

But when the boy began his a senior in high school, the 9/11 event took down the twin towers in New York. Instead of going to college he entered the Air Force and went away to serve his country. The father was crushed at this interruption of *their* plans, but he was proud of his son. Under the circumstances, this was the best that he could expect though it was not what he planned or willed.

When the son returned from Afghanistan, he completed his college education school and today heads his father's firm.

We find in this story the *will* of the father expressed on three different levels. His *intentional will* that his son grow up unhindered in his progress toward a career in engineering. When this was disturbed, we find his *circumstantial will* expressed in the boy doing what he could under the circumstances. Then we see his *ultimate will* expressed in his son finally coming to accomplish what he had hoped for him in the beginning.

While we cannot fully know the mind of God, the scriptures reveal to us that God is a parent much like that.

God has desires and designs for us children, and if God's intentional will is not disturbed we live the ideal life. But we live in a fallen world. Sin has invaded our midst, and we injure one another, on and off the battlefields of life.

Sin, sickness, and death occur, and thus God has to allow some things that God doesn't intend because of the circumstances. But in the end . . . God's will . . . will be accomplished . . . that is what Jesus is all about.

Now this is a broad theological principle which deals with our creation in perfection, our fall through sin, and our restoration in Christ. Can we apply to this the very practical matter of marriage and divorce?

Amidst all the problems of our culture, certainly one of the most difficult challenges is how the church views divorce. The sad thing is that the church has not known how to deal with this question. About all we have to say is that monogamous marriage is good and that divorce is not good. While this may be true, it is an inadequate theology.

Sickness, too, is a bad thing, but we relate to people who are sick and show great compassion to them. We do not always know how to respond to a person who is enduring a broken relationship or involved in a messy divorce. About all we can do is respond in silence and whispered conversations that end abruptly when the person enters the room.

How can we be more comfortable in our thoughts about marriage and divorce? What should be the Christian perspective?

To begin, we can hold to our belief that God's *intentional will* is monogamous marriage . . . "till death do us part". And in order to be compassionate, understanding and forgiving toward a person experiencing brokenness in a marriage, we do not have to surrender this very basic tenet of our faith.

It is part of our creation faith. When God created the man, the man was incomplete. All of the animals were not fit companions. The woman was not made as the man's helper (i.e., subservient . . . as the animals), but an equal partner. And they lived in perfect harmony in the garden called Eden. But this was before the Fall.

And so in our theology of marriage we must give place to the reality of the serpent. In doing so, we move on to what is God's *circumstantial will*.

We do not live in the paradise of Adam and Eve where things are ideal. We must live outside the garden in our fallen world where problems exist and tensions arise.

- The serpent still raises its head.
- Some people have more problems than others.
- Some are more able to cope than others.
- Some people change.
- Some people are jerks.

There are times when people are literally destroying each other in their marriages. What is God's will under these circumstances?

Jesus acknowledged that provisions are made to remedy an impossible situation. He spoke about Moses allowing for the possibility of divorce. But he also said, "*This is not the way God intended it.*" Because we are caught up in our fallen human condition, divine concession becomes necessary.

And because divorce is an option, it should be the last resort rather than the first alternative to marital problems.

While we must accept divorce as necessary under certain circumstances, we must never take it lightly.

The whole of creation weeps for the brokenness of the order. It isn't God's intention for us that life should come to this. We cannot, however, believe that God wills that we destroy ourselves in an impossible relationship.

Our theology of marriage and divorce must make place for the fact that we don't live in a perfect world. God's will becomes circumstantial. Divorce makes the best of a bad situation.

But we cannot end here . . . for God doesn't leave us wallowing in despair. God's *ultimate will* for us is to live full and abundant lives on this side of God's grace.

Jesus came to speak to our loneliness and our brokenness and our despair. In the midst of marriage and, yes even divorce, we must make a place for God's grace and forgiveness.

We must all personally agonize with those who have gone through the heart-ache of divorce . . . and with those who are presently experiencing broken relationships.

These are members of our family who need the love and support of the community of faith . . . and not our condemnation.

God's will can be done and will be done, but woe be unto any of us who stand in its way through judgmental attitudes and un-accepting spirits.

May we thank God for marriages that are long and happy. But may we equally thank God for the grace given to those who have experienced divorce.

And may we all come to realize God's ultimate will for our lives . . . a will that acknowledges our humanness and offers to all forgiveness and love.