

Divine Wisdom in Touchy Situations

Gospel of Mark Part Two: #6

Mark 10:1-12

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil. But love rejoices with the truth.

Have you ever been on the receiving end of a loaded question? I sure have and they are no fun to answer either. Regardless of how you respond, you don't feel like you can win. "Hey Derrick, have you stopped abusing your pet iguana, yet?" You can't answer a question like that, can you? If I answer "yes," it implies I used to but stopped. If I answer "no," it implies I used to and continue to. Now think about this: Have you ever been on the receiving end of a loaded question about a touchy subject? You know all about those types of loaded questions, don't you? They are designed to get you scrambling before you even have a chance to respond. "Hey Derrick, can we meet tomorrow to discuss how you are going to vote on this particular issue or will you be too busy trying to avoid it?" That's a real doozy. If I answer "no," it implies I'm trying to avoid it. If I answer "yes," it implies I'm willing to discuss something I don't want to discuss with that person. You need divine wisdom to respond appropriately.

In today's passage, the first passage in Mark 10, the Pharisees smell blood in the water. They've smelled it since Jesus refused to give them a sign in chapter 8 and will continue to smell it through the rest of the book. As a result, they reason that there is no better way to silence Jesus and get him into trouble with authorities than to ask him a loaded question about a touchy subject. It was a subject matter they were well familiar with but framed the question in a way to try to trap him. The touchy subject was divorce. And the loaded question was this: "is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" I want to tell you today that instead of going on the defensive, Jesus gladly answered the question with a piece of divine wisdom that has stood the test of time. Consequently, the passage is rich today not only because it addresses the covenant of marriage. But also, because we can learn from it how to do something most people who confess the name of Christ struggle with mightily: deal with touchy situations with divine wisdom. To see how Jesus dealt with touchy situations with divine wisdom, please turn with me to Mark 10:1-12. We can learn much from this passage.

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again, crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. 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."

How to Have Divine Wisdom in Touchy Situations

1. Discern Why the Touchy Situation Exists (1-2)

- **Cola Taste Test:** (1) Some years ago while walking in the mall, I got a chance to do a blind cola taste test. (2) They wanted to see if I could identify the name brand colas through only my taste buds. (3) I drank the first three. I didn't know them, nor did I care to. But the fourth was glorious. It was Diet Coke. I could differentiate because I knew the product well.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The first step to having divine wisdom in touchy situations is the ability to differentiate. We must be prepared to "distinguish light from darkness, truth from error, best from better, righteousness from unrighteousness, purity from defilement, and principles from pragmatics" (J. Stowell).
- **The Father's Plan vs the Devil's Plan are Contrasted Here:** (1) The Father's Plan: Notice how Mark introduces the context to this passage: "Jesus left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan." That's the first time Mark gives us that piece of information. And it's important. In chapter 8, after the disciple's journey to Caesarea Philippi in the north, they've been traveling south. But they are not going back to Galilee. They are going to Jerusalem where Jesus is going to die. This touchy situation was brought on by the fact that they were on the way to do the Father's will in Jerusalem. But the devil was right around the corner. (2) The Devil's Plan: Is right there in the question by the Pharisees: "is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife." They knew the answer. But they also knew the region of Judea and the region across the Jordan is the land of Herod Antipas. He had divorced his wife to marry Herodias, who happened to be married to his half-brother. John the Baptist criticized this marriage and was thrown in prison for it. Now they were trying to do the same thing to Jesus.
- **App:** Jesus had two options: (1) Respond like John the Baptist and be thrown in prison before it was his time or (2) Respond with divine wisdom. We have the same choice.

2. Boldness for the Lord Will Be Rewarded by the Lord (3-5)

- **Adoniram Judson:** (1) Was a missionary to Burma known for a lot of things, but his looks were not among them. (2) Once he entered a village in Burma to preach the gospel and faced jeers because of the way he looked. (3) He let it go on for a while before responding: "I may not

have the most beautiful face. I may not have the most beautiful eyes. But I certainly have the most beautiful feet. For it is written: 'how beautiful are the feet who bring good news.'" (4) According to his journals, most in the village came to know Christ that day.

- **Main Idea of the Point:** Boldness is an attitude of strong confidence in God during a very difficult – even intimidating – situation. And having divine wisdom in a touchy situation will always require a measure of boldness from you.
- **Jesus Display of Boldness and Why He Needed It:** (1) Jesus' boldness is in v5: "it was because your hearts were hard" that Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her on her way." (2) It was a bold statement for one reason: what was true of Herod Antipas was also true of the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. Men were divorcing their wives for any reason. Herod Antipas set the example and the people followed. They didn't need a lawyer or to pay court fees. They just wrote her a certificate of divorce and sent her on her way. (3) Knowing this, the Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce in front of a crowd because they hoped that Jesus' response to question would thin out the crowd listening who were behaving like Herod Antipas in their lives. (4) As a result, he points to the real issue: the issue of the hardness of heart. (5) That requires boldness.
- **App:** "His voice is not the voice of timid discipleship. It is the voice of boldness." – Charles Stanley. He's right. Where boldness is, providence follows.

3. Speak the Truth of God into the Situation (6-9)

- **Under Oath:** (1) The best way to see how important speaking truth into a touchy situation is to consider being under oath. (2) When testimony is about to be given at a trial in court, the witness must place his/her hand on the Bible then asked one question: "Do you promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?" (3) The trial itself might be touchy. There will be real emotions and feelings on both sides. (4) But if the jury has any hope of reaching a wise verdict, they must be able to discern the truth from the truth-tellers on the stand.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** It is never a mistake to speak the Truth of God into a touchy situation. For all solutions to touchy situations rise and fall on the truth.
- **The Context and the Truth:** (1) Jesus has been put on the spot by the Pharisees. Those politically aligned with Herod Antipas are listening eagerly for his response. Those aligned with the Pharisees are listening eagerly as well, making sure Jesus dots the "i" and crosses the "t." The crowd is listening eagerly, especially those men divorcing their wives for any reason much like Herod Antipas. The disciples know the audience could thin if they didn't like Jesus' answer. Jesus knows this also. (2) So, what does he do? He doesn't point a finger at Herod Antipas. He doesn't point a finger at the crowd. He bases his answer to their loaded question on God's original intention for creation itself. He bases it on why God created the world to begin with and why he created male and female. The whole answer is based on what God has done and mankind's appropriate response: (a) God made them male and female (therefore) a man will leave his mother and father...and the two will become one flesh; (b) God joined them together (therefore) let no man put asunder.
- **App:** The best way to have divine wisdom in touchy situations is always to direct the situation back to God's intentions. Put it on Him. He created us for relationship with Him. He created us knowing it is not good for man to be alone. We're the ones who have moved away from that picture of relationship, not Him. For truth is truth is truth is truth. So, help us God.

4. Be Wise about What You Share with Who You Share It With (10-12)

- **The Best Advice I've Ever Received about Friendship:** (1) Some years ago, I had a mentor named Peter (who is now with Jesus) give me some of the best advice about friendship. He said in life, you will have 25 lb., 50 lb., 75 lb., and 100 lb. friendships. They are genuine friendships. But don't entrust 25 lb. weight friends with 100 lb. weight friendship information.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Jesus went deeper with the disciples about marriage from God's perspective than he did with the crowd because he knew they could handle it. He was wise about how much he shared and with who he shared it with. We must be also.
- **The Most Challenging Verses in the Passage:** (1) Are found in 11-12. (2) Notice when and where he shared this information and who he shared it with. He shared it only with his disciples while they were in closed quarters. It wasn't information meant for the masses because it was weighty. It was meant for the disciples, for those who followed him. (3) He tells them anyone who divorces and then remarries is an adulterer. That's strong language. That's very strong language, in fact. But if you search Jesus' words about adultery, you will find more strong language: "you've heard it said, 'you shall not commit adultery,' but I tell you that anyone who has ever looked lustfully at another person has already committed adultery in his/her heart" (Mt 5:27-28). By that standard, we are all adulterers, married, unmarried, divorced or never divorced. (4) So, what he says here has to do with the word "covenant." He's telling his disciples that people have corrupted God's definition for marriage. People have corrupted that one man and one woman become unified by a covenant that was made before God. (5) When that covenant is broken for an unbiblical reason, it leads to consequences in that other person's life (thus the reason for the phrase "makes him/her commit adultery"). (6) That's weighty information. But he wanted his disciples to feel the weight of it.
- **App:** If we had gotten it perfect, there would have been no need for Jesus. But I'm thankful that his standards don't change even when we fall short of his glory. And we, the people of God, need to be mindful of those standards in a world that wants to act like Herod Antipas. That's 100 lb. information that Jesus thinks we can all handle.