

Jesus's commands can seem unreasonable and unrealistic. Let me give you an example. In Luke chapter 6 Jesus commands that we give to those who ask of us, and if our goods should be taken away that we should not demand them back. Upon hearing that we are to give to anyone who asks, and that we should not demand back what has been taken, there is a part of every one of us that rebels against this command. It doesn't seem like it will work out very well for us. All our stuff will be taken away. So we don't do it. We set Jesus's command aside.

But there is another way of looking at it. A person could believe that Jesus's commands are good. A person could believe that things will go better if we follow Jesus's command, if we give to those who ask, and not demand back from those who take. God must be the biggest factor in this scenario. God would have to protect you. God would have to repay what was taken from you. Can you trust him? In order to accept Jesus's command about giving and not demanding back we have to believe that God loves us and will take care of us. Jesus's commands require faith. Hearing his commands with faith changes our perception of them.

We heard Jesus's commands concerning the irrevocability of marriage and the unsuitability of divorce in our Gospel reading. Divorce is very emotional, painful, and complicated. Nobody gets married with the hopes of getting divorced. I won't be covering all aspects of this topic in this sermon. Pastor Bertram and I would be happy to speak with you more about any questions or thoughts you might have one on one. For the purposes of our time together today, though, I'd like to look at Jesus's commands regarding marriage and divorce as requiring faith.

When Jesus was asked about the permissibility of divorce I think his answer surprised both his opponents and his disciples. His opponents, the Pharisees, knew that Moses allowed for divorce. I think Jesus surprised them when he told them that that was an accommodation for their hardness of heart. A hard heart is an unbelieving heart. Husband and wife are not supposed to separate. From the beginning man and woman have been joined in marriage so that they become one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man separate.

It seems that the disciples were surprised by this command also. They asked Jesus about it afterwards. Jesus did not soften his stance on the irrevocability of marriage. If a husband divorces his wife and marries another, he is committing adultery against his first wife. If a wife divorces her husband and marries another, she is committing adultery against her first husband. Marriage, in God's sight, is not ended by a certificate of divorce. It is ended by God when he brings about the death of one or the other of the spouses. If God ends the marriage, then the surviving spouse is free to marry another.

Upon hearing Jesus's teaching our immediate reaction might be that all of this is way too black and white. What about this circumstance and that circumstance? And there might be validity to those circumstances. Not every divorce is sinful. Some divorces are justified. Jesus himself, in a parallel passage, says that divorce may be granted when adultery has been committed by the other spouse.

But we all know that not all divorces are because of adultery or abuse or abandonment. Many divorces happen because husband and wife do not get along. That is not unusual or surprising. We all have our sinful flesh that is as wicked as can be. We also have the devil who is always ready to blow any sparks he

can find into a raging, consuming fire. Divorce is not irrational. It seems like it is a good solution to an all too common problem. Why should two people be chained together when they no longer want to be together?

Although this seems reasonable, it doesn't seem to play out this way in actual experience. Becoming one flesh with someone is not merely biological or social or economic. As Jesus shows in our reading, God is involved in this union. God joins together. Divorce pulls apart. Those who divorce often feel lingering pains. Maybe some problems have been solved by the divorce, but new ones arise. The happiness that was hoped for doesn't always come or doesn't always last.

When Jesus teaches about the irrevocability of marriage and the unsuitability of divorce, he is actually showing us a way for happiness, for blessedness. If you have experienced difficulties in your marriage, or if you are currently experiencing difficulties in your marriage, then Jesus's commands might seem to be offering the opposite of happiness or blessedness. It might seem as though Jesus is only making the situation worse. Now not only can you not have the hope of happiness from getting divorced, if you do get divorced, then you'll have to feel guilty about it.

Although this might be a common way of hearing Jesus's commands, it isn't the only way. Consider again the commands that I began with. Jesus commands us to give to those who ask, and not to demand back from those who take. One could interpret those commands in such a way that Jesus intends to make us miserable. Jesus wants us to lose all our money. Jesus wants us to be abused by evildoers and have no recourse so as to defend ourselves.

But is this what Jesus really wants? Does he want us to be miserable? He wants just the opposite. He wants us to be happy and blessed. He promises that if we follow his commands that we will be blessed. Strangely enough, if we were to follow his commands we might end up with less money, but we will nevertheless end up with more. Undertaking Jesus's commands with faith makes the scenario appear altogether different.

So it is also with Jesus's commands about the irrevocability of marriage and the unsuitability of divorce. If you leave God out of the picture it can seem like the gloomiest of commands. It can sound like God is cruel and wants to take away all joy and happiness by keeping people stuck in miserable marriages. But that is not the only way it can be looked at. We can look at these commands with faith.

Looking at your marriage with faith is to realize that God has been and is completely involved. God has joined you together with your spouse. We know that because you have not just been dating or going steady. You have made your promises before God, to one another, and to society. You have promised that you will love and cherish this person for better for worse, for richer for poorer, and in sickness and in health until death parts you. Because God has put you together with this person, you know that that is where you belong. Because God has put you together with this person, you know that God will care for you even if you are going through some troubles.

Now, I wish that there weren't any troubles. I wish that everyone always got along splendidly. I wish that everyone always had more than enough money so that they would never have to ask another person for

money. I could wish for a lot of things along these lines, but my wishing wouldn't make it so. We live in a broken world with much suffering. How should we respond to this brokenness? Jesus's commands direct us in the way that we should go. His commands help to undo brokenness. We don't have to sit idly by with brokenness, believing with the rest of the world that nothing can be done. We can demonstrate our faith by cheerfully giving when called upon to do so. We can demonstrate our faith by cheerfully looking to the future with the one to whom we have been joined by God to be one flesh.

I understand how what I have said could be painful for those of you who have difficulties in your marriage. To be cheerful about your marriage seems like something you gave up on a long time ago. You haven't been looking forward with cheerfulness. You've only been trying to survive. But this is where Jesus's commands can be the most helpful. Although you might not be able to see any light at the end of the tunnel or anywhere else for that matter, God is the creator of light. What might God do if you were to believe? What might God do if you joined yourself wholeheartedly to his teaching? There's no telling what might happen—what adventures God might put you on—but I'm sure that it would be good!

There is no way for me to prove to you that obeying Jesus's commands, being his disciple, will be good for you. The only way you can know that is by taking the plunge yourself. You have to believe that giving to the one who asks will do you good. You have to believe that not demanding back what was taken from you will bring you happiness and blessedness. You have to believe that Jesus will protect you and lead you in the way that you should go, even if that path might be filled with painful sacrifices and frightening challenges.

What is good for you to know, though, is that you are not stuck. Jesus's commands and promises open up possibilities that are so often deemed to be impossible. Jesus is Lord. All things have been put under his feet. Therefore, there is always hope. Nothing that we do in faith will be in vain. Listening to Jesus brings us on the right paths that bring about love and healing.

Hopefully today you have seen that none of us believe as we ought. None of us are as convinced as we should be that Jesus's ways. Therefore we can all change our ways. We can all repent and believe the good news that Jesus is Lord. Jesus forgives and will set right all that has gone wrong. In the mean time be led by Jesus's good commands and promises.