

Come to Jesus like a child

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[0 : 00] I have a few favourite movies. I don't know what your favourite movie is. I have a few. If I was going to go... When I was preparing this, I was thinking, what would I choose as my top three? At the time, I said Star Wars, Die Hard, and Gladiator.

I don't know. I probably have a lot more that I could put on my list. I don't know what yours are. I reckon if I was to ask you, you'd probably say Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter. There's lots of stuff that people like as their favourite movie.

The thing is about your favourite movies, I've watched those movies, by the way, loads. You know it's your favourite movie when you start being able to repeat lines before they happen.

They're like a bit of a comfort blanket, aren't they? When you feel a bit sick and you just don't know what else to watch, like, oh, I'm just going to put on my favourite movie. However, as good as they are, nothing really beats for me the first time that I saw them.

I remember as a child, the first time I saw Star Wars, and watching and hanging off every moment, every word, every scene, and I honestly finished it and thought, that's the best thing I've ever seen.

[1 : 08] Like, I think it was like six or seven, but thinking, like, this is the best thing ever. Now, I still enjoy those films, yet it's not as good as the first time, is it?

The first time blows you away. It's not as good, because you know what's going to happen. I still get a little bit, do you ever get that when, if you watch your favourite film with someone who hasn't seen it, and you kind of get excited for them, because you're like, you're experiencing this, what I've experienced years ago, and then it's always like, you feel a little bit flat, when they just don't love it as much as you did.

I had that experience with Star Wars and Don't Tell Mom the Babysitter's Dead. We did have the trade-off. I made her watch all six movies, before the new ones came out. In the trade-off for that, I'd watch Pride and Prejudice.

I don't know if we got the better deal out of that, but we enjoyed it. The way that we are with a movie that we love, first, we're gripped. That should be like, when we think of that, that should be like what we are when we listen to the words of Jesus, shouldn't it?

When Jesus speaks, when he speaks, through his word, when we hear his word, he wants us to hang off his every word. Even if we've heard him say the same thing before, he wants us to hear it with a renewed emphasis every time.

[2 : 29] In our reading from the Bible this morning, we have different groups of people reacting to Jesus' words, him speaking, reacting to his teaching, and in many ways, just reacting to him, just being his presence.

We've got the Pharisees. Pharisees, a strange word. It's kind of the religious elite of the day. The guys who studied their Bible all day who thought they knew God back to front.

We've got the disciples, Jesus' close friends that followed him around. Israel went around with him, knew him. He called them by name. They were his friends. Then we have parents.

The third group is two, it's parents with their children. And it's parents with children who are children in that day and age. We mentioned this a few weeks ago, it came up.

They're the marginalised nobodies in the eyes of the world, because they were just another mouth to feed. They weren't thought of in the same way that we might think of children today. And so we've got three groups, and each of them come to Jesus differently.

[3 : 40] And I suppose my question that I'm fronting up now, that I want us to think about by the end, is how will you come to Jesus today? Will you come like a Pharisee?

Will you come like a disciple here? Or will you come like a child? How will you come to Jesus today? Throughout this section of Mark, there's been this recurring line that's emphasised by Jesus.

It says, if you want to be first in the kingdom of heaven, then you must be last and be the servant of all. You must be last and the servant of all.

We've got the few weeks we saw that in the man who prayed and he said, I believe, help my unbelief. This idea of what it means to believe and what unbelief is, keeps coming in, what it means to be the last, to be humble and not to be proud.

These chapters that follow on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, to the cross, is really Jesus teaching his disciples what it means to live that cross-shaped life, to live as a servant, to live as the one who comes last.

[4 : 48] We see that in verse 1, we start on the way to Jerusalem, travelling throughout these chapters.

It's in Judea and what we read is that it's Jesus' custom to teach. It's Jesus' custom to teach and it's one of the things, if it is his custom to teach, you expect that the people who come to him, the crowd, are there to be taught.

They're there to be taught. They're ready to learn from Jesus and that should be the case with us. But the Pharisees don't come to be taught. They come to be with the crowd but they come to test Jesus.

Just look with me in verse 2, that's what we read. Some Pharisees came and tested him and they test him by asking this question, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

It's a very sneaky question because they know that how Jesus, well what they want is that how Jesus' answers might get him into trouble. It brings tension because you might remember, maybe you don't, the last time we read about divorce in Mark's Gospel is when John the Baptist brought it up regarding King Herod's marriage to Herodias who Herodias was his brother's wife and John the Baptist ended up losing his head for bringing up divorce.

[6 : 08] Alongside that, divorce was tripped flippantly by some men in the Jewish community. In many ways it's similar to issues today that there was a lot of what we might call today no-fault divorces.

Jewish men were issuing certificates of divorce for any reason they wanted. There's even reports if you look back in Jewish sort of literature of a Jewish man divorcing his wife because his dinner wasn't really on time.

So for a wife, you can imagine that if it was thought that only the man could issue the certificate. for a wife to have that hanging over her head, that in itself is conducive, could be conducive to manipulation and abuse if someone didn't do that.

You better have my dinner ready on time or I'll divorce you. You can imagine that. The Pharisees ask him a question in the hope that Jesus' answer will trip himself up.

Answer in a way that is maybe against the law, maybe upset Herod and maybe some Jewish men in the crowd. But Jesus knows what's going on. He's not. He knows exactly what's coming.

[7 : 15] What's coming. Their hearts are open to him. He spots their intention a mile off. Verse 5. He answers. It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.

The problem, the real problem is, the issue really is in many ways there's nothing to do with divorce. The issue is the Pharisees' hard hearts and the hard hearts of men.

You see, God permits divorce. We know that. It says that in Deuteronomy. But that doesn't mean it's his preferred choice. divorce. The permitting of divorce was not, as the Jewish men saw it at the time, as a get-out clause to get something new.

The Pharisees' question really reveals their attitude to God. It reveals their attitude towards his word and it shows that they don't understand. Because marriage was never about what they could get out of it.

What anybody should, this is what I'm getting married because of what I can get. It was never designed so that somebody could come and go as they pleased. Jesus reminds them, he points them, and he reminds them of that.

[8 : 32] Because he points them to when marriage first began, because when marriage first began, when the world first began. Verse 6, at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female.

For this reason, a man will leave his mother and father and be united to his wife and the two will become one flesh. So they're no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has drawn together, let no one separate.

That is God's original intention and design for marriage that man and wife stay together. Divorce only entered into the world because hard hearts wanted more for themselves.

Wanted more and came into it thinking, what can I get out of this? Now I know, we have to pause here, don't we?

I know that for many, maybe even some of us, thinking about this issue whilst we're looking at the Pharisees' hearts, it can be hard because maybe personally we've been affected by divorce.

[9 : 34] It could be ourselves specifically, our friends, our family. We may even have been damaged by it. We've all had different experiences, different backgrounds and it can be a healing process to get over it.

It's important when we say this because, but what I mentioned earlier is God's word does not tiptoe around the difficult areas of life. Not at all.

But God's word tackles these things head on. That is one of the beauties of God's word in many ways, isn't it? Because God knows that this is hard but he doesn't leave you to figure it out on your own.

He speaks into it. I just want to say before we tackle some of this, if there are things here as I'm speaking that are very raw, maybe things that you've never spoken about, can I encourage you to speak about them?

Either grab me at some point or I thought one of the elders would be more than happy at some point, you can't do it on a Sunday morning but to work through these issues, if we have things, to work through them together.

[10 : 45] However, whilst this is a thorny issue, the real point that's being made has that, it's kind of a, it's kind of a strange one because the real point has nothing to do with divorce. It is the unbelief of the Pharisees which is the problem.

Jesus is spiritually pointing the finger at them. You're not as holy as you think you are. They've studied, they've said, this is what the Pharisees are like, they've studied, they've got all the answers but their knowledge, inflated ego, self-importance is their stumbling block.

The Pharisees want to finish first, not last. They want to be ahead of Jesus in the queue. And so like the movie that you were transfixed with as a child, will you be transfixed by the words of Jesus?

He's lost to teachers. We'll never stop learning about him, what it means to follow him. We'll never know all we need to know. There is a danger that the more knowledge you have, like the Pharisees had more knowledge, the less you listen.

And it's a very real danger, especially as we reflect on the Pharisees' knowledge that makes them not want to listen to Jesus. It's a very real danger, and especially though true for those who are in spiritual leadership, or if you've been a Christian for any decent amount of time, that you stop listening.

[12 : 06] For myself, for the elders in the church, pray for us that we would always be teachable. Pray that for yourself, even.

You must never stop sitting at the feet of Jesus to listen. That's the first thing we're going to look at is the Pharisees. However, we can't sidestep some of this stuff.

The primary issue, as I've said, is not divorce, but the Pharisees' heart. Yet what we see in this conversation that follows is we've seen the Pharisees' heart and what comes out is Jesus' heart when he talks about divorce.

And he comes out, it comes out in how he loves those who are hurting. He loves those who are hurting. You see, Jesus loves those who finish last.

He loves the marginalized, he loves the forgotten, he loves the nobodies. He loves the people who the world doesn't think twice about. What we see here is his heart, his compassion towards the divorced, towards those who are hurting or who have been hurt, those who have been cast aside by selfish men.

[13 : 24] Now what I'm going to say here does not nullify what God thinks about marriage, not in any way. God's intention for marriage was that it wouldn't be broken. We've just heard those verses.

The two will become one flesh, they're no longer two but one. what God has joined together let no one separate. Without sin that would still be the case. Divorce is a consequence of sin.

However, whilst that is God's intention, what we see in divorce, even though it's not what God wanted, is a kindness, a real kindness, a compassion to the hurting from the divorce.

Just look with me from verse 10. When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. He answered, anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.

And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. The woman, there's a slightly technical what's going on here. Let me try, boil it down for us.

[14 : 29] The woman, in verse 11, that is divorced here is viewed as the injured party. If a man, and here's the nub of it, if a man divorces his wife so that he can marry another woman, that is what's labelled as adultery.

It shows us that divorce is more complicated than we might think. The reason for it is important. If a man divorces his wife to marry another, the woman he leaves is injured.

She's hurting. And the sin is against her. Which means she's done nothing wrong. She's in the clear.

She's not sinned. And actually, projecting from that, she's able to get married again. It's really important stuff because what it teaches us, okay, we've looked it through this lens of divorce, but what it teaches us is a principle.

It teaches us that there are legitimate reasons why two people can divorce and God doesn't penalise people for that. It means there's more to it if there's adultery.

[15 : 39] But it means if there is abuse or if there is neglect, abandonment. it means the injured part is free. Which shows, which shows, doesn't it, how much Jesus cares for the injured party, how much he has compassion for the hurting.

there's a lot to take in with what I've just said, I get that. Maybe lots of questions that spring from it.

And I expect there to be. the real point that I want to push and drive with us whilst we think about that is that is Jesus care for the hurting?

Is Jesus care for the abused and for the neglected? Marriage breakdown is always painful. It always involves sin and it always involves suffering.

He's there for those who hurt and he's there to give fresh starts and help people move on. If I'm, I'm going to be really honest with you, there is a, there is a sadness unfortunately in the church that has a history of hush-hushing these issues.

[16 : 52] We've, I've seen that whispering behind people's backs but ultimately actually avoiding dealing with it and walking with people through the suffering. That can't be the way to treat people who are going through it.

Or treat the families who are reeling and in distress. It can't be the way. These things take decades to recover from and we know it can't be the way because that's not how Jesus treats people who go through it.

And let's just remind us, the Jesus that we see care like this in the Bible is the same Jesus for us today. The issues are not swept under the carpet but he'll bring healing today for you.

You know, when Jesus returns, some people might, we can think this sometimes, when Jesus returned to heaven at the end of his life he didn't retire but he's fully human still and so he gets you and he's present with you by his power of his Holy Spirit.

And so because he's lived that human life what that means is that he gets, he understands our emotional pain, your emotional pain better than anyone else. It's almost like he, save the illustrate, but it's almost like he has compassion and blinkers.

[18 : 16] You know horses have blinkers to stop them getting distracted and keep going in the right direction. Nothing distracts Jesus from loving those who need to know his compassion.

Nothing distracts him. It's not like he's showing compassion something happens and he's got something else to do. His eyes are focused, his gaze is on those who are suffering.

And any sense of shame or condemnation that's resulted from things that have gone on in your life he sets you free for all. Those who want to be the first must be last and be the servant of all.

Isn't that what Jesus is doing here? Loving the ones who nobody loves. who literally the other spouses said I don't love you.

He's loving the ones that nobody loves that feel rejected. He's serving them. Now the final thing that I want to say here is just going to look on the other foot.

[19 : 19] Because I reckon if this is a personal issue then if you have been if you are the one who's divorced someone to be with someone else you could sit here feeling completely condemned but I want you to know that there is forgiveness for you as well.

There is no sin that is beyond God's grace and kindness. He forgives all who turn and repent. He loves the hurting. He cares about your suffering but he cares also about your sin because he came to call sinners to repentance and he came to care for the suffering.

So we've looked at the Pharisees' hearts we've looked at Jesus' hearts we've got two more hearts to look at. First we've got the disciples and how they respond to the marginalised not the divorcee but children.

And the question we might have if you were here a few weeks ago is are they going to be any different? A few weeks ago I think it was chapter 9 you can just flick over to chapter 9 I think it's verse 13 I might have got that right.

No verse 36 Are they going to be any different? Because he says to them taking the child in his arms he said to them verse 37 whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

[20 : 54] People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them but the disciples rebuked them. Notice they rebuke the it's not just the children they rebuke the parents for bringing their children to Jesus.

It's quite staggering knowing that less than a week ago he just said that he loves children and so his response in verse 14 is entirely appropriate he's furious he's livid let the little children come to me do not hinder them for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these the disciples those chosen by Jesus himself yet again look down on those who Jesus loves and look down on their parents Jesus isn't too important for you that's what's going through their head only the important ones get to speak or be near him the whole message of the cross what it means to follow Jesus has not sunk in where Jesus finishes last on a cross to serve us in death to save the lowly and nobody's has not sunk in whoever wants to be great in the kingdom of God must be last and the servant of all they continue to assume their superiority first children the marginalized must get to the back and Jesus with razor sharp insight zooms in on the problem truly I tell you anyone will not receive anyone who will not receive the kingdom of

God like a child will never enter it a few years ago when I had time I was in I bought a really nice digital SLR camera I used to love taking photographs to be honest now with smartphones they've all got great cameras one thing that was amazing was that macro focus when you can zoom in on something and it picks out things when you blow it up things that you can't actually focus in on with your normal eye you can get so much detail on something so close it zooms right in on it well Jesus Jesus is like a zoom lens here but he's zooming directly in on our heart he's zooming directly in on the disciples heart and what he's saying is you see these children the disciples want them at the back

Jesus wants them at the front of the queue he's saying to the disciples they're ahead of you because the children and their parents they're not coming to him thinking about who's watching they're not thinking about who's looking or thinking about superiority or the first in line the parents bring their children believing Jesus can bless them the children run to him because they love him they trust him because he oozes compassion like a big safety blanket who looks out for them who wraps them in compassion and when they're sat on his knee he gives them his undivided attention he listens to their word he engages with them down at their level he comforts them with the problems which may seem small he has all the time in the world for them there is a purity isn't there to the faith of the child there is a trust that the disciples don't quite get the disciples are standing by

Jesus for what they can get the children come to Jesus knowing they need him and so I wonder how will you come to Jesus today there's three options isn't there like a Pharisee I know all you've heard and seen it all before I've heard this what you're saying to me from the front will you come like one of his disciples here maybe you think because you've been a Christian a while that you deserve a place at his table maybe even that you're perhaps a little bit more deserving than other people are afterwards you've served him tirelessly for years or will you come like a child a child who knows what Jesus is really all about coming to him dependently knowing you need him in your life being dependent on him Jesus came to save the lowly he came to save those who know that they need him to be saved he came to save what it means actually when we recognise that is to know that actually we're sinners we're sinners who become like children because we admit that we can't save ourselves that we need a loving saviour to rescue us that are dependent on him to save come to

[25 : 59] Jesus like a child today let's pray almighty god lord we thank you so much for your word to us and we want to be like children that come to you we want to be dependent upon you and have that faith like a child that purity the innocence of that faith and forgive us lord where we do think that we know it all or where we think that we are more deserving of your love than someone else lord help us and we turn to you and ask that you bless us and lord we thank you that your heart is different we thank you for the purity and the care and the compassion that you have for the hurting we thank you that you care about the those who are marginalised in your time the women and the children the divorced and I just pray for us as well if we're hurting if we're suffering

I pray that we'd walk with one another side by side that we'd be a church that addresses the real issues in life that we would be vulnerable with one another that we'd feel like we can share real stuff and there's no embarrassment there's no there's no reason to hide it or think that people will have strange opinions or funny looks but lord I thank you that we pray that you'd help us to be a community that walks with one another through life with journeying towards Jesus and so just commit this into your hands pray for your blessing upon us in Jesus name Amen