



Sexuality AND JESUS



AN INTERACTIVE BIBLE STUDY IN THE GOSPELS

4. DIFFICULT TEXTS

In small groups:

Read either Matthew 22:30 or Luke 14:26

Discuss:

- Why might people be shocked to hear Jesus say this?
- Do you think people in Jesus' time would have been shocked to hear Jesus say this?
- Read a few verses before and after. Is it any more clear what Jesus means?

In larger groups:

Report back to one another: What is your text about?

Discuss together:

- What questions have Jesus' words left you with?
- Do you think it's still possible for people to be surprised by Jesus' words 2,000 years after he spoke them? Why or why not?

Matthew 19:3-10

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

⁴ “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ ⁵ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

⁷ “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.”

¹¹ Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others

—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Matthew 19:11-12



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Matthew 19:11-12

1 There was a debate in Jesus' time about how to interpret the Bible on divorce. The strict conservative Rabbi Shammai said the only reason a man could divorce his wife was sexual unfaithfulness. The more liberal Rabbi Hillel said a man could divorce his wife for any reason even if she cooked badly.

- *What debates are there today about how the Bible should be interpreted?*

2 Jesus quotes from Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 then adds his own comment - Husband and wife are one, and it is God who joins them together.

- *How does it change things if you think of married people as joined by God, instead of joined by the law?*

3 Deuteronomy 24:1-5 is about divorced women being remarried. A certificate of divorce allowed the woman to remarry. It protected the vulnerable from being left without food or shelter. The debate in Jesus' time was about what men were allowed to divorce their wives for. Jesus points out the difference between what is allowed and what God intended.

- *It is possible to be able to quote the Bible chapter and verse and to totally miss the point?*

4 The focus of the divorce debate was on a wife's behaviour. Jesus puts the focus on the husband's behaviour and responsibility.

- *Does our culture have different expectations of sexual behaviour from men and women?*

5 The disciples seem shocked at Jesus teaching that marriage is intended to be life-long, and that men bear equal responsibility.

- *What parts of Jesus' teaching here are shocking in our world?*

6 Jesus picks up on the disciples saying "It is better not to marry" and uses it to teach them something that was hard for them to understand because it was brand new in their culture – a positive view of being unmarried.

- *How are people who are not married or have no sexual partner viewed in our culture?*

7 Eunuchs were people who had been castrated so that they could serve rich households without any concern about them getting sexually involved with the household's women. Jesus then uses the term as a metaphor for anyone who will not marry, have sex, or have children. Having just quoted Genesis describing male and female made for each other, Jesus acknowledges that some people are born this way.

- *What different groups might Jesus be referring to?*

8 Jesus is talking about people who willingly give up marriage, sex and the possibility of children 'for the sake of the kingdom'. This group likely includes John the Baptist, and Jesus himself who has chosen not to get married, have sex, or have children.

- *What do you think Jesus might mean by 'for the sake of the kingdom'?*

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8. DISCUSSION TOPICS – JESUS ON DIVORCE

Choose two or three of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. Which of the pieces of information is most important to understanding the text?
Are any of the pieces of information something you had never thought of before?
2. Some people say Jesus sides with the conservative Rabbi Shammai in the divorce debate. Do you think he does? Or is what Jesus says different from both Shammai and Hillel?
3. Jesus takes a different approach to scripture from the Pharisees. When they were debating the meaning of a single word of the law in Deuteronomy, Jesus answers by pointing them to Genesis.
What can we learn from Jesus' approach to scripture?
Does Jesus' approach mean that some scriptures carry more weight than others?
Does Jesus approach mean that we need to know the big picture and understand where scriptures fit in the story if we want to apply them?
4. What would it mean to take Jesus' approach to the debates of our time?
What assumptions does Jesus challenge?
What attitudes does Jesus criticise?
What would Jesus say into polarised debates?
What might Jesus say that no one else is saying?

9. QUOTE: EUGENE M. BORING ON “WHAT GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER”

“In all of this, while still reflecting the first-century patriarchal culture, Jesus has transcended its views of marriage and the family by making marriage an element of the will of God, expressed in creation rather than merely a culturally conditioned contract on the human level. In the biblical story of creation, the first human pair were intended solely for each other, marriage being a God-given human relationship.”

M. Eugene Boring – The Gospel of Matthew, The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Abingdon Press, 2015, pg285

- In what ways could it be said that Jesus’s teaching here is “still reflecting the first-century patriarchal culture”?
- In what ways has Jesus “transcended [first- century] views of marriage and the family”?
- Is it overstating the case to suggest that Pharisees did not think of Genesis as a model for marriage until Jesus suggested it?
- What questions does it give us if we say marriage is “an element of the will of God”?

13. DISCUSSION TOPICS - JESUS AND THE EUNUCHS

Choose one or two of these topics and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. “Jesus was the first religious teacher that we know of to elevate the role of unmarried, single life to be a normal, honorable, significant, meaningful way of life. Early Christianity was the first religious movement that elevated people not getting married as leading exemplary lives.”

Tim Mackie - Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew], YouTube

Is it difficult to imagine how revolutionary this teaching of Jesus was?

Is it still revolutionary in our time?

How good are churches at communicating this teaching of Jesus?

2. Jesus chooses “eunuch” as his metaphor for people who don’t get married, don’t have sex and don’t have children.
Does Jesus mean that giving up marriage, sex and children is “cutting off” a part of yourself?
Is Jesus positive or negative about this choice?
3. Jesus acknowledges that some people are born in a way that means they will not get married, have sex or have children. Is our culture accepting of this? Is our church culture accepting of this?
4. How much tension is there between Genesis, where the man and woman are partners and sexuality is part of the good creation, and Jesus’ teaching here that elevates being unmarried?
Are there married and unmarried ways to reflect the image of God?
Are there married and unmarried ways to experience and express covenant love?

14. "THOSE TO WHOM IT HAS BEEN GIVEN"?

There is a debate about what is being referred to in verse 11: "not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given." Likewise verse 12: "The one who can accept this should accept it."

What possible options can you see for the "word" that Jesus is referring to?

How much does this parallel 1 Corinthians 7:7 where Paul describes celibacy as a gift that not everyone has?

What interpretive techniques could shed light on this question?

17. DISCUSSION TOPICS – TIM MACKIE

Choose two or three of these quotes from Bible Project's Tim Mackie and share your thoughts and questions with one another.

1. "For Jesus the purpose of life is not happiness. The purpose of life is the kingdom of God... human beings will fulfil their true purpose when they are so made like God's own character that they are living breathing images of the loving Creator God. For some humans that will mean getting married because marriage, in Jesus' view, is... a covenant symbol of the covenant love of God. But in Jesus's mind is getting married the only way to image the covenant love of God? No."

What part of this is the most challenging?

What part of this is most different to how our culture views life and marriage?

2. "Sex produces about as much heartbreak as it does ecstasy and marriage is definitely not a guarantee of happiness or fulfilment."

Do you think this is a fair comment?

Where do we encounter idealised views of sex and marriage?

3. "We end up creating churches where people who are not married feel second-class and where people who are gay feel even more ostracized."

How much has a certain view of marriage contributed to making people feel lesser or unwelcome in Church spaces?

How could what we have heard from Jesus today challenge that?

4. "In our culture, to hear Jesus say you don't need to have sex to have a meaningful life... You may as well start talking about aliens... That is so off the map of our culture."

How challenging is the idea that you don't need to have sex to have a meaningful life?

Can you think of any prominent examples of people who are single and celibate?

17. DISCUSSION TOPICS – TIM MACKIE

5. “Jesus envisions a full, meaningful, significant human existence that does not involve having sex or having children but it does involve a life of covenant love.”
What does it mean to have a life of covenant love?
How could local churches become better places for unmarried people to experience and express covenant love?

All quotes taken from: Tim Mackie - Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew], YouTube.

18. THE SOURCE OF OUR ETHICS

Matthew 19 asks a question about the foundation of our sexual ethics.

In a polarised debate, liberals and conservatives were debating the meaning of scripture. In quoting Genesis rather than the law, Jesus is making quite a radical move, suggesting that the focus is in the wrong place.

- Might Jesus' view that the law of Moses was a concession have been controversial for the Pharisees?
- How strong a case could be made that the Pharisees were basing their sexual ethics primarily on factors other than scripture?
- What warning does the Pharisees' approach give in contemporary debates in the Church?
- How much do you agree with this summary of the difference of approaches between Jesus and the Pharisees?

The source of our Christian sexual ethics cannot be conservative normativity. It must be a radical picture of new creation.

22. RESPONDING

Responding to Scripture

This week, ask yourself:

- What is the most shocking or surprising thing I have heard Jesus say?
- How might it change me?

You might want to respond in some more ways. Here are some suggestions.

- Write a personal prayer responding to what you've heard in the scripture.
- Create something: a poem; a painting; a list; a sculpture; a meal; a photograph; a wordcloud.
- Read or listen to Matthew 19 at BibleGateway.com.
- Choose just one word or phrase and think about what it means.
- List some personal commitments that you want to make in the coming week.
- Listen to this talk about Matthew 19:3-10 from BibleProject's Tim Mackie:



Jesus, Marriage, and Sex [Matthew] - Tim Mackie (The Bible Project)
youtu.be/1xvt6AMaBow



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