

When Matrimony Becomes Misery

Text: Matthew 19:3
Broadcast June 10

A man told me that he was divorcing his wife. When I asked if he were planning to marry someone else, he replied, "No. If I ever get rid of the one I have, I don't want another." For him matrimony had become misery. It is said that many marriages fail which never come to the divorce courts. They just endure the ordeal together.

Is this a true picture of marriage? Hardly so. But the fact that there is one unhappy marriage should be cause for concern. Multiply that by the many and the situation becomes compounded in its serious aspect.

Unhappy marriages affect every area of life—efficiency in business, the life and health of men and women, the emotional security of children, the stability of communities and nations. Every relationship of life will be either helped or hindered by the atmosphere within the home.

The question is naturally asked as to why the rising casualty list in marriages. Two people with high hopes set sail on the sea of matrimony only to founder on the reefs of discord and misery. What went wrong? This question has been asked times without number. If the walls of every pastor's study could talk, what stories they could tell. Is it the times in which we live? Is society

itself at fault? Is the institution of marriage itself a failure? Are outside parties to blame? Which member of the marriage failed? Or did both? Someone said, "The quarrel with marriage isn't with the institution. It's with the personnel." And he spoke words of wisdom.

The truth that matrimonial misery is not merely a product of the times or a fault of society is seen in the fact that it is not confined to any one period of history or mode of society.

One of the major contributing factors to the fall of the Roman Empire was the breakdown in marriage. This was a problem in Jesus' day among the Jews. Our text speaks of matrimony that has become misery. "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" (Matt. 19:3) This speaks not merely of time or condition but of personnel. Let us, therefore, look to ourselves.

"Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" As we seek an answer to this question let us note, first, the condition; second, the cause; third, the cure.

CONSIDER THE CONDITION

This verse speaks of misery. Two people linked together in a marriage that has failed. An experience which

began with the friendly shouts of "Bon voyage" is plagued with *mal de mer* or seasickness. The rocks of destruction loom before them. A cottage of love has become a hovel of hate. Affection which once blossomed in beauty has been bitten by the frost of failure.

Skies which once beckoned with blue now lower about them with dark clouds of foreboding and loneliness. The present is blighted. The future is bleak. Is there any more miserable human scene than a marriage that has failed? It is not only a personal tragedy but a social one.

Sadly the greatest sufferers in such a scene are not the parents but their children. The population of many of our children's homes is not in the main made up of orphans in fact. They are the victims of broken homes.

A couple came to me for counsel as to whether or not they should get a divorce. My first question was "Do you have any little children?" When they told me that they did, I advised them not to get a divorce. They replied almost in unison, "But we are not happy!" My answer was "Your happiness is not of primary importance in this situation. The most important thing is that you resolve your problems so as to give your children the kind of home which under God they deserve."

Yes, the misery of matrimonial failure is compounded in the lives of the children. Parents have eaten sour grapes, and their children's teeth have been set on edge. If not for your own sakes then for the sake of the boys and girls whom God has given you, you should remove the causes of your failures and build in the lives of your children the character and attitudes which will enable them to live rich and wholesome lives.

The Bible speaks of children as a gift of God (Gen. 33:5) and a blessing. (Prov. 10:1) You should so re-

gard them. To do otherwise is to sin against God.

NOTE THE CAUSE

The Pharisees asked Jesus, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" What are some of the causes which turn matrimony into misery?

One cause is the wrong attitude with which many regard marriage. Last week I mentioned the young lady who said, "If we don't hit it off we can quit." You cannot build a happy marriage on such an attitude.

It is at this point that society itself must bear a portion of the blame. Easy divorce laws are a blight upon the matrimonial scene. And they have become a part of the social attitude.

This was the point of the Pharisees' question to Jesus. Two schools of thought interpreted the Mosaic law of divorce (Deut. 24:1-2) differently. One allowed only one cause for divorce and remarriage—adultery. The other said that it could be for any cause. If a woman lost her beauty, burned the biscuits, or in any other way displeased her husband, the marriage could be dissolved. This latter sounds rather modern, does it not?

But Jesus reminded the Pharisees that Moses gave his law because of the hardness of their hearts. God's intention in marriage is, so to speak, for keeps. To enter into marriage on any other basis is to court disaster. So the issue boils down to the attitudes of the man and woman involved.

Another cause of matrimonial misery is finances. An old adage says that when poverty comes in the door love flies out the window. But it need not necessarily be so. With the right attitude adversity can draw you closer together.

So often financial problems arise when a family tries to live beyond its means. It may be necessary for the wife to work in order to supplement

the family income. Or a widow to be the sole support of her children.

But if it be merely to keep up with the neighbors, it is a poor excuse indeed, especially if it be to the neglect of the children and home. The Bible says, "Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife." (Prov. 17:1)

Still another cause of matrimonial misery is a lack of consideration for one another. Kind words left unspoken leave a void. Sharp words spoken in moments of anger may be forgiven, but they leave their scars. Magnifying the faults of one another will set any marriage out of focus.

A woman complained to a judge about her husband. "Judge, he just won't do right. I've nagged him and nagged him, but it does no good." The judge asked, "Have you tried heaping coals of fire on his head?" She replied, "No, but I don't think it would do any good. I've tried scalding water, and that didn't help." Extreme? Yes. But it illustrates a principle.

The Bible says it another way. Proverbs 21:9 says, "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house." Proverbs 21:19 adds, "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman." Still again Proverbs 27:15—"A continual dropping in a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike."

Apparently Solomon spoke as a man of experience. But, my dear brother, before you flap your wings and crow, hear this. Proverbs 26:21 says, "As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle fire." It takes two people to have an argument. It would be well for both husband and wife to read Proverbs 15:1. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger."

Once again a lack of religion in the

home is a major cause of matrimonial misery. A marriage which shuts God out altogether has no basis upon which to build a truly happy home. If it reaches any measure of success it will be in spite of rather than because of this condition. But a home with no concept or recognition of God is rare indeed. The greater concern is with that marriage which recognizes God but denies Him a place in it. When you depart from Him and His way, you are treading the road which leads to matrimonial misery and failure.

A study of the life of Abraham is most revealing in this regard. Wherever he went he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord. One time he failed to do so—in Egypt. And there the story relates an experience of matrimonial grief.

One day I visited a woman in her home in the interest of the church. I knew that in a small town the husband had been a Sunday School superintendent and the wife had been a Sunday School teacher. But they had moved to the city without identifying themselves with a church home.

When every argument failed to stir the interest of the wife, I made one desperate effort. I reminded her of marriages which failed from lack of spiritual activity and food. Then, lest I offend her, I hastily added that I was sure that there was nothing wrong with her marriage.

Tears welled up in her eyes. Her lips trembled as she said, "Oh, you are so right! When we moved here we meant to join a church, but kept putting it off. We made friends outside the church. Our lives became one round of dances after another. My husband became interested in another woman. And now we are fixing to get a divorce." How sad! But how true and how many!

But all of these causes come together to form one final, fatal one. The Pharisees asked, "Is it lawful for

a man to put away his wife for every cause?" They did not ask how a man could save his marriage, but how could he get out of it. They were looking for a way out rather than for a way through. It is infinitely better to find a way through your matrimonial misery than to find a way out of it.

CONSIDER THE CURE

Three things I would suggest.

In the first place, recognize God's will for your marriage. Jesus did not quibble with the Pharisees over their petty question. Instead He went back to God's original design for marriage. Moses gave a proceeding for divorce simply because of the hardness of men's hearts. But here is God's will. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh . . . What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matt. 19:5-6; cf. Gen. 2:24)

God does not will that your marriage be unhappy, nor that it be dissolved. He wills that it be happy and until death do you part. Trouble entered into the first marriage because of sin. It has ever been so. And sin has no place in the intentional and benevolent will of God.

In the second place, determine that you are going to build a happy, wholesome marriage. Instead of going to a lawyer to dissolve your marriage, go to your pastor, or some pastor, that he may help you to resolve it. If you are not a Christian, trust in Christ who cleanses from all sin. If you are a Christian confess your sins to God through Christ and ask His forgiveness. Admit your sins toward one another, and forgive each other as God has forgiven you. If God has forgotten the past so should you.

Find your place in the life of the church. If you are already in a church, let the church come into your home.

Gather your children together about the family altar where God's Word is read and prayer is offered up to God for your home. Rear your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Let your life before them be such that you can lead them into the full experience of a Christian home and family life.

In the third place, feed your marriage on those little things which will enable your marital love to maintain the glow with which it burned on your wedding day. A bashful young man was praying after the girl of his choice had accepted his proposal of marriage. Said he, "O Lord, I ain't got nothin' 'gin nobody now." He knew the cleansing power of the warm fire of love. And so may you.

This does not mean that your married life from this moment on will be just one sweet song. Problems will come. But you can meet and solve them in a mutual love made holy by the Spirit of God.

"'I'll master you,' said the ax to a piece of iron as his blows fell heavily upon it. But every blow made his edge more blunt until the ax ceased to strike. 'Leave it to me,' said the saw, but soon all his teeth were broken, and he fell aside.

"'Ha! Ha!' said the hammer, 'I knew you couldn't succeed. I'll show you the way.' But upon the first blow, his head fell off.

"'Shall I try?' asked the soft, small flame. They all despised the flame, but he curled gently under the iron, embraced it, and never left it until the iron melted under his irresistible influence.

"Likewise, love works when all else fails."*

Would you have a happy marriage? Then learn the lesson from the flame. For when all else fails, love will find a way.

*Milburn H. Miller, *Notes and Quotes*, The Warner Press, Anderson, Indiana, 1960, p. 111.