



Karam Chand was born in 1905 yet he only died just two years ago in England at the age of 110. Living that long is a remarkable feat. But his greatest claim is having been married to his wife, Kartari, since 1925. They hold claim to the longest marriage in modern history at 90 years 291 days. The oldest couple officially recognized by Guinness World-Records with birth and marriage records is a couple from the United States. Herbert and Zelmyra Fisher were married in 1924. They both lived to 105 years-old and were married for 86 years 290 days. Now, you can imagine a lot of people approached them asking for marriage advice. What is the key to a long and happy marriage? Today we continue our series on “Family Values” and look to the best place for answers to that question. In Mark 10 we hear from the one who designed marriage. As part of the family of God we listen carefully to his Word on marriage. And we learn why OUR FAMILY VALUES HEALTHY MARRIAGES.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with a question about marriage. “Is it permissible for a man to divorce his wife?” They weren’t asking because they wanted to know the secret to a lasting healthy marriage. They were testing him. They actually weren’t interested in honoring marriage. They wanted to know how far they could safely go in breaking it. They were like foolish children who saw a sign at the zoo near the wolf exhibit which read “do not cross.” But instead of staying back they tried to find out how close they get before they were in danger.

And isn’t that they type of questioning we often bring to our God? Instead of wondering how we can best know his will and obey him we want to know the limits of his commands or the loopholes for not keeping them. “How far can I go before I’m really sinning?” we sometimes wonder. “How much can I drink before it’s considered being drunk? How much can I overeat before I’m sinfully wasteful and indulgent? How fast can I go before the police will pull me over and issue me a ticket? How many times can a write off Sunday worship before I should start to feel guilty?” It’s sad to admit, but our sinful hearts despise God’s perfect design. And when it comes to marriage many foolishly ask, “How far can I go in dishonoring marriage before I’m in any danger?”

Jesus doesn’t come up with an answer that matches the times. He ignores the prevailing precedent to divorce for many reasons. He doesn’t care what the Roman governing authority or Jewish culture around them considered permissible. He directs the Pharisees to the same place we all ought to look. He turns to God’s Word. “What did Moses command you?”

The Pharisees were quick to latch on to an exception for marriage. “The book of Moses permitted us to write a certificate and divorce a woman.” It seems hard to believe that Moses would ever write such a thing. He never advocated divorce as a godly thing. But he did say that if someone found something shamefully improper he could write a certificate of divorce. Basically, if you foolishly fell into the wolf exhibit or were pushed into the wolf exhibit, there’s a ladder to climb and get out. But by design you weren’t supposed to be there! If because of sin you end up in a broken marriage, a certificate of divorce was the way out. But by design you weren’t supposed to be in a broken marriage in the first place! The sinful heart finds boundaries and it crosses them. “Moses wrote this,” Jesus explains, “because your hearts were hard.” Moses was writing this instruction for fallen sinners. Divorce happens in a sinful world because of sinful people. Divorce is a result of sin. Wives in ancient Israel were at times unfaithful. Husbands in ancient Israel did at times unfaithfully desert their wives. That’s why it was required that a certificate be written if a marriage was broken. Moses never commanded divorce. On the contrary he regulated it for sinful hearts so that they would not just dismiss marriage. Still today our society rightly has laws that protect marriage and regulate divorce.

Now that he has explained the reason for the exception, Jesus gets to the real heart of the matter. To define and defend marriage Jesus takes us to the time before the hardness of the human heart. He quotes from the second chapter of the Bible. There we read God’s establishment of marriage. This brings us to our main point for today. A healthy marriage is one which honors God’s establishment of marriage. I must repeat: A healthy marriage is one which honors God’s establishment of marriage.

Firstly, God established marriage at creation. “At the beginning of the created world he made them male and female.” The very fact that there is a Creator makes us look at marriage very differently. Marriage is not a mere human contract or invention of human culture. It comes from the Creator. He is the one who designed all this world and our very bodies. He is the one who put together his plan for all his world. It is to him that we are accountable. We must turn to his Word for truth about marriage.

Jesus starts his definition of marriage by talking about the two sexes. There are many who deny that Jesus speaks against homosexuality. Not only does he through his prophets, but he does here as well. Jesus defends marriage in the positive manner by affirming marriage includes male and female. We can take for granted from Jesus that marriage must comprise of, “male and female.” Everything else is an invention of the sinful heart and corrupt rebellion against the Creator. Jesus also never directly speaks against polygamy. But here he defends marriage against it by speaking in the positive. He defines marriage as between one man and one woman. “For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

So far God’s establishment of marriage brings us to this definition: Marriage is a union between one man and one woman, established by God as the closest family bond. Jesus now expounds on what that means.

“The two become one flesh, they are no longer two but one.” This is referring to more than sexual intimacy. It refers to the whole person and their life. Do we always honor marriage by treating it as God designed it? “They are no longer two, but one.” Is

this phrase not a clear and constant instruction for all who are married? Is your marriage so highly regarded that you no longer talk about “my money, my time, my truck, my house?” Or have you at times failed to give up selfishness? A healthy marriage isn’t just seen in the husband who stays legally married, it is seen in the husband who makes sure his wife shares in everything he has. The husband who considers it the wife’s job to do all the work around the house and never helps her doesn’t act like he has a wife, he acts like he has a house maid. He is selfish. The wife who thinks she deserves more than what her husband is able to give her doesn’t think like she has a husband, she has someone to manipulate for personal gain. The husband who mocks his wife in public mocks himself. The wife who gossips about her husband in private gossips against herself. So many act like they don’t even know what marriage is! They tear it apart at the seams by not living as one.

A healthy marriage doesn’t look out for self. It looks out for the two. It works to keep the two united. It fights against everything which causes division. Sin will constantly seek to destroy and divide such a unity and blessing. “The two are one.” When the Fishers, who were Christians, were asked about how they kept a healthy marriage for over 86 years they replied, “Remember marriage is not a contest, never keep a score. God has put the two of you together on the same team to win.”

Having properly defined marriage from Scripture, Jesus then answers the question. He affirms marriage is a lifelong union. “So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.” Marriage is established by God. And it should not be ended by mankind. Marriage should not end in sin but be treasured as a gift of God. “God has joined together.” Does every Christian always treasure marriage as a God-given union or do they sinfully at times swallow the world’s ideas, “Maybe were not compatible; maybe I’ll be happier with someone else.” By such thoughts they despise what God has given and treat their spouse horribly. A godly marriage never even considers divorce, never tolerates things which lead to divorce. A husband is never supposed to threaten to leave his wife. A wife is never supposed to threaten to leave her husband. And when a back-door opens up to the marriage as a possible escape, sin takes hold. Instead of reconciliation, husband and wife fight. Instead of seeking and giving forgiveness there is seeking a way to break the union. And as Jesus explained to his disciples if a husband divorces his wife, he commits adultery against her. If a wife divorces her husband, she commits adultery against him.

A healthy marriage ends when a heart is so cold and hard it refuses to love the one God has given. Instead it betrays, deserts, and in lovelessness hurts the one they are supposed to be one with. Instead of being one with their spouse they are one with pornography, with another person in reality or in fantasy, or with their own selfish hearts. That destruction of marriage doesn’t start with divorce. It starts with a sin-hardened heart which refuses to be one with their spouse.

Such hardness of heart is a serious and destructive sin. It not only destroys marriage but destroys faith. And what ought God to do to the person who does not honor marriage? “Do not be deceived” Paul writes, “Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men...will inherit the kingdom of God.” This includes those guilty of divorce and those guilty of any sexually immoral habit, thought, or action. All sin destroys. It destroys our earthly relationship and it destroys our relationship with our God. All of us, married and unmarried who have not honored marriage as we ought to have broken a perfect union with God. God ought to rightly divorce himself from us saying, “Away from me. We are not one.” Hell is an eternal divorce from God with an everlasting restraining order.

What has happened to what God has joined together? Is all lost because of sin? If anyone knows anything about a healthy marriage despite sin’s destruction it is God. He entered a covenant with his Church. He promised to be faithful to her and love her always. But his people, like an adulterous bride, were not faithful. We have not loved him above all things and faithfully kept to that union. We have broken his design for marriage, for parents and children, for families. But God’s plan was to remain faithful to his bride. Jesus could have left his bride even as his own abandoned him the night before he died. He prayed that night, “Father if it is possible take this cup away.” But his will was to go on. “There’s no going back. There is no giving up. I will love until the end. Even if it kills me.”

For his bride, the Church, Jesus came to this earth. And even though his Church is guilty of dishonoring marriage he still came. And though his people would continue to struggle against divisive sins, he still loved his Church. For her, and so that he might remain united with her, he gave himself. In order that his bride the Church might be holy, Jesus died for her on the cross. That is the love of Jesus for you, me, and for all. That is the love he has freely given us in order to keep us united with him forever.

Now his bride stands forgiven and pure. He gladly reconciles himself to her by his cross. He now lives and promises she will join in the eternal wedding banquet and never leave his side. God’s definition of marriage is a type of the love he has for you, his bride.

Now, husbands and wives have healthy marriages as they reflect this type of love. “Never keep score,” the Fishers advised. Godly advice. Forgiveness and selfless love drive a marriage closer. This is the love of Christ who forgave us. Holding to the love of Jesus makes for a healthy marriage because his love never fails. “There’s no going back. There is no giving up. I will love until the end. Even if it kills me.” There’s much more to say about what makes a healthy marriage. But we know why we value it: because our God valued us. So, we speak up for defense of marriage. We honor it. We support it. It is a life-long union between one man and woman, that forgives, loves, endures, never gives up as long as both live. And when sin comes to destroy, healthy marriages look to Jesus for strength, knowing he will never abandon, never fail his bride. It’s a beautiful union!

The Fishers who were married for 86 years had a lot of good advice. Some of it so simple. When asked what transcends all other things in their marriage, they answered, “We are both Christians. Marriage is a commitment to God.” It all starts there as we see marriage as his gift, built around his great love for us all. That’s why our family values healthy marriages.