

## *Hardness of Heart, Suffering, and Relationships*

Job 1:1 2:1–10

Mark 10:2–16

This is the sixth week of a twelve-week walk through several chapters in the Gospel of Mark. This is a difficult text because divorce and adultery and suffering are hard topics to talk about, especially if we are going through a painful and hurtful experience. It sounds like Jesus is very judgmental and harsh in Mark 10. It is important to always understand scripture in the context of the whole Bible and the context the writer of the gospel is addressing.

Both Mark 10:2–16 and Job 1:1, 2:1–10 talk about and raise more questions than they give answers. They talk about divorce, adultery, and suffering. There are no easy answers to these life experiences.

Most readers come to the book of Job desperately wanting nothing more than to understand why bad things happen to good people. Yet those seeking an answer to *that* question will find the book of Job unsettling, at best, because it does not provide the kinds of tidy answers we would hope to discover.

The writer of Job debunks the normative worldview of the day. Simply put, this worldview understood the events of the world in terms of those who act righteously can expect good things to happen, and those who fail to act righteously can expect calamity. Job's friends fail in their explanations of Job's troubles. They fail because the book of Job is not about what Job did or didn't do, but about God and who God is.

In Mark, context is everything. The Pharisees are intentionally trying to expose faults in Jesus' thinking and teaching. They want people to stop following and listening to Jesus. While divorce and adultery stand out as the issues, the Pharisees want to force Jesus into making a statement that they could use against him.

Though Jesus seems to issue a straightforward, blanket prohibition against divorce in this passage, the picture is considerably more complex. We need to remember Mark regularly uses exaggerated terms in his writing to make a point. Our context is different than Jesus'. Taking one passage and saying it is the only and final word on an issue takes things out of context. Both Matthew and Paul give exceptions for divorce and are not as absolute. Then there is the story in John where a woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus, and Jesus tells the leaders of the church "the one without sin can cast the first stone." Living the law for Jesus is a matter of the heart.

So the challenge is to discover a word of hope in the text, hope that is not drowned out by stigma or disappointment. Hope that is not simply a temporary word of encouragement. Hope that is not empty promises about future relationships—but hope that communicates understanding and compassion. Hope that tells the truth about the pain, but also tells the truth that God will not leave us in the pain. Hope that God is indeed mindful of those who suffer.

Can we hear and realize God calls the church to not abandon each other in our struggles to live up to so-called biblical standards in the midst of suffering? Can we show the world the community of faith will not excommunicate when we fall short but instead will be a community for all, the source of unconditional relationships that will support each other and love each other?

In the end, this is the promise of the Gospel—that even our best attempts at thwarting God's grace will be met again and again by God's abounding love.

Think about it – Pray about it – Live it

*Bob*