



Sermon Growth Guide

May 22, 2022

Awake to Sexual Identity



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Mark 10:1-12

Key Verse: Mark 10:7-8 “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 they are no longer two, but one flesh.”

Big Idea: God has a creational intent for your life.

Foundations

“Everyone is wrestling in the tension between God’s creational intent and their own behavior,” Pastor Tim states this week.

Divorce was not a part of God’s creational intent, yet God permits it under extreme conditions. In our passage today, Jesus says that the reason we have divorce codes in the Old Testament is “because our hearts are hard” (Mark 10:5).

Divorce under extreme circumstances is an example of what Pastor Tim calls a “merciful limitation.” So we have “creational intent” and “merciful limitation.” But what about other aspects of our sexual identity?

Scripture leads us to affirm that our sexuality is a gift to be enjoyed within the context of a heterosexual, monogamous Christian marriage.

What aspects of sexual identity would you like your Life Group to host a conversation on this week? How have you and members of your household struggled with sexual identity?

For our co-ed groups, this is a good week to make time to meet in same-gender groups for sisters to be with sisters and brothers to be with brothers. Pray that the Spirit guides and guards your hearts, minds and discussion this week.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Mark 10:1-12.

In verse three, how does Jesus first respond to the Pharisees?

How are a husband and wife described in verse eight?

So, according to Jesus’ response throughout Mark 10:1-12, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

Applying God’s Word

God has a creational intent for your life, yet we all wrestle with God’s creational intent. What’s your next step in leaning into God’s ideal for your life, especially in regard to your sexuality?

Witnessing God’s Word

Tim starts out this week saying, “of all the topics in our **Awake** series, nowhere has the world divorced itself from the Word more vehemently than in the area of human sexuality.”

How do we as Christians “shine like stars” in the way we walk out our sexual ethic? (Philippians 2:15) Are we Christians called to hold secular culture to our ethical code? How do we best welcome someone currently walking out a different sexual ethic into our worshipping community?

Of all the topics of this series, today's is the most difficult and the most uncomfortable. Do you feel it? Are you uncomfortable yet just looking at the title? I am! I know what is coming next. I bet half of you came today just thinking, "You know, I better get over there. This might be Tim's last sermon!" I think we'll be okay. It is uncomfortable because of all these topics we are addressing, nowhere has the world divorced itself from the Word more vehemently than in the area of human sexuality. And, in recent times, nowhere has the church lost its bearings in love and compassion more than right here. We need to follow Jesus. We need to find the eyes of Jesus. Jesus, full of grace and truth. Truth and grace. Jesus.

The first thing to say is that this is a sermon on Mark 10, not an opinion piece. The job of a sermon is to bring us together under the authority of the Word of God. If you have no interest in these scriptures as the Word of God, this will be the most frustrating message you have ever heard. But if you are here wanting to try to live your life under God's Word, in God's way, you will hear something today. In this series, **Awake**, we want to see through the eyes of Jesus. Why do I listen to this Word? Because Jesus is my Savior and I want to know him as my Lord. I want his thoughts to be my thoughts, his ways to be my ways, his sight to be my sight, his view to be my view. I trust him. How does Jesus share his thoughts and opinions and viewpoints with us? Through his holy Word. We hear Jesus through his Word. Will we go with the world or with the Word?

Jesus was Awake to Sexual Identity. He knew what people struggle with. Sexual identity exploration is nothing new. People say the reason Jesus didn't bless and support the wide range of sexual identities is that he just wasn't aware. Actually,

Jesus would have been well aware, fully awake. The dominant culture accepted homosexuality; many practiced polygamy. Religious cults included polyamory and the use of prostitutes for supposed spiritual rituals. Within earshot of Jesus would have been Greeks who grew up with pederasty as part of their childhood education, Roman men who visited brothels and abused their slaves as objects of personal pleasure, Persians who set no gender boundaries, tribalists who married as many wives as they could afford, and, apparently, Jews who practiced serial monogamy with quick divorces. In that mix, in that room, what does Jesus say? Jesus establishes the baseline. The first thing we are going to do is to establish the baseline. Then, from there, we will move as urgently as we can toward how we deeply, fully, unreservedly love one another.

Mark 10. The presenting issue is divorce. "Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'" (Mark 10:2) The intent was to test and trap Jesus. "'What did Moses command you?' he replied. They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away'" (Mark 10:3-4). That's true. Deuteronomy 24 outlines procedures for divorce. It required that the husband deliver to the wife a certificate of divorce. This protected women in ways no other ancient law did. But is this what God wanted for us? Is this God's heart for marriage?

Jesus goes on. "'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied. 'But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' '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 they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate'" (Mark 10:5-9). This is marriage liturgy.



It sounds like we're at a wedding doesn't it? The verses that feed this liturgy come from Genesis, from the Creation narrative. One is the verse we have been lifting up in this series: "Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...' So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27). The other is Genesis 2:24 which Jesus quotes in its entirety. These are foundational statements about what it means to be human beings created in the image of God. Jesus lets them sit. The baseline. Was he unaware of all the various ways the gathered people in earshot were struggling to find love? Was he unsympathetic to all the souls who would read this in coming generations and wonder if he loves them or not? He lets it sit.

As his opponents try to trap him, Jesus responds by illustrating the difference between two types of law. One is what we would call God's "creational intent." This is how God made things to be. For this, we look to Genesis 1-3, before the fall, before original sin, before human disobedience entered and spun everything into chaos and disorder, before that, we see God's creational intent. The other is law granted by God for "merciful limitation." Given that we are not living in the Garden of Eden any longer, we are navigating life in a fallen, broken, twisted world, God gives laws to limit the damage we inflict on one another as we try to find our way forward. "Moses wrote you this law, God gave you this limit, because your hearts are hard. Because it is apparent that you are willing to step on and crush one another in your desperate race to your own personal fulfillment." Mercy sets limits. But what is ideal? What is life? It isn't living at the limits of sin and selfishness that God will allow. It's living into the core of how God made us, the beauty and wonder of

God's creational intent.

Later the disciples ask or more on divorce. "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'" (Mark 10:11-12). Quickly, match this with Matthew 19 where Jesus recognized the occasional need for divorce and we know this is not a blanket proclamation against divorce, but against superficial divorce. Two interesting things before we move on. One is that Jesus says adultery is on the line. So, what is adultery? Breaking faithfulness in marriage? If the marriage is over, how can there be adultery? Real marriage, and therefore real adultery, is what's happening in God's eyes, not legal documents. God's laws are above the laws of the County Courthouse. Second, and I just can't go into this, but it is amazing to note how both the Deuteronomic law and the teaching of Jesus elevated the rights and protections of women who otherwise could have been thrown out of their homes on a word. But let's get back to the main point.

Jesus is Awake to Sexual Identity. Prove it. Okay. Well, it is the common human experience. People listening to Jesus would be from all range of backgrounds and proclivities we see today and more. We act like Jesus would be surprised to know what is in the hearts of men and women. "Jesus would never have said what he said had he only known how difficult it is today." But, no, Jesus knew. He knew. And he lifted up the creational intent, the beauty and wonder of physical intimacy within the bounds of a covenant of marriage. Male and female he made them, and "'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 they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mark 10:7-8). To punctuate it,



he ends with an authoritative proclamation: “Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate” (Mark 10:9)

So there it is. Jesus stays faithful to the baseline. Immovable. Unchanging. For my generation and your generation and the generations to come. In one hundred years they will open to this passage and read the very same thing. There it is. That’s that, I suppose. But church, how do you imagine Jesus in this moment? Is he flinty-eyed and arms folded? Is he angry, with a set chin and steely gaze? Is that Jesus? He knows who was listening in that crowd that day. He knows who is listening today. Jesus isn’t out to clobber anybody. Jesus isn’t proof-texting to attack anyone or make himself feel superior. No. Jesus knows who is in the crowd. Folks, we are not in the Garden of Eden. We are east of Eden now. In this world of sin and confusion, people struggle to find their way in love. For some, finding love in the creational intent of male and female, husband and wife, for some this is just not possible. We all know these stories. We all have loved ones in this struggle. On the prompting of a friend knowing this message was coming I listened to a 45-part podcast from a man who struggles with same sex attraction. From boyhood to adolescence to adulthood, a strong Christian, wrestling with God, wrestling with Scripture. In despair he said, “I knew that sex is the gateway to everything that matters, and I could not pass through that gate.” What he meant was that if you ask anyone what matters most to them, they say their family. My wife. My husband. My kids. You don’t get to pass into all that in biblical terms without marriage between a man and a woman, which he could not do. Painful. Lonely. What does Jesus have to say to

them?

Well, let’s find the eyes of Jesus. Does he shut people out with anger? Do you remember when Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well in John 4? “I know you have no husband. You’ve had five. And the man you are with isn’t one.” What do you see there? Is that condemnation or compassion? Remember the woman caught in adultery, dragged before Jesus by a crowd of men in John 8? “Let you without sin cast the first stone.” “Jesus straightened up and asked her, ‘Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?’ ‘No one, sir,’ she said. ‘Then neither do I condemn you,’ Jesus declared. ‘Go now and leave your life of sin’” (John 8:10-11). Condemnation or compassion? Jesus, full of grace and truth.

God made sex sacred. Jesus is clear. It isn’t a hobby or a game or something to try to see if you like. It is sacred. That’s why it is protected by the covenant of marriage. We can’t lose our moorings as believers to the creational intent of God. Male and female. One man, one woman, covenanted in marriage. There is no question, the Word of God sets these moorings and strongly instructs us not to cultivate or normalize other patterns of behavior. We can’t lose those foundations. But we can’t lose the compassionate eyes of Jesus either. When you meet someone who is struggling and they trust you enough to tell you, here’s what I have learned to say: “I believe you. I love you. Tell me more.” I think that’s the posture of Jesus. Let us love one another fully, deeply, unreservedly, relentlessly. Those who are in this struggle, they are in the greatest struggle of their lives, to find their way forward when “husband and wife” is not working for them. Remember who stands before you, an image bearer of the



Creator, worthy of dignity, honor, respect, understanding and love. If you are someone who struggles with this, if you are still listening, I want to speak to you. Jesus loves you. God loves you. God will never give up on you. The worst thing in the world is to feel boxed out by your family, your church, your God. I believe you. I love you. Tell me more.

I want to offer a few points of hope for those trying to find a faithful way forward with God when their bodies and psyches are not cooperating. I think these reminders help us all: (1) No one is righteous; no not one. Often a person wrestling with their sexual identity isolates themselves convinced that nobody feels as mismatched and confused as they do. No. Everyone is struggling. No one has it all together. Everyone is wrestling in the tension between God's creational ideal and their own behavior. Even the married struggle. We are all on the side of sinners saved by grace whose only hope is Jesus. (2) Sex is a good thing, but it is not everything. We make too much of sex. Remember, Jesus lived the perfect life—and it did not include sex. We have taken a good thing and made it the ultimate thing. Sexuality is not a big enough thing to rest your identity upon. Soren Kierkegaard said, "Sin is building your identity on anything but God." We take a good thing and make it the ultimate thing and everything falls apart. Sex is not the gateway to all that matters in life. Jesus is the gate. (3) God is good and God is for you. Whatever you are struggling with in your own search for love and sexual health, Jesus is good. Trust him with your story. Trust that he has good things in store for you. What do you see in Jesus' eyes? Hard flint? Steely judgmentalism? Or compassion and understanding? Grace and hopeful love? Jesus loves

you. He will not walk away from you. Keep Jesus in your story. Let Jesus write your story with you. And let your imagination grow large! Your story is not finished. God has broad places and unknown horizons to walk with you. His love will not disappoint.

What has this sermon done to you? What hurts have been dredged up? What regrets? This is a powerful part of life. It is full of regret, shame, inadequacy, incomprehensible desires and tendencies and habits. Jesus stood up and held the line. He pointed to true north in a stormy sea of confusion. Here is the God who made you. Here is the gift of marriage and the joy of physical intimacy. Here is man and woman. Yes, he remained faithful to the truth, and at the same time, he knew, he saw, there was not a woman or a man in the house who could find their way home without his help, without his grace, without his forgiveness. In our naked shame we lock ourselves in darkness. Jesus is the light. Jesus came to take our place. Jesus died on the cross alone so that we would never be locked in isolation. Jesus died on the cross naked in shame, so that we go on clothed in his righteousness. Jesus was wronged and abused so that we could be forgiven for any wrong, any abuse, any sin we have ever committed or wanted to commit. Forgiven, redeemed, restored, in the eyes of Jesus.

