ReMARKable: Maybe We Have Lost Sight (Ch. 10) Memory Verse: Mark 10:45

March 16th, 2025 Scripture Reading: Mark 10

**[SLIDE 1]**

 Last week, in chapter nine, we discussed mountaintop experiences. Jesus literally took Peter, James and John up to the top of a very high mountain. There Jesus was revealed in all his power and glory. He was transfigured. He shone brightly. Moses and Elijah appeared, the cloud of God’s presence appeared and, in fact, the very voice of God proclaimed Jesus to be his Son and that he should be listened to. A transformative event. A mountaintop experience that had to come to an end, but the impact of that experience would carry on.

 Once down from the mountain, Jesus shares with his other disciples for a second time that he will be delivered over into the hands of men, he will be killed, and he will rise again. But these **[SLIDE 2]** faithful Jewish men can simply not absorb what Jesus is saying. It doesn’t compute with what they know about the Messiah.

 In chapter 10 then, we see Jesus in yet another location. He is in the southern area of Judea and he is approached by some Pharisees with a question about divorce. **[SLIDE 3]** Now, I learned something as I was studying this chapter that really surprised me. Mark tells us that these teachers are trying to test Jesus. They want to trip him up with his answer here and it is a good test because divorce, even at that time, was a hotly debated subject. Here in MN, we have something called “no-fault divorce”. Previous to this law, one spouse would have to prove to the courts that their husband or wife was at fault and that the marriage should be dissolved. In other words, there had to be a reason. Needless to say, our current system makes ending a marriage a much easier process, at least legally speaking. Well in first century Judaism, women had no rights and it was completely the husband’s prerogative of whether or not he wanted to issue a certificate of divorce and end his marriage. In this system, no reason really needed to be given, it was simply the husband’s decision. What I am trying to say here is that some things never change. Divorce was all too common in ancient Judaism and it is all too common now. There was a debate about what the law of God required, and there were different schools of thought surrounding the issue, so maybe these teachers could trap Jesus into subscribing to one side of the debate thereby creating some new enemies for Jesus.

 But we know going into this that Jesus is going to remain above the fray. Jesus brings up Moses, what does he say? And the teachers answer correctly. In Deuteronomy 24 men are allowed to issue a certificate of divorce if he finds **[SLIDE 4]** something disgraceful about his wife and has lost favor in his eyes. That is the “law” these people are trying to live by and you can see why they are all worked up in arguments. What does “disgrace” mean here? What does “lost favor” mean? So some teachers held that virtually any reason a husband could come up with was acceptable for divorce according to the law Moses had written.

 But over and above all the squabbling over semantics, Jesus acknowledges, “Yes, yes, Moses gave this rule, but it was only a concession due to the stubbornness of the people’s hearts. Let me take you further back, past Deuteronomy, past Exodus, past when the law was even given. Let’s go to the beginning. At creation, God made man and woman… **[SLIDE 5]** the two will be joined together and they will become “one flesh.” Jesus reiterates this part. He says it twice. And the conclusion to becoming one is in verse 9, “Therefore, humans must not pull apart what God has put together.” So argue about all the reasonings someone might have for divorce, justify certain situations, but in so doing, you are missing the point. The purpose and plan from creation, is oneness; an indissoluble unity. And Jesus goes on to say that even if men do pull apart what God has brought together, it doesn’t change our status as one. Jesus calls relationships after marriage adulterous.

 So what do we do  **[SLIDE 6]** in a state of no-fault divorce, in a culture of marriage and re-marriage? Well, from the outset, we want to be clear: if there is a perspective that highly values marriage, **[SLIDE 7]** Jesus raises that standard even higher. He is showing that arguing about what Moses said is missing the point. Go back to Genesis, look at the origin of marriage, look at the purpose and intent. There is no wiggle room or exception to two becoming one.

 Now if divorce is not God’s plan, what do we do when we fall short of the ideal? I myself have been divorced and re-married. My oldest two children are from my first marriage and even though they were quite young when the divorce occurred, they know firsthand the destruction that happens when one becomes pulled apert into two. So I, and many like me, are faced with a very blunt question: Am I an adulterer since I have been re-married?

 Marriage is a totally unique and purposeful enterprise. It is God’s idea…it is rooted in his character. In marriage, a man and a woman become one and out of the relationship comes…creation. A family then is a picture of the Trinity. **[SLIDE 8]** All of creation bursts forth out of the loved shared between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And we participate in the work of God; we become creators as we selflessly love our spouse as ourself. The two become one. But, marriage is also unique in the fact that it takes two people to make it happen and two people to keep it happening. But, as scripture recognizes, we are people with stubborn hearts. This means if one spouse is committed and faithful to keep a marriage intact, it cannot remain intact if the other spouse is uncommitted. This is why in Matthew’s account of this conversation Jesus includes an exception. If there has been **[SLIDE 9]** unfaithfulness, then the oneness has already been broken, the ripping has already occurred and the divorce at that point simply acknowledges this reality.

 So, husbands and wives, **[SLIDE 10]** through the tumult of this life, through the arguments, through the bad habits, through the breakdowns in communication, through the disappointments, through the pet peeves, through the mistakes and missteps, even through the out-and-out sins committed by the other….take it from Jesus: You are one. And it is going to take the two of you to remain as one. Don’t remain stubborn with one another. Love each other selflessly. Trust that the plan and purpose of God is greater than the current struggle. It can certainly be appropriate to get some extra help, to talk to a counselor, to read a book together. I have a few wonderful marriage books in my office if you might want a suggestion. Let us not be stubborn with one another. What God has brought together, may it not be ripped apart.

 After Jesus establishes this high standard for marriage, Mark moves on to talk about children **[SLIDE 11]**. Now, let’s remember, in the last chapter, Jesus took a child, embraced that child, and told his disciples that if they welcome a child, they actually welcome him and the One who sent him. But here, as parents are bringing their children to meet Jesus, the disciples are trying to shoo them away to give Jesus space. But Jesus rebuked his disciples. He hugs the children, he blesses them. You can imagine that Jesus just exuded a joy that made him fun to be around. Jesus reiterate what he said earlier about kids, but he takes that thought even further as he actually sets up a child as the example to follow. **[SLIDE 12]** Verse 15, “Whoever does not welcome God’s kingdom like a child will never enter it.” In other words, this child is getting in…you adults, not so much. You adults, we’ll see. To what degree are you like this child? To what degree do you run to me to be hugged, to be blessed? To what degree do you trust me? To what degree do you need me? Am I like a child?

 As Jesus continues his journey, he meets a rich man who, interestingly, wants to inherit eternal life. This man has followed the law and is in good standing. So Jesus prescribed the next step: sell all he has and give the proceeds to the poor. This was a bridge too far and the man left dismayed. Jesus concludes that it is very hard for the wealthy **[SLIDE 13]** to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Verse 24 says that this startled the disciples. And just like the two becoming one idea, Jesus repeats himself. He calls the grown men around him, “Children,” and states even more strongly, “It is impossible for a rich person to enter God’s kingdom”. They were shocked even more. From their perspective, wealth was a blessing from God. If you were righteous, God would bless you with material prosperity. It is easy to see if we think about Job, and Abraham and Jacob…all men who received great wealth from God. But now Jesus is indicating that wealth is actually a hindrance. They were shocked! Again, they were to come as children, who have nothing to offer as far as money or status. The disciples are floored: “Well, who then can be saved?” And Jesus pulls no punches, **[SLIDE 14]** “It is impossible with human beings…but not with God.” Peter cannot help but pipe up. I think he is a verbal processor. He needs to audibly sort out what he hears Jesus saying. He sort of stands up for himself and his fellow disciples. “Look, Jesus, we have left everything. We have nothing and we are following you. Surely, we of all people meet the criteria you are talking about here.”

 Then Jesus assures them, **[SLIDE 15]** verse 29, whatever you have left, whoever you have left for my sake will be reimbursed a hundred-fold and you will receive eternal life! But the kingdom works in non-intuitive ways. It’s a reversal. The last shall be first and the first shall be last. Just like a child shall serve as your example to emulate.

 In verse 33, Jesus speaks plainly for a third time about what is going to happen to him in Jerusalem. It is the same story with a few more added details. **[SLIDE 16]** Jesus is to be handed over, but this time to the chief priests, this time to the leaders of his own people! They will condemn him and then Rome will step in. He will be tortured and spit upon and killed. Then, three days later he will rise. You might imagine the mood being rather solemn as Jesus and his crew make their way to Jerusalem. Most probably the disciples were feeling sadness, and, at the very least, confusion. “Why would we head into Jerusalem if this bad stuff is going to happen to you?” And yet out of this confusion, James and John ginny up the courage to talk to Jesus about something that the disciples were already caught arguing about in 9:34. They were squabbling about who was the greatest. But James and John want to ask Jesus for a favor. Jesus responds “What do you want me to do for you?” “Well, when you come into your glorious kingdom, we want to be the ones to **[SLIDE 17]** sit at your right and left. When you are sitting on your throne, we want to be right there with you sharing your glory.” Remember, these two had seen a glimpse of that glory on the mountaintop in chapter 9. But what we see as audacious and out of line, what the other disciples see as ambitious and wrong-headed, Jesus does not condemn James and John. He basically says that it is not his decision, that they will in fact, eventually, share in his sufferings. What they cannot see is that two thieves, two criminals, will occupy the places at Jesus’ right and left, and his throne with not be a regal chair, but a brutal cross.

 In verse 45 Jesus sums up his mission; to serve and to give his life to liberate many people. Mark uses the word **[SLIDE 18]** *lutron*. It means a ransom, or a price that would be paid in order to set slaves free. Thank you Lord, for the cross. Thank you Lord for setting us free! And now what do we do with our freedom now that the ransom has been paid? We serve.

Jesus and the crew reach Jericho…only 15 miles from Jerusalem. The crowds are there as usual, and a blind man speaks up asking for mercy from the Son of David. Now in all of the miracle stories of Mark, those who receive healing **[SLIDE 19]** are anonymous. Sometimes they are described in various ways, but they are never named. Here, we are given not only the man’s name, Bartimaeus, but also his father’s name, Timaeus. And this gives us as readers insight into another layer that Mark is adding to this story. This is an account of healing no doubt, but it is also a call. Look at verse 49, Jesus stopped and said, “Call him forward.” They called the blind man, “Be encouraged! Get up! He's calling you!” Bartimaeus comes to Jesus and Jesus asks the exact same question he posed to James and John in verse 36, “What do you want me to do for you?” And I think what we have here is a sort of commentary from Mark. Bartimaeus’ answer here should have been James’ and John’s answer. “Lord, we want to see.” Jesus’ answer would have been similar, “Your faith has healed you.” By faith we can see. Faith corrects our blindness.

 ((Once healed, Bartimaeus begins to **[SLIDE 20]** follow Jesus on the way. It’s a call story! Bartimaeus is a disciple. His story is the same as the other disciples, the same as ours. Jesus has called, we have responded. Our blindness has been healed by faith and now we can see enough to follow after this Jesus, into Jerusalem, into danger, into the ordeal of the cross. That is where faith guides us. That is where Jesus leads.))

 I must admit, this was a tough chapter to digest and breakdown. It just includes so much information, so many different stories. I actually admitted to a pastor friend of mine that I may have made a big mistake in trying to preach one sermon on a whole chapter. But despite my inability to cover everything adequately, I think each of us can let the text speak into our current position in life. Maybe today is the day I do need to revisit and reaffirm God’s intent for marriage, to reinvigorate our efforts to remain steadfast as husband and wife. **[SLIDE 21]** Maybe I’ve lost sight of the heart marriage: the two becoming one.

Maybe today is the perfect day to understand my role as a child of God. Maybe I need to remember that I run to Jesus out of my need, not because I have something to offer. Maybe I have lost sight of the fact that childlikeness is the way of God’s kingdom.

Maybe I need to regain perspective on my financial status. What do I do with my money? Would I walk away from Jesus if it meant selling what I have? Maybe I have lost sight of how much my money inhibits my faith?

Maybe I nurture an ambition to be the best, to outshine others. Maybe I am concerned with getting ahead and advocating for myself. Maybe I long for glory that should belong to Christ. Maybe I have lost sight of what it means to be a servant. Maybe I have lost sight of where Jesus leads…to the cross.

Maybe I have lost sight….all of these maybes come together in Bartimaeus. He certainly can’t see all ends…and neither can I. I want to dictate my marriage, I want to ignore the least of these, I want to stockpile my wealth, I want a glorious story, a conquering Messiah…more often than not, I am okay with my blindness, or maybe it is the case that, ironically, I can’t see my own blindness. But Jesus comes offering the kingdom, offering sight, offering eternal life. It comes by faith. Jesus says, “You’re faith has healed you.” And like Bartimaeus, we join Jesus, we follow him all the way to the cross. And because we’ve been healed, we can see that cross looming up ahead, and yet, despite, what is coming, we persist in following him. We know, we have faith, that if we follow far enough, if we follow through the turmoil of the cross, on the other side lies resurrection and the gift of eternal life. Oh Lord, give us faith! Heal our blindness! We want to see! Amen.