

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 10:1-12

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week we'll be reading Mark chapter 10, and today we'll read from verse 1 to verse 12.

Since Jesus appointed the twelve apostles, His focus in the region of Galilee was on training these twelve disciples. This included three rounds of missionary journey, which resulted in remarkable effectiveness in foundational training, expanding the breadth of the gospel, and increasing the depth of revelation. Starting from Chapter 10, Jesus concluded His training course in the Galilean region and began to walk the road to the cross, with the endpoint being various locations near Jerusalem, precisely six months later at the Passover.

The week before the Passover is the Holy Week that we're familiar with. Many events occurred during this week, detailed extensively in all four Gospels. However, in the preceding five months, the account in the Gospel of Mark is very concise, limited to just Chapter 10. Corresponding to this chapter, in the Gospel of Matthew, the narrative is spread across chapters 19 and 20, with Matthew's account being twice as long as Mark's. Particularly noteworthy is the Gospel of Luke, which, starting from Luke 9:51, states, "When the time came near for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he set his face toward Jerusalem," indicating his departure from Galilee and his determination to go to Jerusalem. It is not until Luke 19:28, "After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem," that He actually enters Jerusalem. Therefore, from Luke 9:51 to Luke 19:28, there are a total of 10 chapters documenting Jesus' journey from leaving Galilee to walking the road to the cross, culminating in His final entry into Jerusalem. Luke's Gospel employs ten times the length of Mark's to record this journey. So, if you truly want to understand the road to the cross, you must read the Gospel of Luke to see how Jesus, as the Son of Man, carried the cross, not only physically walking towards Golgotha but also helping His disciples understand the significance of the cross. Additionally, He continued to

assist those in need along the way and directly faced the persecution and accusations of the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees.

The Gospel of Mark only briefly records the events of this period. Generally, it's easier to provide detailed records in a chronological manner, whereas selecting a few events from many is more challenging. However, for readers, it's even more challenging because they must first enter the author's mindset through the selected material to truly understand the central message the author intends to convey. May the Lord grant us wisdom to understand the message about the road to the cross that Mark seeks to convey, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 1: "Then He arose from there and came to the region of Judea by the other side of the Jordan. And multitudes gathered to Him again, and as He was accustomed, He taught them."

"From there" refers to Capernaum in Galilee. This was the last time Jesus left, as He never returned to Galilee before His crucifixion. Now He came to the region of Judea on the other side of the Jordan, likely referring to Bethany beyond the Jordan mentioned in John 1:28, where John was baptizing. When John the Baptist was fulfilling his ministry, he baptized people in three locations: on the Jordan River near the Dead Sea, by the wilderness in southern Judea; near Anon, close to Jerusalem; and Bethany by the other side of the Jordan, near the southeastern edge of the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus initially began His ministry, where He met John and Andrew and invited them to stay; and the next day, Andrew brought his brother Peter to see Jesus. This place was likely not far from Galilee, within a day's journey. Through some scholarly research, Bethany on the other side of the Jordan is believed to be the Old Testament Bashan region. The Greek name for Bashan is Batanea, which sounds very similar to Bethany. This Bethany is situated by the Yarmouk River, which is the brook Cherith where the prophet Elijah hid, and where the Lord sent ravens to bring him bread and meat.

After leaving Capernaum in Galilee, Jesus came to Bethany beyond the Jordan, which became His central place of work for the next six months. Luke's Gospel from Chapter 9 to Chapter 19 sequentially records four stages of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, while Mark only selects a few events during this time, primarily highlighting the requirements for entering the kingdom of God. Jesus arrived at Bethany on the other side of the Jordan, and the multitudes gathered to Him there, and He began to teach them as usual.

Verse 2: "The Pharisees came and asked Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' testing Him."The Pharisees were constantly seeking to find fault with Jesus in order to arrest Him. Up to this point, Jesus had deliberately avoided them, not wanting to engage in direct conflict with them. But now, as Jesus was on the path to the cross, He no longer avoided them and engaged in dialogue face to face. They sought to test Jesus by asking whether it was permissible for a man to divorce his wife. In today's terms, this would be akin to asking whether Christians can divorce. Such questions are difficult to answer because each family situation is unique, making a generalized response is challenging. The Pharisees chose this question because it was highly controversial at the time. According to the Mosaic Law, in Deuteronomy 24:1, "When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife," Moses' words seemed ambiguous as they did not clearly define what constituted "uncleanness" or why the husband found her displeasing.

Due to the ambiguity of the law, two schools of thought emerged among those interpreting the Mosaic Law. One school emphasized that the woman must commit an act of unfaithfulness for the husband to divorce her. This interpretation narrowly defined "uncleanness" as marital unfaithfulness, stating that only if the wife was unfaithful could the husband divorce her. The other school of thought emphasized that if the husband found anything displeasing about her, he could divorce her. According to them, as long as the husband found anything displeasing, he could

divorce his wife. These two schools of thought clashed vehemently, each with its own supporters, and the crowd around Jesus likely held differing opinions on the matter. Therefore, this was a deceitful question, as no matter which side Jesus supported, there would be opposition. In fact, this issue remains contentious even today. When a husband and wife constantly argue, making their home feel like anything but a home, can they divorce? Let's see how Jesus responds.

Verse 3: "And He answered and said to them, 'What did Moses command you?'"

Jesus, knowing their malicious intent, asked them in return what Moses commanded regarding divorce. Since the Pharisees claimed to be defenders and executors of the Mosaic Law, they should naturally be familiar with the law.

Verse 4: "They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and to dismiss her.'"

Their response was, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and to dismiss her." Their answer was evasive, merely quoting the latter part of Deuteronomy 24. Indeed, writing a certificate of divorce would allow a man to divorce his wife, as the marital relationship would cease to exist. However, the real question was under what circumstances one could write such a certificate? On this question, they answered as if they had not answered at all. Jesus' reason for asking them in return was to expose their true intentions, as they themselves did not know. If they were truly willing to admit their ignorance and humble themselves, perhaps they could find salvation from Jesus. However, they persisted in playing word games, answering without truly answering. In contrast to the Pharisees' evasion of the question, Jesus did not evade it but went straight to the heart of the matter.

Verse 5: "And Jesus answered and said to them, 'Because of the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.'"

Although they quoted Moses' law, specifically Deuteronomy 24:1, Jesus informed them that Moses wrote this law because of the hardness of their hearts, and then permitted them to divorce their wives. Here we see that the permission for divorce among the Israelites was not God's best will, but rather a concession made to give out a permissive will, because the people's hearts were hardened and unwilling to obey God's best will.

Dear brothers and sisters, I hope we all understand the two aspects of God's will. God's best will is something every person who loves God and is willing to follow Him must seek. God's best will is usually clear and explicitly stated in the Bible, and it's often clear in the hearts of believers as well. However, many times we are unwilling to obey, and we repeatedly seek God's will, meaning we repeatedly ask God to lower His standards, which then brings out God's permissive will. This is not God's original design but rather a concession made because people's hearts are hardened.

Verses 6-7: "But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.' 'For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'"

Jesus brought people back to God's original intent. In the beginning of creation, God created them male and female. God first created man and then, based on man's need, created a woman to help him. God created Adam first, but seeing that it was not good for Adam to be alone, He created Eve to help him. When Eve was created and brought to Adam, he was overjoyed, saying, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." This leads to Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." This verse is the biblical definition of marriage, established by God before the fall of man, and this definition remains unchanged to this day.

In every person's life today, it begins with birth. Naturally, the relationship between a person and their parents is very intimate. Children are God's gift to parents, and children grow up under the care of their parents, eventually becoming the heritage of their parents. Though the relationship is intimate, ultimately each individual is

independent. On the other hand, the relationship between husband and wife should be even more intimate than that between parents and children because a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Becoming one flesh means they cannot be separated. Therefore, it is unwise for married couples not to leave their parents, as children are ultimately God's and are entrusted by God to parents for a period of time. During this time, parents nurture them, educate them, and influence them, but when children grow up, parents must return them to God. Of course, children should honor their parents and have the responsibility to support them.

But the Bible says that children should leave their parents and be united to their spouses; this is the divine ordinance of marriage. This may be different from the traditional Chinese emphasis on filial piety, and sometimes we may prioritize our relationship with our parents over our relationship with our spouses. However, we must understand that in the Bible, the relationship between husband and wife is a foreshadowing of Christ and the Church. Christ and the Church are the head and body, and naturally, the head and body are one. This relationship is even more intimate than the relationship between parents and children.

Verse 8-9: "So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let not man separate."

In contrast to the Pharisees' evasion of the issue, Jesus directly brings people back to God's original intent, giving a clear answer: that once married, husband and wife are no longer two but one flesh, and therefore, what God has joined together, no one should separate. Marriage is sacred, it is what God has ordained, and it should not be broken! Often the difficulties we encounter in life arise when we cannot decide; most of these, stem from selfish considerations, balancing various interests. If we are willing to return to God's best will, the answers are actually very clear and definite. However, we cannot turn God's best will into rules for the church to strictly adhere to, otherwise, we would become like the Pharisees. What God desires to see is people willingly obeying His best will.

Verse 10: "In the house His disciples also asked Him about the same matter."

Jesus' answer left the Pharisees speechless, but His disciples still had questions. The truth about marriage is clear-cut; it's about returning to God's original design as Jesus described, where two become one, and what God has joined together should not be separated. However, in practice, because both husband and wife are fallen sinners, it may not be easy for both parties to agree to return to God's original design. Perhaps the disciples' question was about this aspect – what to do if one party insists on leaving?

Verse 11-12: "So He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'"

Jesus' response remains pure, completely based on God's original design. According to God's plan, both husband and wife are equal. If a husband divorces his wife and remarries, he commits adultery; similarly, if a wife divorces her husband and remarries, she also commits adultery. Adultery is a violation of the Seventh Commandment. Jesus emphasizes God's best will: neither party in marriage should remarry, as it would constitute adultery. The provision in Deuteronomy 24 allowing divorce is God's permissive will, given human hard-heartedness. Moses' law is permissive, but Jesus emphasizes God's ideal: remarriage after divorce is adultery. Jesus sets a high standard because in His heart, there is an image of Christ and the Church; just as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for her, so the Church should love Christ and never be separated from Him. Therefore, Jesus speaks with such severity.

In Matthew's parallel passage (Matthew 19:10-12), the disciples say to Jesus, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." They found Jesus' teaching difficult to accept, suggesting that it might be better not to marry at all. Jesus responds, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able

to accept it, let him accept it." Jesus seems to agree with their sentiment but notes that not everyone can live without marriage; it requires a special gift from God. Some are born with this gift, while others receive it for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. In Jesus' time, there were a group of celibates known as the Essenes, most of whom were single, living devout lives, copying scriptures. They were the ones who chose to live celibate lives for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Later, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls were copied by these Essenes living by the Dead Sea.

Mark's selected record of events begins with family relationships. Family is something God highly values, and it serves as a metaphor for Christ and the Church's relationship. Although Moses allowed divorce due to human stubbornness, Jesus brings the marriage relationship back to God's original design. This shows us that anyone truly seeking the kingdom of God must seek God's best will, which is the marriage relationship established by God before the fall of man. Through this example, Mark encourages those willing to seek the kingdom of God to seek God's best will.

Let us pray together: Lord, have mercy on us, for we are often weak and prone to stumbling, unable to keep up with Your best will. But thank You, for Your abundant mercy. When we repent and confess our sins to You, You forgive us and give us a fresh start, enabling us to seek Your best will with clean hands and pure hearts again. Show us the hearts of those willing to bear the cross and follow You; help us to understand and earnestly seek Your best will. Grant me such determination, and provide companions in the church who also seek Your best will, so that our church can become a beautiful testimony to You on earth. We pray in Jesus Christ's holy name.