**Uniquely Jesus** February 12, 17

Mark 10:1-31, Part One

**"He who asks a question is a fool for five minutes; he who does not ask**

**a question remains a fool forever." *- Chinese proverb***

Why do we typically ask questions?

Here are some reasons.

1. To acquire knowledge

2. To eliminate confusion

3. To guide a conversation

4. To help a person discover answers for themselves

5. To understand another person’s view

6. To influence someone else to consider another viewpoint

7. To stimulate creativity

8. To solve a problem

9. To reach agreement or to “agree to disagree” with clarity

http://qbq.com/15-reasons-to-ask-questions/

In Mark 10:1-31, two very different questions were asked of Jesus, for two very

different reasons, by two very different inquirers.

This week we’ll study the first question: is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? (10:2) And next week, we’ll study the second question: what must a person do to inherit

eternal life? (10:17)

In addition to the answers given by Jesus, we’re interested in discovering if “who” asked the questions, made a difference in how Jesus responded to them, and “why” the particular questions asked were asked.

Everyone has questions of Jesus – before they ever decide if they’ll follow him.

For some, their initial conversations with Jesus are not sincere - as we shall see in the first question asked. But some are, as we’ll see in the second question asked.

Just as everyone has questions before they ever decide to follow Jesus, so everyone has even more questions after.

To live by faith in Jesus is not to live without questions.

**Coffee/question.**

I want to encourage you with our coffee question, to take a risk and be vulnerable with the person you talk with this morning: whether you’re “in the thinking about following Jesus,” or “you’re already following him:” **what’s the question you are currently asking Jesus about?**

I want to help us see in Mark 10, how Jesus interacted with inquirers - regardless of

their sincerity or insincerity.

Jesus’ response to them tells us much about who he is.

Jesus engages with people, who are both far from him and near.

And he would have us do the same.

**The First Question**

v.1-2a.

Some Pharisees came to him.

Typically, there was an edge to the Pharisees conversations with Jesus.

How would you describe this particular interaction?

The Pharisees came as antagonists – they came to “test” him.

They were probing for flaws; looking for faults.

So why did Jesus speak with them?

Why didn’t he ignore them or tell them to go away?

Jesus welcomes conversation with anyone – including an adversary.

A skeptic’s “loaded” questions don’t intimidate him.

Here’s something else that might surprise you.

Many of Jesus’ most committed followers were once vocal adversaries of his.

Before he wrote the Chronicles of Narnia, **C.S. Lewis** was a professed atheist.

In his biographical work, *Surprised by Joy,* he wrote of his "seemingly firm belief in the inexistence of God,” which was later shattered by a combination of reading

G.K. Chesterton and developing a friendship with JRR Tolkien.

In perhaps the most famous passage from *Surprised by Joy*, Lewis writes:

"You must picture me alone in that room at Magdalen, night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet.

That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England."

You and I need to know, Jesus didn’t turn the Pharisees away; because he never turns anyone away, even if their initial interaction with him is as an adversary.

The question with which the Pharisees hoped to ensnare Jesus was, v.2c –

*“…Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”*

There were two historical pieces that help us better appreciate “why” the

Pharisees might have asked this question.

(1) When King Herod had divorced the daughter of King Aretas, in order to marry Herodias, John the Baptist had told Herod, (Mark 6:18) that it was *“not lawful for*

 *[him] to have [his] brother’s wife.”*

Because he said this to Herod, John was imprisoned and later beheaded.

Did these Pharisees hope that their question might get Jesus to say something that

could be repeated to Herod; hopefully angering Herod enough that he would want

to imprison Jesus? Possibly.

(2) Among the religious scholars in Jesus’ day, there were two very different

perspectives regarding divorce.

> Rabbi Shammai taught that according to the Mishnah\*, divorce was allowed only

on the grounds of adultery.

*\*The Mishnah in Jesus’ day was the oral law in Judaism, as opposed to the written*

*Mosaic Law. It was believed that Moses received the Torah (the books of Genesis,*

*Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) from God and that he wrote down everything God spoke to him.*

*However, it was also believed that God gave Moses explanations and examples of how*

*to interpret the Law... that Moses did not write down. It is these unwritten explanations that were supposedly passed down from Moses to Joshua and then to the rabbis. https://www.gotquestions.org/Mishnah-midrash.html*

> Rabbi Hillel taught that divorce was allowed for any and every reason.

Did the Pharisees there on that particular day hope Jesus’ answer might be “off”

enough to antagonize one of those leading rabbis, so they could convince them to

 join the Pharisees in their plot to get rid of Jesus?Possibly.

 (3) Or might it have been that those Pharisees were probing to see if they could get

Jesus, in some way, to disagree with Moses? And if they could get Jesus to do that,

then maybe they’d have grounds to charge him with blasphemy.

We’re not certain of the exact reason(s) the Pharisees asked their question - the text is silent. But what we do know from what we’ve seen so far in Mark, is that the Pharisees were determined opponents, and if they’d come up with this question, it was because they’d carefully calculated that it had potential to cause trouble for Jesus.

v.3 – *“What did Moses command you?”*

Jesus turned their question of him… into a question… of them.

v.4 – *They said, “Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.”*

The Pharisees quoted the “exception” clause, found in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4:

*If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent*

*about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,****2****and*

*if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man,****3****and her second husband dislikes*

*her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies,****4****then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.*

In Jesus’ response to the Pharisees, he addressed the question that hadn’t been asked.

**Bono said: "We thought that we had the answers, it was the questions we had wrong."**

What was the question that needed to be asked?

**Why did Moses permit divorce?**

And, there was a question even more important!

**What did God intend marriage to be?**

Jesus answered the question, “why did Moses permit divorce?” in v.5.

*“It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law.”*

Divorce was an accommodation on God’s part because of what?

Because of hard hearts.

But it wasn’t only in Moses’ time that people had hard hearts.

In his answer, Jesus ever so subtly, pointed to the real reason behind the Pharisees questioning of him. They too had hard hearts.

Jesus pressed on, and as the Pharisees had done, he too quoted from Moses,

answering the most important question that had not been asked:

**What did God intend marriage to be?**

v.6-9 - *“But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’****7****‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife,****8****and the two will become one flesh.’So they are no longer two, but one flesh.****9****Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”*

What did God intend marriage to be?

What does the passage say?

\* God intended marriage to be between a man and a woman.

\* He intended it to result in a union, where the two become one.

\* God intended for this union to be permanent.

Everything God did when he created, was good, including his plan regarding marriage.

The problem, according to Jesus, was not in God’s creation intent or even with the Law.

The problem was **in** the human heart – it had become hard.

The Bible is clear on what happened to us.

Humanity had been created in the image of God.

But that image has been distorted by Eve and Adam’s choice, and each one of us participates in further distorting it.

Rosaria Butterfield writes: *“There are a million ways to shatter the image of God…”*

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert,” Location 2965

Today’s questions to Jesus might deal with gender identity, or who can marry, or who can live (abortion) or who can die (euthanasia), or should North America keep receiving Muslim refugees, or how do we live in a sustainable way, or….

There are so many issues today where humanity’s brokenness manifests.

But regardless of the question, and the intent of the inquirer who asks, what Jesus did then, is what he still does today – he interacts with anyone who comes to him, he will direct any discussion to the real question needing to be asked, and he will answer.

**And he uses us, his followers, in all of this.**

You further need to know, that when a person interacts with Jesus, it is common for them to experience inner conflict; to feel a strong pull, as well as a surprising resistance towards Jesus.

We learn from Jesus, when this happens, to not react, or pull back, or ignore, but to stay engaged with the person.

This inner conflict speaks to how important Jesus is.

If he didn’t matter, it would be easy for someone to dismiss him.

But something in the human heart, is drawn to him, like C.S. Lewis said, even though we fear his approach and his presence.

Rosaria Butterfield finished the statement I earlier quoted by saying:

*“There are a million ways to shatter the image of God…and one way to restore it.”*

The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert,” Location 2965

This is the amazingly good news regarding Jesus – he came to restore in humanity what has been shattered. He came to make it possible for a person to be recreated in God’s image. He came to remove our hard heart, and give us a new one.

**Implications to us:**

You need to know or remember that the Bible says much more about marriage, divorce and remarriage. Other passages: Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:32; 19:1-12; 1 Corinthians 7.

But the question asked by the Pharisees that day, was:

*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*

And Jesus only answered that question: **“What God has joined together, let no one separate.”**

It was God’s plan and will that in the covenant of marriage, a man and a woman would commit to one another, in God’s presence, promising that regardless of what might happen, they will share life together, in all of its fullness and in all of its challenges.

This is God’s ideal that we champion and teach our children.

Such a covenant provides the security for a woman and a man to give themselves completely to each other.

But there is much, much more to marriage!

Ephesians 5:31-32.

John Piper writes: *“When a couple speaks their vows and consummates their vows with sexual union, it is not man or woman or pastor or parent who is the main actor. God is.*

*God joins a husband and a wife into a one-flesh union. God does that! …*

*Marriage is patterned after Christ’s covenant commitment to his church…*

*This is what Paul is referring to when he says that marriage is a great mystery…*

**What is the mystery?**

*The highest meaning and the most ultimate purpose of marriage is to put the covenant relationship of Christ and his church on display…*

http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/staying-married-is-not-about-staying-in-love-part-1

To those who are married this is why we work hard to build our marriages; why we carefully guard our hearts; why we never give up on our spouse.

Our faithfulness to our marriage partner points to the faithfulness of Jesus, who will never forsake his church.

I know for a number of you here, your first marriage failed – your partner left you; betrayed you; broke their promise to you; a relationship that was not to be severed

was severed.

In light of the pain you experienced, or may still be experiencing, I urge you to take

that pain to Jesus, if you haven’t already done so.

You need him to heal your heart.

Yes, there is work that you must do –confession, repentance, grieving, counselling,

giving and receiving of forgiveness, prayer, filling your mind with Scripture…

These things are how you put into practice Philippians 2:13-14: *forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead.* *Press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God called you heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

There is a saying – “time heals all wounds.”

I am not convinced this saying is accurate.

With the passing of time, a person learns to cope.

But Jesus wants you to do more than cope.

He wants you to live life to the full.

God’s grace is more than sufficient to restore – your brokenness, your failure, your shortcomings, your hard heart, your selfishness, and I could go on and on....

And this is true, not just when the betrayal of a spouse pierces one’s heart.

It is true in the myriad of ways in which sin brings death into our lives.

Listen to these promises!

Psalm 55:22: Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let

the righteous (his own) fall.

Psalm 34:18: The Lord is close to the broken hearted and saves those who are crushed

in spirit.

Psalm 147:3: He heals the broken hearted and binds up their wounds.

Matthew 11:28-30: Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give

you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in

heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

After speaking with them the Pharisees walked away.

Rather than walking away, I urge you to come to Jesus.

When you do, you will find that his mercy is greater than... what has happened to you,

or what was done through you.

His is a love that never fails.

**LIFE GROUP STUDY QUESTIONS**
Mark 10:1-12

1. What might have prompted the Pharisees’ question about marriage (v. 1 provides two possible reasons.
2. In what ways does the Pharisees’ question “test” Jesus?
3. Why did Jesus ask His question in v. 3? Why didn’t He just answer without asking this question?
4. What significance do you attribute to the fact that Jesus asked what Moses commanded but the Pharisees answered with what Moses allowed?
5. Did the Pharisees answer Jesus correctly (see Deuteronomy 24:1- 4)? Why or why not?
6. What might the “some indecency” be (Deuteronomy 24:1) for which the man in the hypothetical situation divorces his wife?
7. Note all of the “if” statements in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Are these commands? Permissions? Acceptances? Something else?
8. Note all of the commands in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Why is remarrying a woman after she has been divorced and remarried “detestable in the eyes of the Lord?”
9. What would you say? In the OT divorce was (a) commanded, (b), allowed, (c) not allowed, (d) accepted as a possibility but frowned upon? (FYI: the only other places divorce is spoken of is when God uses the term in relation to His idolatrous & adulterous people (Jeremiah 3:1-9; Isaiah 50:1), priests are commanded not to marry a woman who is divorced (Leviticus 21:7, 14; 22:13; Ezra 44:22; Malachi 2:16), express commands are given not to divorce (Deuteronomy 22:19, 29), or concerning a divorced woman’s vows (Numbers 30:9).
10. In v. 5 Jesus again uses the word “commandment” to speak of what Moses wrote. To what is Jesus referring, and is His referent the same as the Pharisees?
11. Does the term “hardness of heart” refer to man’s attitude toward God or man’s attitude toward his wife? Explain.
12. What does the “but” that begins v. 6 tell you about what precedes and what follows?
13. How does Jesus use God’s words recorded by Moses in Genesis to explain God’s words recorded by Moses in Deuteronomy? How does Jesus, ultimately, answer the Pharisees’ question?
14. What significant differences do you see between Matthew’s account and Mark’s? Matthew 19:1-12.
15. For what reason does Matthew’s account include what is known as the exception clause, “except for sexual immorality?” How do we reconcile these two accounts?
16. Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-16, 25-40. Write down everything you learn about Paul’s teaching on divorce and remarriage and compare it to everything you have learned from the OT & NT passages already looked at.
17. In one paragraph, summarize the Scripture’s view of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Questions adapted from: http://cabotbible.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Mark-10v01-12DG.pdf