

The Gospel of Matthew
Week Twenty-Two
Matthew 19:1-30

Day One

1When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. 2Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. 3Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" 4"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."

v. 1 – The text is a bit unclear here, for if Jesus crossed the Jordan, He would have been in modern-day Jordan and not Judea. It is quite possible that Jesus was feeling the pressure of intense vigilance on the part of His enemies, so He felt it was time to get away with His team once again.

v. 2 – The problem with getting away was that the crowd followed Jesus. What was Jesus' response? He healed them all! While Jesus probably had His own agenda for getting away, He did not shrink back from meeting the needs of the people. I am always impressed with Jesus' flexibility and willingness to adapt His schedule to the needs of those around Him. When I was on church staff, I always tried to have my door open and receive people regardless of what I had going on. This was in some small part an effort to emulate Jesus' flexibility and openness to others. What accommodations do you make in your schedule to meet the needs of people? How flexible are you when it comes to others and their needs?

v. 3 – The Pharisees were not content to let Jesus go away from Galilee. They followed Him across the Jordan to question and test Him. They were not desirous of learning more about Jesus and what He had to say. They wanted to trap Him into some mis-statement so they could criticize and dismiss His presence and power. The evidence of all whom Jesus healed meant nothing to this hardhearted bunch of hypocrites. The Pharisees believed that they were God's watchdogs, there to protect the life and revelation that God had given Moses. Watchdogs are trained to bark and bite, and these Pharisees did their watchdog job well.

Religion tends to make one a watchdog – angry, reactive, mean-spirited, and closed-minded. Religion is actually a spirit, and that is why the behavior and attitude of religious people is almost always the same. The spirit maintains the same characteristics among all its inhabitants. I don't get along with a religious spirit very well and hope I never do.

vs. 4-6 – The Pharisees raised the issue of divorce and whether or not it was ever permissible. Jesus quoted their Scriptures back to them from Genesis to say that God has made a man and woman one in marriage. Therefore, divorce was not God’s idea or plan for those two people. Notice here that Jesus accepted the Old Testament and specifically the Genesis account as factual and authoritative. If Jesus accepted it as such, then we should as well. Those who discount or dismiss God’s word as incorrect or biased believe they know better than God. I never want to have that attitude.

Day Two

7"Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

v. 7 – The Pharisees thought they had Jesus boxed in, for Moses had permitted divorce. This exchange is fascinating, for it reveals something that happened that only God could know the reason. Let me explain in the next verse.

v. 8 – Moses had permitted divorce, that’s true, as explained in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Yet Jesus knew Moses intent for why he allowed that. If Jesus knew Moses’ intent, then that meant that Jesus was there! This is another proof that Jesus was and is God! No prophet could possibly know someone’s heart and mind who had lived centuries earlier, unless that person was God. If Jesus pretended to know Moses’ intent when He didn’t know, then He is a liar. Of course, that is not true, so the opposite must be true. He is God!

We must be careful with this particular explanation for it only explains this one situation. The question could arise, “Well, how many other instances are there where Moses or anyone else in the Bible issued a decree based on the frailty of humans?” The answer is, “None that we know of, or else they would have been pointed out to us.”

At the same time, we must see that Moses issued his decree to protect the women from being brutalized or rendered useless in a marriage situation. The cultural stigma of divorce in Israel, however, must have been almost unbearable, so this was certainly not an ideal solution from a woman’s point of view.

Notice too that Jesus takes a “high view” of Scripture. He referred back to the creation account in Genesis as evidence that divorce was not in God’s will for a man and a woman. If Jesus takes the Genesis account to be literal, should not we as well? Someone may say, “But He didn’t refer back to the account of creation itself, just to the part about man and woman being created to be one flesh.” That’s true but how could one part of that narrative be “literal” and the other be “myth”? That makes no sense, for then how can we know for sure which is myth and which is to be taken literally. It is either all myth or all literal, and since Jesus accepted it as literal, then we should as well. Does this

make sense? Don't be intimidated by those who say the Bible is just a collection of stories that accommodated the ancient mindsets with superstitions and fairy tales. Take sides with Jesus in accepting the Bible for what it is – God's Word!

v. 9 – I still think that this principle holds true, but I also know that there are a myriad of complications that must be considered in any divorce. I think some reasons are frivolous or suspect, like incompatibility or mental cruelty, but other reasons besides these could be considered possible reasons. We as a church counseled a man one time whose wife was not unfaithful but she dealt and ingested drugs to such an extent that she was strung out and eventually arrested. When she got out, she continued her ways. He had come from a drug background and her addiction always affected him in bad ways. So he eventually divorced, remarried, got custody of his children and lived happily ever after. Was this the correct thing to do? In my mind, the answer is "Yes!" Do you agree or not?

v. 10 – The disciples were so surprised at Jesus' view of the indivisibility of a married couple that they suggested perhaps it would be better if one did not marry! I can almost see the shocked looks on their faces when Jesus related this view of marriage. Let me reiterate; I am not for divorce and everything should be done to avoid it. Yet we must look at all that the Bible has to say about divorce and, having done that, I think there are certain situations when it is the right thing to do.

Day Three

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it." 13 Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. 14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 15 When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

vs 11-12 – It seems that Jesus commented on this entire teaching on marriage that He just delivered. First, Jesus was endorsing what He said the sanctity of marriage and the limitations on divorce, which shocked the disciples into saying that perhaps it would be better not to marry. And, to my surprise, it seems that Jesus was also endorsing what the disciples just said – that for those who could see and accept it, it would be better in some cases not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom.

Of course Paul picked up this celibacy theme in his letter to the Corinthians. With both Paul and Jesus, you don't sense they are exerting any pressure on anyone not to marry; they both seem to indicate that it is a special grace that enables a man or woman to make that decision.

1 Corinthians 7

v. 13 – The disciples served as ushers in this next story, not bringing the children to Jesus but trying to shoo them away. The job of a good church usher is to show the way to Jesus and not hinder it. The parents knew that Jesus had the power to bless their children and they wanted Him to touch them and pray. What a beautiful picture of how accessible Jesus was! He wasn't aloof, nor did He communicate that He was superior to everyone else, which of course He was. How accessible are you to other people? If you are a public figure, do children want to be with you? Do you pray for others and bless them through appropriate touch?

v. 14 – Jesus took charge of the situation and rebuked the rebukers. Every leader of a company or organization must take responsibility for what goes on in that entity and Jesus did not allow the “ushers” to turn the people away. He vetoed their decision and demanded that the children be brought to Him.

Lord, how often have I hindered people from coming to you? How often have I been one to usher people away from You and not to You? Make me more sensitive to others and help me to connect people with You and Your great love. Amen. Will you join me in this prayer?

v. 15 – Jesus placed His hands on the children, blessed them and then moved on His way, reminding His disciples of what He said earlier: The Kingdom belongs to such people who can emulate a child's faith and innocence. How childlike are you? Where do you need to humble yourself in order to receive God's blessing?

Day Four

16Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17"Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18"Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, " 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

v. 16 – Many people have the same concept of eternal life and God as this man had. They ask what good things they must do to gain eternal life. They see God as a celestial scorekeeper, who tallies up their good and bad deeds. If they have more good than bad, then they go to heaven. If they have more bad than good, well then they hope to at least get to purgatory, a Catholic doctrine of a middle ground between heaven and hell where one can work off his bad deeds. The man wanted to know what he could “do” to gain eternal life.

v. 17 – Jesus got a bit philosophical with the man. He was saying that in and of itself, good is not a concept that can be attributed to anything or anyone but God. So the man was looking for the perfect deed that would gain him favor with God. Yet Jesus responded that if the man kept the commandments, he would enter life. This was an interesting answer, for it seems that Jesus was saying there was a way that man could

earn eternal life. I have to believe, however, that Jesus was giving back to the man what the man already knew from Jewish law. Perhaps Jesus wanted to see what this man would do with the answer. Remember, Jesus knew hearts and He undoubtedly knew where this man was coming from when he asked the question.

You don't ever have to play games with God. He knows your heart, so you can be honest with Him. Are you honest with God, or do you tend to tell Him things you think He would want to hear?

Knows thoughts.

v. 18 – It seems like the man wanted to enter into a Jewish debate on the Law, for surely he would have known which of the Commandments were the most important. In fact, they all would have been most important if we are talking about gaining eternal life. One would not want to take a chance by breaking one of them and losing the goal of eternal life.

I have always had little tolerance for religious discussions such as the one described here. I am too predisposed to act and less inclined to talk. I can remember sitting in high school religion classes, discussing what was called “moral theology.” In that class, we discussed how much you could steal before it was stealing. I wanted to answer, “Any amount!” but I didn't want to get a bad grade. The whole scenario was lunacy and that is where many religious discussions such as this man had with Jesus end up – they are worthless.

If you want a good definition of religion, James, Jesus' brother, had one:

Religion

v. 19 – Jesus slipped in a commandment that was not one of the ten given to Moses. He told the man that he had to love his neighbor as himself. Again, I must assume that Jesus discerned something in this man that was missing, something that was holding him back from a life yielded to God that would enable him to gain the eternal life he desired. What is holding you back, if anything, from total surrender to God? Tomorrow we shall see that the answer to that question was riches for this young man.

Day Five

20“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?” 21Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” 22When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

v. 20 – It seems that on one hand the man was confident that he had done what was required, yet he had doubts if it was enough. Once again, let us remember that Matthew was writing as a Jew to Jews, and his readers would have a keen interest in the answer to this question. He kept all the Commandments; what else was there for him to do to have right standing with God?

v. 21 – Jesus gave the man a perfect answer, because God knows the heart and always gives answers that are based in reality and truth. First, Jesus told the young man to go and sell his possessions and then give the money to the poor. So it was obvious that the young man had property, for he had to sell it and then give the money away.

Jesus did not stop there, however, for He instructed the man, once he had divested himself of his possessions, to come follow Jesus! Jesus was declared that the man was missing a relationship with Jesus! Do you see the implications? Jesus was declaring that keeping the Commandments was not enough to gain heaven. If the man was going to reach his desired destination, he needed to have a relationship with Jesus.

v. 22 – The young man never got as far as considering whether or not to follow Jesus, because he had much property. He was rich and the thought of parting with his property upset him. He wanted to go to heaven, and he certainly could not take his property with him there. So Jesus showed him a way to get to heaven, so to speak, right now and he went away sad. Jesus' answer revealed that heaven was not the man's main goal; wealth was his top priority. Jesus must be one's all-in-all if eternal life is the goal.

Notice that Jesus gave three steps to eternal life: follow Him, keep the Commandments and eliminate the hold that wealth and possessions can have on one's soul. At least this was the prescription for this man. What would Jesus say to you? Is there anything that ranks above your commitment to Him or to keeping the Commandments?

v. 23 – The Jews held the rich in high esteem, for they considered them in right standing with God and, consequently had His blessings. This was one of those "I-tell-you-the-truth" statements that Jesus knew would be hard for the disciples to receive. In fact, this is the seventeenth time in Matthew's gospel up to this point that Jesus uttered that phrase. What is the Lord trying to tell you that you think is impossible and may not be able to receive? This shows that when our thinking is wrong, we cannot hear or accept the truth.

Day Six

25When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" 26Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." 27Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

v. 25 – First Jesus astonished the disciples with His comments about marriage and divorce. Now He took their breath away with what He had to say about the rich! I have been praying the last few days, "Lord, confront my wrong thinking. Show me what I'm

not seeing.” I know that I am blind and have assumptions that both limit what God can do or what I can do in and through Him. The disciples thought for sure that a rich person could be “saved,” for they all thought that most rich (except for tax gatherers) were in right standing with God. That is a hard attitude not to have, isn’t it? Somehow we believe that those who are successful must have done something right for God to bless, and those who are unsuccessful or poor must have done something wrong. That may in fact be true, but it’s not necessarily true.

This is a good question to ask Jesus. The disciples understood that He would know who could and could not be saved. This question indicates that the men following Jesus accepted that He had authoritative and accurate knowledge of the things of God. They did not debate Jesus; they asked Him. What questions are you asking God? What answers are you getting? Are there any mental or thought blocks in your life that are keeping those answers from getting through? There is only one way to find out the answer to the last question and that is to ask God.

v. 26 – The disciples were thinking about the Jewish system and culture in which they had grown up and matured. That culture was oriented toward works, which gave the impression that man could earn favor with God. Jesus was moving them toward a sense of God’s grace. The rich had not earned favor with God and could not use their riches to do so. The disciples were surprised, but Jesus was not saying that the rich could never be saved. The rich would, however, have to surrender their attachment to their faith and follow Jesus if they were to be saved. That could happen by God’ grace, but could not happen by the will of the rich person.

v. 27 – Peter asked another good question: What about us? Or perhaps he was really asking, “What about me?” Peter gave the current state of the disciples’ lives. They had left it all behind to follow Jesus! He moved the discussion from what would happen to the rich to what would happen to the disciples. I like Peter. He had enough of any philosophical discussion. He wanted to know about him and his reward.

The disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. Can you say the same? Do you own your stuff or does your stuff own you? Have you left it all – reputation, family, friends, career and position – to follow Him?

Day Seven

28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.

v. 28 – There is number 18 where Jesus said, “I tell you the truth.” Do you get the idea He was trying to tell them and us something? He was saying, “I know what I am talking

about!' This time He was responding to Peter's question concerning the disciples' reward for leaving all to follow Jesus. Jesus spoke authoritatively about what would happen at the last judgment. Only God could have the knowledge to answer the question the way Jesus did. He stated that He would sit on a glorious throne. Only kings sit on glorious thrones, so Jesus was declaring Himself to be the King of heaven! Then He declared that those who had followed Him as the original apostles would sit on their own thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel! Jesus was thus proclaiming that His followers were superior to those who followed the Old Testament Law.

Plus, if Jesus was able to promise His followers a throne, that meant He had the authority to bestow those thrones upon them. Thus He would exercise dominion in heaven and not just be an ordinary "citizen." The gospels are full of proofs that Jesus was and is the King, and many of those proof came from Jesus Himself. Jesus did not come right out and say, "I am the King!" but rather stated that He would sit on a glorious throne in heaven. Isn't that telling the audience that He was a King without saying it in direct terms?

v. 29 – Jesus did not stop by defining the rewards for Peter and the men. Jesus said that anyone following Him would be rewarded accordingly. Jesus doesn't just reward leaders; He rewards followers, too! Jesus acknowledged that some would have to break with family inheritance and even family relationships to follow Him. That is an unfortunate reality, for some family may not be thrilled when another family member decides to follow Jesus. When that happens, Jesus will reward them! The account in Mark is more specific

mark 10

What have you had to surrender to follow Him? Whatever it is, know that He realizes what you have given up and He will reward you for it!

v. 30 – This famous phrase indicates is in response to Peter's question about the disciple's reward. It may seem that followers of Jesus aren't being "compensated," but they will be eventually. It may not happen until the final judgment, but it will indeed happen. I have always said that God has a big book and sharp pencil and He writes down everything that anyone who knows Him does on His behalf. He never forgets and will reward us, if not in this life, then in the life to come. That is why Jesus had urged His followers to store up treasure in heaven, for God is faithful to reward His people. That is why Jesus had urged the young man to sell His possessions and give to the poor, so that he would have a heavenly reward that he could anticipate receiving.

Store up treasure

What treasures are you storing in heaven? What price have you paid for the gospel of the Kingdom? Whatever it is, be reminded today that God will reward you abundantly in His way and in His time, which may be in the age to come.