

Lesson #20- Matthew Chapter 19 Questions for Discussion (With Help for Teachers):

1. When the Pharisees asked Jesus to take a legal position on divorce, His answer was probably nothing like they expected. What do you see as the major teachings of Jesus from this text about marriage and divorce?

Help for Teachers:

His answer was such that it condemned the common practice of the day and continues to condemn the way our society currently views marriage.

Jesus first directs their attention to the book of beginnings, Genesis. Jesus sites Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, reminding the Pharisees that God made man and woman and stated that in marriage, the two become one flesh. Jesus then adds that it is not ok to separate what God has put together.

The only place in the law of Moses (the law that God delivered to Moses) that divorce is granted (note that even here it is not commanded) is in the case of a man finding that his wife is sexually unclean (Deut. 24). The Pharisees tried to stretch this to conform to the common practice in Israel of divorce “for every cause”. Jesus made it clear here that Moses “suffered it” (divorce for any reason) because of the hardness of their hearts. “Suffering”, according to Meriam-Webster dictionary, is synonymous with “BEAR, SUFFER, ENDURE, ABIDE, TOLERATE, STAND mean to put up with something trying or painful”. Obviously, Moses did not condone or approve of divorce, he rather chose to ignore it and he put up with it because the hardness of the people’s heart was such that the issue was insurmountable for him (notice that *Moses* suffered it, not God).

Jesus then makes it clear in verse 9 that no matter what men teach or tolerate, divorce for any reason other than the exception given in the law (sexual unfaithfulness) does not liberate one to marry another. If remarriage occurs in this case, it is called adultery and is a sin. Not only is the one remarried guilty, so is the one that marries a divorced wife.

Even the disciples were shocked by Jesus’ answer, probably because the practice of divorce was so rampant that it had become a societal norm; the religious leaders had wrongly “interpreted” what God’s law said to fit the practice they wished to continue. The disciples thought it so radical to deny the escape hatch of divorce that they asked, “Is it better then to just not get married? (paraphrase)” Jesus’ answer is that only a few men are gifted with the ability to not marry and yet stay out of the trap of sexual immorality. Those that can are truly blessed because they are free to devote all their attention to the worship and service of God.

This is not to be confused with the fact that God made man with the need for a helpmeet and when done His way, marriage is wholesome and God-honoring, and most of us need it.

2. How did Jesus respond to the disciple's attitude toward little children?

Help for Teachers:

First, we see the disciple's mindset. They rebuked those that brought the little children to be blessed by Jesus. It seems they thought it an imposition or beneath the scope of Jesus' ministry. They were busy with healing and casting out demons and restoring sight, and there is no indication that these children brought here to Jesus had any physical infirmity whatsoever. However, Jesus took a quite different position.

- He commanded that the request be granted. Those that brought the little children, likely the parents or guardians, wished that Jesus would lay His hands on them and pray for them. Jesus saw this as a request He wanted to answer and for which He would make time.
- Jesus is greatly honored when we most desire Him and come to Him because we believe (faith) that He is what we need. In the same way, it is very honoring to Christ when we bring others to Him for the blessings that only He can supply.
- Parents are commanded to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; is there any way to do that without bringing them to Jesus? Should we not be bringing our children to Jesus through the teaching of the Scriptures, the way they see us live, our active involvement in church, and any other way we possibly can?
- Though these children brought to Jesus have no reported disease or condition, they are brought. It's good to come and to bring our children to Jesus for blessing, even when there is no crisis, before we are driven to Him by circumstances that force us to see our need, though the need is already there.
- "...: for of such are the kingdom of heaven". The saints are referred to as children and sons and daughters throughout Scripture for a reason. A response of faith, such as a child dependent on a parent possesses, having no hope in anything else, is the only response to the gospel call that will bring salvation.

3. Verses 16-26 contain the famous story of the rich young ruler. What important lessons do you see in this narrative?

Help for Teachers:

Jesus is good. The first engagement between Jesus and this young man is quite centered on the use of the word “good”. The young ruler’s opening remark involves a salutation, “Good Master”, followed by a question, what “good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?”

So, here is the first contradiction that Jesus addresses, and He does so directly. This man did not believe that Jesus was God. Jesus points out that only God is good, the obvious inference being that were it the case that Jesus was only a man and not Emanuel, “God with us”, then the title, “Good Master” was inappropriate.

Next, Jesus, responding to the rich young ruler’s assumption that he might gain eternal life by his own goodness, gives him the precise answer that the law requires, keep the commandments contained therein. The follow up question from the young man is, “which?” Jesus’ answer only goes as far as to address the law’s requirements pertaining to how we are to treat others; it doesn’t even enter the commandments concerning our relationship with God.

Already the man is defeated. It would seem very unlikely that anyone presented with that list would be able, in good conscience, to claim that they had at no time violated any of those commandments. It is hard to imagine that as he stood before Jesus his mind didn’t betray his arrogant attitude and secretly recall events he would like to forget. Nevertheless, this young man makes the bold assertion that he has never broken one, from his childhood to the present day.

Without rebutting the lie the rich young ruler offered, Jesus in one short sentence brings condemnation and grace to the table.

Condemnation: The last law requirement Jesus had given was “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Lev 19:18). Had this young and rich man been obedient to that commandment, he would have had no hesitation in following Jesus’ instructions to sell all he had and give it to the poor. His refusal evidenced his guilt. The obvious implication being that he would not have eternal life (as this young man phrased it). But notice that Jesus phrased it differently, “enter into life”. Why the difference? Note: “And you hath he quickened, who **were dead in trespasses and sins;**” (Eph 2:1), “Even when we were **dead in sins,** hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)” (Eph 2:5), “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is **condemned already,** because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:18). This man asked for commandments and received what he requested, but

Paul writes, “For I was alive without the law once: but **when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.**” (Rom 7:9).

Grace: “Follow me”. It’s evident that we cannot keep the law, not even the portion that pertains to our conduct with each other, and certainly not the portion regarding our allegiance to God, which Jesus had not even thus far mentioned. I think it was intentional that Jesus had not brought up the commandments concerning God. By this time the young man was defeated and aware of his condition, as is evidenced by his sorrow in the following verse (22). But in immeasurable grace, Jesus doesn’t demand that this person do the impossible and perform to the standard- Jesus was doing that for him. Jesus didn’t demand that he pay the penalty for all the past sins of his life; I’m sure those memories were now flooding through this man’s mind- Jesus was on a mission to do that in his stead. Jesus simply offers that if you will just throw down that heavy and impossible load of self-reliance you are carrying and trust in me, you can begin to have true life, and you can have it more abundantly, in fact, eternally. “Follow me”. What a wonderful way for a man to find reconciliation with God! Not by keeping the law of God, which our sinful nature makes a hopeless proposition, but by God Himself keeping the law for us and paying the penalty for our past transgressions by His own pain and death. Sadly, the rich young ruler rejected Jesus’ offer of grace and life for the deception of self-righteousness and what the world sees as treasure.

The disciples witnessed this encounter, and as the rich young man walked away Jesus turned to them and said, “Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” The disciple’s reaction was that of amazement and they asked, “Who then can be saved?”

Some have reported that there was a gate in Jerusalem called the needle gate. It was small and should a camel laden with supplies (riches) be brought in through the gate, it would have required that the camel be stripped of its burden. This seems unlikely because first, there is no evidence of such a gate existing (from what I could find). Secondly, why would a camel driver use such a gate when there were ample larger gates? And third, it seems there would be no call for amazement on the part of the disciples if the entering of the city through such a gate was merely an issue of unpacking the camel. This metaphoric phrase was probably commonly used in Jewish culture to describe something that sounded hopelessly impossible. The Persians had a similar saying but replaced “camel” (Israel’s largest animal) with “elephant”. Finally, it is much more in keeping with Jesus’ point that what is beyond impossible for man (entering the kingdom of heaven) is made possible by the gift of God the Father, the work of Jesus Christ the Son, and the reproving and transforming work of the Holy Spirit.

4. Verses 27-30. After witnessing Jesus' interaction with this rich young man, Peter expresses a concern. What is his question and what answer does he receive from Jesus?

Help for Teachers:

Peter states that he and the disciples had done what Jesus told the rich young ruler to do, they had left what earthly treasures they had and followed Jesus. He now wants to know, "what shall we have therefore?"

Jesus begins with "verily". Isn't it wonderful to know that what we look forward to by faith is an assured reality. Jesus declares with this one word that it is true, it will be.

All those that follow Him are not just given the status of servant, but are adopted into the family, Jesus is our Brother, and we are joint-heirs with Him who is the heir of all things! We are promised that we will share in His glory. Things forsaken won't compare with the blessings received, plus eternal life (Heb 2:10-12, Phil 3:8, Rom 8:17-18)!

The last verse of the chapter reads, "But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first." In the King's upside-down (by man's thinking) kingdom, the wisdom of man becomes foolishness. Temporal riches that seem so important to the carnally minded leave the owner that trusts therein destitute and last. The forsaking of what man considers treasure and the embracing of Jesus as the great treasure makes Lazarus "verily" the rich man.