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The Gospel According to Matthew

Rich People and the Kingdom of Heaven

October 13, 2019

Sermon Text: Matt 19:13-30

Scripture Reading: Matt 19:13-30

Before we move on to the account of the rich young ruler asking Jesus about the kingdom, we need to comment on this statement of Jesus that seems rather odd to us:

Mat 19:9-12 And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.” (10) The disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” (11) But he said to them, “Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is

given. (12) For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.”

I suppose this is difficult for us to sort out because we don't know anything about this business of “eunuchs.” There is one in the book of Acts:

Act 8:26-27 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. (27) And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship

This no doubt is an example of “a eunuch who has been made a eunuch by men.”

This statement by Jesus is in response to the question His disciples put to him in the form of this statement: *If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.*” Jesus had said that the “any cause” divorce of their day that was so popular was sinful and resulted in adultery. The disciples seemed shocked at this. We are led to wonder – just what did these people think of marriage? “If we have to remain married our whole life, we aren’t sure we want any part of it.”

Jesus found it necessary to take them back to the basics because they had wandered soooo far from God’s design:

Mat 19:4-6 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, (5) and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? (6) So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

This should warn us that if we are not careful, the false teachings (even in churches) about marriage and divorce today can become so ingrained in us that the truth shocks us when we hear it. And is this not the case now? What kinds of ideas to people have, even

professing Christians, about marriage and divorce that are absolutely contrary to God’s Word? We must heed the Lord’s command:

Rom 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Let me allow William Hendricksen to explain what Jesus meant in vss 11-12

Jesus is about to mention three situations, each of which applies to a special group. The three have in common: abstinence from the relationships commonly associated with the married state. Truly, what Jesus has said about life within the married state is not applicable to all.

The first group consists of those who are eunuchs because of a congenital defect. The second refers to physically castrated men. This deplorable condition was brought upon them by other men (see 2 Kings 20:18; Esther 2:14). Such eunuchs frequently were chosen to serve as keepers of the harem. That at times they attained to important positions is clear from Acts 8:26-39.

The third class can also be called “eunuchs” though the word is now used in a figurative sense. These men are not impotent. They could marry and fulfill all of their responsibilities in that state, if they so desired.

Their abstinence from marriage is of a purely voluntary character. They are eunuchs or celibates “in the interest” of the kingdom of heaven. Being fully aware that, in the course of spreading the gospel, situations will develop that are marked by tremendous hardship and sore distress, but nevertheless being filled with eagerness to spread the message of salvation far and wide, these men, of their own accord – not because of any divine or human order – decide not to marry. See 1 Cor 7 –

1Co 7:26-38 I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is. (27) Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. (28) But if you do marry, you have not sinned, and if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. (29) This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, (30) and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and

those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, (31) and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away. (32) I want you to be free from anxieties. The unmarried man is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to please the Lord. (33) But the married man is anxious about worldly things, how to please his wife, (34) and his interests are divided. And the unmarried or betrothed woman is anxious about the things of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit. But the married woman is anxious about worldly things, how to please her husband. (35) I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (36) If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry—it is no sin. (37) But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. (38) So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.

That is their privilege. They are not thereby raised to a higher degree of holiness, as if in the eyes of God the state of celibacy as such would give them extra credit. Such a doctrine is entirely foreign to Scripture, which everywhere exalts the married state, and even pictures it as a symbol of the beautiful love relationship between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride. But if Paul wishes to remain unmarried, let him do so. If Peter prefers to take his wife along in his travels (see 1 Cor 9:5), he too, has a right to do this.

This is vital to understand clearly:

- It exposes the false doctrine and practice of Rome's enforced celibacy rule for priests.
- It shows us that the church (or anyone else) has the authority to dictate whether a person marries or not
- It shows us that that any teaching that claims every Christian is required to marry is a false teaching
- It challenges anyone who determines to remain unmarried to examine their motives for not marrying. The fundamental reason Jesus gives here and which Paul sets forth in 1 Cor 7 is to be able to serve the Lord, especially in times of distress and

persecution, without so much of a burden of care.

I can certainly tell you this, and there are hundreds of people who follow our blogs that would give a hearty "Amen" to this: *It is better not to marry than to marry a wicked person, a hypocrite, a false Christian.* In our day when evil is abounding more and more and more, and when the visible church is so filled with wolves in wool, everyone needs to be very, very cautious. Marrying the wrong person will not only give you untold misery, it will largely hinder your ability to do the things the Lord has for you to do.

And a note for all of us who are married: *We need to take care about intentionally or even unintentionally pressuring single people into getting married and acting as if there were no place in Christ's purpose and kingdom for unmarried people AND this includes divorced people too!* The decision to divorce a wicked spouse also comes under this heading. It is not in the church's realm of authority to demand having the final say in such a decision.

Permit the Children to Come

Mat 19:13-15 Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, (14) but Jesus

said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” (15) And he laid his hands on them and went away.

The disciples were quite slow to learn, just as we can be sometimes. Here they are once again hindering the children from coming to Jesus. It isn't the first time that Jesus had addressed this subject:

Mat 18:1-6 At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (2) And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them (3) and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (4) Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (5) “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, (6) but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

We have a parallel to this account in Luke and Mark:

Luk 18:15-17 Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it,

they rebuked them. (16) But Jesus called them to him, saying, “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. (17) Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Mar 10:13-16 And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. (14) But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. (15) **Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.**” (16) And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

We see several lessons here:

- We must reject the world's notion of greatness. The greatest in Christ's kingdom is the one who is least.
- Christ receives everyone who comes to Him in faith. Here were these parents confessing their faith in Him by bringing their children to Him for His blessing. Such people are never to be sent away.
- Christ's salvation and kingdom must be received entirely by

grace. It cannot be entered by works anymore than an infant can do some work to merit salvation.

- Parents can and should pray that the Lord would bless their children and bring them to saving faith. *Parents do not need some intermediary in the church or some church sacrament to ask the Lord to bless their children. These parents came straight to Jesus and He blessed them.*

Now, in stark contrast to this teaching, we have the opposite attitude presented to us next. Listen to it once more:

The Rich Young Man

Mat 19:16-30 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (17) And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

(18) He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, (19) Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (20) The young man said to him, “All these I

have kept. What do I still lack?”

(21) Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (22) When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

(23) And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

(25) When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” (26) But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

(27) Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (28) Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit 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 lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. **(30) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.**

We will only have time today to introduce this passage and will plan to continue with it next time. First of all, carefully note this:

Jesus deals with this man according to the Law.

Look at it again:

Mat 19:16-17 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what **good deed** must I do to have eternal life?" (17) And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."

Why would Jesus tell someone to be saved by keeping the commandments? It is because this man's religion was the Old Covenant. He believed that he could be set right with God by his own doings.

His question is interesting, isn't it? I mean, if he believed that he had kept all the commandments of the Law, then why is he asking Jesus what else he must do? *"What good deed must I*

do...". This is the mentality of all the "religious" who reject the gospel of Christ.

He has a skewed view of what God requires and this is evident in his use of the simple adjective, "good." He wants to do a "good" thing and both Mark and Luke tell us that he called Jesus "Good Teacher." Matthew is emphasizing the fact that he used the term "good deed," and Jesus addressed both uses in His answer:

Mar 10:17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "**Good Teacher**, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

When a person is working under the Law to merit justification before God, they necessarily believe that they possess some "good" in themselves and that there are "good" people in this world and that God accepts this "goodness." There is no place in their system for the truth Jesus just taught – unless one becomes as a little child, he cannot enter the kingdom.

Jesus initially then addresses him according to the man's own religion. The Law. Want to enter the kingdom? Then keep the commandments.

The reason God gave the Law at Mt. Sinai was *never* for the purpose of salvation. The Law was completely and entirely a covenant and ministry of *condemnation and curse*. There was no grace in it. None.

Gal 3:10-12 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

(11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

(12) But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”

This is the answer everyone will receive from Christ as long as they insist that they have kept the Law and therefore merit salvation on that basis.

Now, Jesus’ motive for dealing with him as under the Law was this: He loved this young man. You see it in Mark:

Mar 10:21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

The purpose of the Law is to show sinners their desperate need of Christ and their inability to be “good.” But this man had not seen it. He pursued a righteousness of his own making.

We are surrounded by this very thing in our day. Many churches teach it, if not in word then certainly by implication. Let me give you an illustration, and then we will close.

Consider the memorial service given for a “good” man, even for a “good” man who professed to be a Christian – which he may have been. Is it not true that the emphasis in such services most often is NOT upon Christ’s righteousness by which we are saved through grace alone, but upon the “good” deeds of this “good” man who has departed this life?

“Yes, what a fine, good man he was. Think of all the good things he did. Surely he is in heaven right now and the Lord is very pleased with him.”

When I die, the ONLY reason I will be with the Lord and pleasing in His sight is *because of the goodness found only in Christ, whose righteousness was imputed to me by faith alone, by grace alone, and it should be to Him that all our praise and glory is given.*