

MATTHEW: THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

LESSON 46 – THE LAWS IN THE KINGDOM – MATTHEW 19:1-30

Jesus entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. The crowds followed him. He healed them. The Pharisees tested Jesus with questions about divorce. Jesus rebuked the disciples for holding Jesus back from being blessed. This chapter then finishes with a rich young man wondering what he must do to have eternal life. The opposition that Jesus faces gives him the opportunity to show the triumph of grace.

Matthew 19:3-12 – Marriage and divorce

The opposition to Jesus becomes more intense and focused. The different positions of Jesus and the Jewish leaders become irreconcilable. Pharisees are often found testing or opposing Jesus.

1. What is the test? What do the Pharisees hope to accomplish?
2. There were two opposing camps, the school of Hillel and the school of Shammai. They both permitted divorce, of the woman by the man. Deuteronomy 24:1 refers to some “indecency in her.” These two camps disagreed on what “indecent” might include. Shammai and his followers understood gross indecency, but not necessarily adultery. Hillel extended the meaning beyond sin to all kinds of real or imagined offenses. Jesus agrees with neither Shammai nor Hillel. What basis does Jesus provide for divorce?
3. In Matthew 5:31-32 divorce was set in a discourse that gives the norms of the kingdom and the sanctity of marriage. Matthew 19 is set in the context of when divorces are allowed. Jesus establishes marriage in the origins of creation and the purposes of God. The “one flesh” in every marriage between a man and a woman is a reenactment of the very structure of humanity. What kind of union/relationship is described in Genesis 1:26-27?
4. Since the structure of creation includes the union of husband and wife, then divorce is described as unnatural. Jesus teaches in unity with Genesis, “What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Jesus establishes the dominant perspective, but the Pharisees question how this position can be understood in the context of Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 24:1-14. Jesus focuses on the sanctity of marriage by focusing on what God has designed. For the Pharisees he is presenting the argument “the more original the mightier.” What is the original expectation for marriage?

It is impossible to go further back than creation, so Jesus shows Moses' words an accommodation to a sinful world and not an original design. Jesus' words show that Moses had provided a concession reflective of the hardness of men's hearts. Marriage is not looked at only from a perspective of what may or may not be done but on what God has designed. Moses allowed divorce because the sin that leads to the divorce can be so vile it may be preferred to the continued "indecency." Divorce is not a neutral option but an evidence of sin and hardness of hearts. The disciples follow-up Jesus' teaching with wonderment that anyone would marry. Jesus recognizes that not everyone can receive this saying about the permanence of marriage. Jesus commends celibacy because of the kingdom but not for the sake of attaining the kingdom. Celibacy is not identified as intrinsically more holy.

In verse 12 Jesus uses the word eunuch in three senses. A) men born infertile B) castrated males, and C) men who renounce marriage for the sake of the kingdom, to be able to devote all their time and energy to service of God. This third kind would not necessarily be physically eunuch's but would be people set aside for a different purpose.

5. What makes marriage difficult?

Matthew 19:13-15

6. People would bring children to rabbis and elders to be blessed (Genesis 48:14; Numbers 27:18; Acts 6:6; 13:3). The disciples rebuked the people bringing the children. Why would the disciples rebuke the people?
7. This section of rebuke by the disciples becomes more surprising when we consider the preceding pericope spoke honorably about family. How is family honored in the previous section?
8. Look again at Matthew 18;1-9. How are children a pattern for humility and how we are to receive the kingdom?
9. Jesus receives the children because they are an excellent object lesson in the kind of humility and faith he finds acceptable. What is noteworthy about the faith of children?

Matthew 19:16-30 – Wealth and the Kingdom

A rich young man comes to Jesus seeking wisdom how to gain eternal life.

10. How does the young man's question show that he is far from the humble faith that Jesus has been describing?

11. In the absolute sense of goodness, how do the following passages show that only God is good? (Psalm 106:1; 118:1, 29; 1 Chronicles 16:34; 2 Chronicles 5:13)

12. Justification before God is according to what God's will determines what is good and not our own works. The man shows that he wants something beyond God's will and that he fails to understand the absoluteness of God's goodness. How does Jesus show the difference between God and man?

13. Jesus tells the young man, "come, follow me." The man could not leave behind his possessions. Matthew 19:17-19 shows the focus must be on God's will and looking forward to the coming Messiah. What reward is promised to those who humbly set aside this world's gains for trusting in the will of God? (29-30)