

Matthew 19:13 – 30

^{19:13} Then some children were brought to him so that he might lay his hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, ‘Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ ¹⁵ After laying his hands on them, he departed from there. ¹⁶ And someone came to him and said, ‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?’ ¹⁷ And he said to him, ‘Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ ¹⁸ Then he said to him, ‘Which ones?’ And Jesus said, ‘You shall not commit 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 things I have kept; what am I still lacking?’ ²¹ Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’ ²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. ²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I say to 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.’ ²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, ‘Then who can be saved?’ ²⁶ And looking at them Jesus said to them, ‘With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’ ²⁷ Then Peter said to him, ‘Behold, we have left everything and followed you; what then will there be for us?’ ²⁸ And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon 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 farms for my name’s sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Historical and Cultural Background

- This section (Mt. 19:1 – 26:1) has more high intensity conflicts and disputes because of location and timing. Jesus is going to the capital, Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders are reacting in stronger ways. And Jesus is making especially clear how he is different – theologically, ethically, and socially – from them.
- Recall in Mt. 19:3 – 12, Jesus said he is returning people to God’s original creation order for marriage. What about economics? Here is a comparison between the Law of Moses and the Law of Christ on economic relationships:

| Law of Moses | Law of Christ |
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| Promised Land (Gen. 15:18 – 21; 17:8; Lev. 25; Dt. 11) | Forsake the Promised Land (Mt. 6:19 – 34) |
| Family land inheritance (Lev. 25; Num. 34; 36) | Disinheritance (Mt. 19:13 – 30; Lk. 12:13 – 34; 14:25 – 35; 16:1 – 13) |
| Forgive debts after 7 years, or every 49 or 50 years on the fixed calendar (Dt. 15:1 – 5; Lev. 25:10 – 18, 23 – 28), whichever comes sooner | Forgive debts all the time, frequently (Mt. 5:42; 6:14 – 15; Mt. 18:19 – 35; Lk. 11:4), not just every 7 years or on the jubilee year |
| Lend without interest (Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:35 – 38; Dt. 23:19; Ps. 15:1 – 5; Pr. 28:7 – 9; 22:7; Ezk. 18:8 – 9; 22:12; Neh. 5:1 – 15) | Lend without interest, without expecting any return (Mt. 5:42; Lk. 6:34 – 36) |
| Partial restoration of creation order, though Israel still has ‘hardness of heart’ (Lev. 25; Mt. 19:3 – 12, 13 – 30) | Restoration of creation order; Jesus reverses ‘hardness of heart’ (Mt. 15:18 – 20; 19:3 – 12, 13 – 30) |

Questions

1. What was your family's attitude towards wealth and money? From what you can tell from the passage, what is Jesus' attitude towards wealth and money? (Don't go into great depth in the passage yet. This discussion is to build up some emotional momentum to look for the most important things in this passage)
2. What can you tell about how this Jewish young man's family viewed wealth and money? Include what you know about Jewish life and culture from the time of Jesus.
 - a. He believes that the land (his property) is God's gift to Israel, but also his right.
 - b. He believes that wealth is his reward for good behavior. Israel's disobedience of the Law led God to exile them (Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome) in the past.
3. (optional) What have you heard said about this passage? (Get all the excuses out there. Typically, this passage is taken as a contrast between legalism and grace, or about simply 'being willing' to give money away, or other individual issues). Say explicitly that most of those interpretations have to do with individualistic issues.
4. The ruler:
 - a. Who is this 'someone'? A young man (v.20 and v.22) who 'owned much property' (v.22). Luke identifies him as a ruler (Lk.18:18), presumably of a synagogue. Mark as simply a 'man' who 'owned much property' (Mk.10:17, 22).
 - b. Who does he think Jesus is? How do you think that factors into his ability to accept Jesus' teaching and call?
 - c. Why do you think he asks about eternal life? What kind of internal need is he aware of? Why is money not enough? If you could place yourself into his shoes, why is it that he comes to Jesus?
 - d. Is he like a child?
 - i. How is he not a child? Notice he regards himself as not being young any more. Perhaps he doesn't want to be a child because he has stockpiled all this moral currency by obeying the Law all his life.
 - ii. Why do you think Jesus praises 'children'? Because they're dependent, teachable, maybe don't cling to something as theirs, etc. But maybe it's not because of any general characteristic of children but simply that when we enter a family, we must enter as children. Jesus wants the man to enter the *kingdom family*.
 - e. Do you think Jesus is hard on him? What is the issue Jesus is aiming at? Options:
 - i. Unique Idolatry: NO. The rich man is unique, therefore Jesus' request of him is unique and doesn't pertain to us. Here's reasons why this theory doesn't explain the text:
 1. His problem with materialism is not just his problem. This is evident because Peter and the disciples in v.28 also say that they had given away all they had. Thus, the rich ruler is typical. Jesus asks all his disciples to give up all they have. See Luke 14:33.
 2. He is 'every Jew' because Matthew strips out things that would make other Jews disassociate themselves from him. Matthew does not identify the young man as a 'ruler' of the synagogue, as Luke does. Matthew also does not give any suggestion about the
 - ii. Legalism and Pride: NO. Here's reasons why this theory doesn't explain the text:
 1. We think that the rich ruler was being legalistic; and Jesus was bringing him to the end of himself by asking him to do something that was and is impossible. But Jesus does not say, 'Uh, no, you didn't really live up to the Law,' or, 'But you did it with prideful motives – gotcha!' Jesus might have been thinking it, but he doesn't debate that with the guy.
 2. The issue, rather, is that the young man believed that he should continue to inherit and own his ancestral land. Jesus, on the other hand, is seeking to free Israel from its ancestral land and send his disciples out into the world.
 - iii. Jesus' Mission: YES. What's the problem with trying to hold onto wealth and the Mosaic Law? It's incompatible with Jesus' agenda because it is from Israel's old life. Mosaic Israel (a stationary community tied to its land) needs to transition to Messianic Israel (a mobile community not tied to financial security) and become new. WE KNOW where Jesus is headed with his community, and he wants this man to be a part of it. But wealth gets in his way.

1. Notice that the ‘eye of the needle’ passage presupposes that the kingdom of God requires radical generosity and mission. We are invited into it.
 - a. Some have claimed that the ‘eye of a needle’ was a gate in Jerusalem, which opened after the main gate was closed at night. Some have added that a camel could only pass through this smaller gate if it was stooped and had its baggage removed. This story has been put forth since at least the 15th century, and possibly as far back as the 9th century. However, there is no evidence for the existence of such a gate.¹
 - iv. Mistaken Attitude: YES. What’s the problem with any spiritual framework that tries to tie together wealth and good behavior? It’s completely antithetical to Jesus’ life and mission. Wealth is to be given to the poor and towards the advancement of the kingdom. Jesus abolishes that connection.
- f. Why might Peter remind Jesus in v.27 that the disciples have left homes and followed Jesus? He wants to be validated? He wants to be affirmed as being in God’s will? He is childlike, and just wants to have Jesus give his okay.
- g. What is Jesus’ response to Peter?
 - i. That there is a reward of sorts. ‘And Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, that you who have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’ I take this to mean that the apostles will be the first who are co-heirs with Christ, seated with him and sharing his teaching authority (Eph.1:20 – 23; 2:4 – 6). Jesus calls this the ‘regeneration’ because this is the new ‘genesis’: Jesus is the new Adam and he is renewing God’s creation order; and the disciples share in that by their connection with him. They ‘judge’ the twelve tribes not in a Western sense of judging people’s guilt or innocence, but by serving as the measure of judgment, like how the cornerstone of a building is the measure by which other stones are cut (and the apostles are called the foundation of the church as a ‘new temple’ in Eph.2:20) or a plumb-line (Amos 7:7 – 9; Zechariah 4:10). The Jewish disciples serve as the measure of judgment against which all Israel will be measured. They will be making Israel right with God. In that sense, they will be on thrones judging the twelve tribes.
 - ii. That you can’t outgive God. You are entering a new community where people will be an extended family to you, and (hopefully) help you. And you will inherit much more in the next age.
 1. What is so surprising about v.29? Why doesn’t Jesus just say, ‘I tell you the truth, if you’ve given up all that, you’ve got me!’ We do have him, but we also have ‘house and wife and brothers and parents and children.’ In other words, we inherit a new family. We become a part of a new community.
 - iii. This challenge is not so much about individualistic struggles with materialism as it is a challenge to join a new community, Jesus’ community. And Jesus wants his community to be a radical one. That’s why he demands everything of this man. It’s just like Luke 14:33, where Jesus says, ‘No one can be my disciple who does not give up all his (or her) possessions.’ The reason is because Jesus calls us into a new community, where wealth is meant to be shared and be used strategically.
 - iv. Let this point sink in, because it’s not how we are used to thinking about the Law and Jesus. ‘In Israel, what was appropriate until then was appropriate until then. God had not yet sent Jesus to perfect a new human heart and then offer it to everyone. Now with Jesus, everything changes.’

¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), p.493. Also, Cyril of Alexandria suggested that ‘camel’ is a Greek misprint; that kamêlos (camel) was a misprint of kamilos, meaning ‘rope’ or ‘cable.’ But there is little or no Greek manuscript support for that, and the suggestion goes against the standard principle of textual criticism that errors tend to happen towards the easier reading, not against it. (<http://www.biblicalhebrew.com/nt/camelneedle.htm>; retrieved February 6, 2013)

- v. How do you join a new family? As a child. Jesus wants this young man to join his kingdom family as a child in it. That's why this section follows right after the story about the children!
 - 1. Why does Jesus point to children in the beginning? Because he is getting at our need to be 'born again' as a child into a new family, God's family, as he says in John 3.
 - 2. Because it sets up a contrast to this young man. Ironically, the man is young. Yet he is old enough to not want to give up the currency he has built up in the Mosaic Law (all this I have done) and the Promised Land (he had many possessions). Children, by contrast, represent starting over in a new family.
 - 3. Other psychological characteristics of children: It's debatable whether we should interpret children as having characteristics of being able to share, being unselfish, etc. It is not the psychology of children that Jesus highlights, but the physical age and social place of children: they are the youngest members of the family. The reason why the disciples were upset that parents were bringing their children to Jesus was because children were the lowest status people around. They thought Jesus should not waste his time. Jesus sees children, however, as the newest members of the family. So in Mt.18:1ff. and here, he points to children as physical representations of new Christians.
- vi. We become part of the life of the Triune God. That is what 'eternal life' (v.17, 29) means. The Father and the Son in the Spirit are always giving to each other, infinitely generous, endlessly sharing and hospitable. We are drawn into that life through Jesus, because he has drawn his human nature into the life of God, and invites us to be joined to him by the Spirit. That means that God's ethic of generosity and sacrifice and hospitality are present before us, and we are drawn into it. We do not 'possess' or 'obtain' life, as the rich young man implied (v.16). We 'enter into life' as Jesus said. We receive it, too, as a gift from God.

5. Applications:

- a. How can you more deeply love financial sacrifice? It is one of the distinguishing marks of Christians in contrast to the world.
- b. What one thing can you not buy in the coming days and weeks that you normally would? How can you give that money to the poor?
- c. The issue is not just 'being willing to give,' but 'being **eager** to give, being **glad** to give.' You should be disappointed if you don't get a chance to give. How can you cultivate more of this attitude?
- d. If you feel the need to be financially secure and stable, pray that God would work in you to remove that.
- e. Consider joining Global Poverty Impact/Lazarus at the Gate (www.lazarusatthegate.org) to practice financial transparency with other Christians, simplify your lifestyle, and give more towards the global poor.
- f. Consider living by the living wage (see also the Lazarus website under 'After Lazarus') and giving away the rest of your money to the poor.

Conflict and Controversy in Matthew 19 – 25

| 19:1 – 12 | 19:13 – 30 | 20:1 – 16 | 20:17 – 28 | 21:1 – 9 | 21:10 – 46 | 22:1ff. |
|---|---|--|--|---|---|--------------------------------|
| Region of Judea beyond the Jordan (19:1) | | | About to go up to Jerusalem (20:17) | Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives (21:1) | Jerusalem (21:10) | Jerusalem |
| Jesus debates marriage with the Pharisees | Jesus calls the young man to give up all his wealth to the poor | Jesus tells the parable of the laborers' payment | Jesus tells James and John they may not sit at his right and left hand | Jesus gets donkeys to ride into Jerusalem | Jesus debates with the leaders | Jesus debates with the leaders |
| Jesus establishes sex and marriage from God's creation ideal, | Jesus establishes universal giving, breaks from the Mosaic land | Length of time with Jesus is not a privilege | Disciples must serve, not seek power | | Jesus argues about the role of the Temple | Jesus debates about the Law |

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| not the Mosaic commands | arrangement | | | | | |
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