

Matthew

Chapter 19

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MATTHEW CHAPTER 19

Jesus will now leave the Galilee on His way to Jerusalem and His destiny. Along the way He teaches about divorce, and the welcomes children to His kingdom. Jesus then meets a rich young ruler who wants to have eternal life. This brings Jesus into teaching about riches and the kingdom. Finally, He answers Peter's question about what they will receive for following Him.

THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM (19:1-2)

Jesus now leaves the Galilee and is on His way to Jerusalem to fulfill the reason why He came to earth.

Matt. 19:1 And it came about when Jesus finished these things, he withdrew from the Galilee and came into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan.

And it came about when Jesus finished these things, Jesus has finished the things leading up to His trip to Jerusalem.

he withdrew from the Galilee and came into the region of Judea, beyond the Jordan. He is now moving southward, his journey will eventually take Him to Jerusalem.

Matt. 19:2 And great multitudes followed after him, and he healed them there.

And great multitudes followed after him, The multitudes are still with Him.

and he healed them there. Jesus is still healing.

THE PHARISEES AND DIVORCE (19:3-12)

Jesus now takes on the difficult issue of divorce.

Matt. 19:3 And some Pharisees came to him, testing him, and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?"

And some Pharisees came to him, testing him, Note that they were not interested in the answer to their question.

and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?" The question was not about divorce in our modern sense of the term. The debate was over the question whether a Jewish man could unilaterally divorce his wife for any issue about which the wife could not appeal. Roman law permitted either party to divorce the other while Jewish law permitted the husband to divorce the wife no matter what the wife wanted.

Matt. 19:4 And he answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them at the beginning, made them male and female,

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *create* some manuscripts read *made*.

And he answered and said, "Have you not read, Jesus again appeals to the knowledge of those He is

speaking to.

that he who created them at the beginning, made them male and female, Please notice that Jesus believed in the Genesis account of creation.

Matt. 19:5 and he said, ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh?’

and he said, ‘For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will be one flesh?’ The union God created in the beginning was exclusive and unbreakable.

Matt. 19:6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, that which God has joined together, let not man separate.”

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, that which God has joined together, let not man separate.” This was God’s original intention. Marriage is forever.

Matt. 19:7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, to divorce her?”

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have *her* after *divorce*.

They said to him, “Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, to divorce her?” If this were God’s intention then why the allowance for divorce? They assumed the law of Moses explicitly commanded or even approved divorce. However it did neither.

Matt. 19:8 He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been this way.

He said to them, “Because of the hardness of your heart, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it has not been this way. It was neither commanded nor approved but rather tolerated because of the hard hearts of the people. The statements of Moses were not a divine sanction for divorce.

Matt. 19:9 But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman, he is committing adultery.”

Note on a variant readings: Instead of *except for sexual immorality* some manuscripts read *except on the ground of sexual immorality*.

After *he is committing adultery* some manuscripts read *And he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery*

There are four issues in this verse that make interpretation difficult:

1. What is the exact wording of the text?
2. The meaning of the Greek term *porneia* translated sexual immorality.
3. What the word *except* means and why it is in Matthew alone without being in Mark and Luke
4. How do we understand the disciples reaction to what Jesus said.

But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, The word translated immorality has the idea of any sexual sin..

and marries another woman, Not only do they commit sexual sin, they marry someone else

he is committing adultery.” Here we have the tension between the absolute ideal of no divorce and the exception that Jesus allows. There is the recognition that we live in a fallen world. Jesus now will speak with His authority.

Matt. 19:10 His disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man and his wife, it is better not to marry.”

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the word *His* before *disciples*.

His disciples said to him, “If such is the case with a man and his wife, it is better not to marry.” With the commitment expected is it better to stay single?

Matt. 19:11 And he said to them, “Not every one can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.”

Note on a variant reading: Some manuscripts do not have the word *this* before *teaching*.

And he said to them, “Not every one Jesus is not recommending celibacy over marriage, especially after what He has just said about marriage. Nowhere else does He speak of celibacy as God’s ideal.

can accept this word, This can be taken to mean either:

- (1) The disciples comment in verse 10 or
- (2) Jesus teaching about marriage in verses 3-9.

The first interpretation would have Jesus saying that the disciples proposal of celibacy is a good one, but that not all are able to remain celibate; in that case celibacy becomes a higher ideal for those who can attain it. The second interpretation sets aside the disciples comment about celibacy with the statement that the ideal of marriage is a demanding one, to which not everyone is called, but it is a responsibility that should not be avoided by those whom God calls to it.

but only those to whom it has been given.” Those who can cope with it.

Matt. 19:12 For certain eunuchs were born that way; and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men; and there are certain ones who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept this, let him accept it.

For certain eunuchs were born that way; and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men; and there are certain ones who have made themselves eunuchs “Made themselves eunuchs” is not to be taken literally (see NIV which translates the phrase “renounced marriage”).

for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who is able to accept this, let him accept it. If the second interpretation is correct, then this statement is a parenthesis for those whom the gift of

marriage is not given—those whom God has called to remain single. Celibacy was unusual in Jewish society and it is not unlikely that Jesus Himself was abused by the people because He was not married. There are many reasons, as He points out, that someone may remain unmarried. This could be physical incapacity (either natural or man-inflicted) or some can voluntarily be celibate for the kingdom of God.

Celibacy is not considered a holier state than marriage (1 Timothy 4:1-3; Hebrews 13:4) nor it is a condition for top level leadership (Matthew 8:14; 1 Corinthians 9:5). It is a special calling for greater usefulness for those who have this calling.

THE DISCIPLES AND THE CHILDREN (19:13-15)

Jesus teaches the disciples about humility.

Matt. 19:13 And then little children were brought to him so that he might lay his hands upon them and pray; but his disciples rebuked them.

And then little children were brought to him so that he might lay his hands upon them and pray; It was a Jewish custom to bring a child to the elders on the Day of Atonement “to bless and pray for him” (*Mishnah Sopherim* 18:5). This may be the background for this incident.

but his disciples rebuked them. The disciples’ objection may be to the popular assumption that Jesus was to be identified merely as a regular elder—He was much more than that. Furthermore they may have thought that He has more important concerns than to be bothered by children. The object of the disciples rebuke is most likely the children, not the ones who brought them.

Matt. 19:14 And Jesus said, “Leave the children alone, and do not hinder them to come to me; for the kingdom of the heaven belongs to such as these.”

And Jesus said, “Leave the children alone, and do not hinder them to come to me; Jesus reverses the conventional values that had a low estimate of a child’s importance in society (even His own followers had this view).

for the kingdom of the heaven belongs to such as these.” while Jesus welcomes the children, *such* points beyond children and refers to anyone one who comes to Jesus with a childlike status. The sick, the outcast, the Gentiles, the women, the children, were all welcomed in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 19:15 And after laying his hands upon them, he went away from there.

And after laying his hands upon them, he went away from there. Normally, in the gospels, the laying on of hands is associated with healing but here it is more the act of identification and acceptance.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER AND ETERNAL LIFE (19:16-22)

Jesus is approached by a rich man who wants to be assured of eternal life.

Matt. 19:16 And behold, one of them came to him and said, “Teacher, what good thing must I do that I might have eternal life?”

Note on a variant reading: Before the word *Teacher* some manuscripts have the word *good*.

And behold, one of them came to him and said, Only Matthew tells us that he was young (vss 20,22). Luke adds, as his wealth suggest, that he was a leading member of society (literally “ruler”). His question seems to be sincere.

“Teacher, what good thing must I do that I might have eternal life?” What good thing reflects a common assumption that we must *do* something rather than *be* something. He wants to know what good deed can he do so that he will inherit eternal life—possible some great act of charity.

Matt. 19:17 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.”

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *Why are you asking Me about what is the good?* some manuscripts read *Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone* (see Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19).

And he said to him, “Why are you asking me about what is good? There is only one who is good. Jesus explores the implications of the word good. This man assumed goodness was in his deeds, he had made it a human quality. However goodness is only relative to the one who is good—that is God. Therefore goodness is not to be found with our own resources and what we can give but rather in accepting God’s standards and reflecting His character.

But if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” The commandments are not an automatic guarantee to life, they rather point the way and of course, the need for a Savior.

Matt. 19:18 And he said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You will not murder; you will not commit adultery; you will not steal; you will not bear false witness;

And he said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You will not murder; you will not commit adultery; you will not steal; you will not bear false witness; These commandments are concerned primarily about how we treat other people.

Matt. 19:19 honor your father and your mother, and you will love your neighbor as yourself.”

honor your father and your mother, Something He has already emphasized.

and you will love your neighbor as yourself.” The commandments are appropriately summed up by Leviticus 19:18.

Matt. 19:20 The young man said to him, “All these things I have kept, what am I still lacking?”

Note on a variant reading: After *I have kept* some manuscripts have *from my youth* (see Mark 10:20; Luke 18:21).

The young man said to him, “All these things I have kept, what am I still lacking?” He is aware that he is good, yet he knows he is not good enough.

Matt. 19:21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.”

Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go sell all your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me.” Two elements are stated, selling and giving and then following Jesus. This is not teaching salvation by works, Jesus was on His way to the cross.

Matt. 19:22 And when the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

And when the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions. The man was a slave to his possessions.

THE DIFFICULTY OF RICHES (19:23-30)

Jesus shows that trusting in riches can keep one out of the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 19:23 And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. Poverty is not an essential condition of discipleship. There were followers of Jesus who were wealthy. Jesus did not command all of His followers to sell all their possessions. Yet riches are a stumbling block for many.

Matt. 19:24 Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, rather than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”

Note on a variant reading: Instead of *camel* some manuscripts read *a rope, or ship’s cable*. The word for *camel* and *rope* or *ships cable* are spelled and pronounced nearly identical.

Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, rather than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” Wealth can be a handicap. Jesus illustrates this with a ludicrous parallel. A camel was the largest common animal (cf. 23:23) trying to squeeze through the smallest imaginable hole. Various attempts to make it less ludicrous (e.g. the later reading the Greek text *kamilos* which means “cable,” or the imaginary gate called the “The Needle’s Eye) fail to appreciate Jesus’ sense of humor but also miss the point that it is humanly impossible for someone to enter the kingdom of God.

Matt. 19:25 And when his disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, “Who then can be saved?”

And when his disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and said, “Who then can be saved?” By current Jewish standards the disciples were rightly amazed, for the rich were those considered as ones whom God has blessed.

Matt. 19:26 Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” Jesus makes it clear that salvation is a supernatural work. Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8,9.

Matt. 19:27 And Peter answered and said to him, “Behold, we have left all things and followed after you. What will there be for us?”

And Peter answered and said to him, “Behold, we have left all things and followed after you. What will there be for us?” Peter wants to know “what’s in it for him and the rest of the disciples”

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that in the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed after me will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you that in the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed after me will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Their reward is more than they can imagine.

Matt. 19:29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake, will receive one hundred times as much, and inherit eternal life.

Note on a variant readings: After *father or mother* some manuscripts have the word *wife*. Some manuscripts read *parents* instead of *father or mother*.

Instead of *one hundred times* some manuscripts read *many times* while others read *seven times*.

And whosoever leaves houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother children or fields on account of my name, he will receive one hundred times more and life everlasting. God always gives more to us than we do to Him.

Matt. 19:30 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

For many of the first will be last, and the last ones will be first. The different value system of the Christians compared with the world.

SUMMARY TO CHAPTER 19

Jesus now turns toward Jerusalem to meet His fate. As He is proceeding He speaks to the religious leaders about divorce. He allows only one cause for divorce, marital unfaithfulness. Jesus then speaks about eunuchs and their place in the kingdom of God.

Children become His next subject. They are to be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.

Then we have the meeting of Jesus and the rich young ruler. This man wants to have assurance of eternal life but he is now willing to do what it takes. This causes Jesus to speak about the problem of riches and the kingdom of God.

Finally, He answers Peter’s question regarding their reward for following Him, untold riches will be theirs as well as authority to judge the tribes of Israel.