

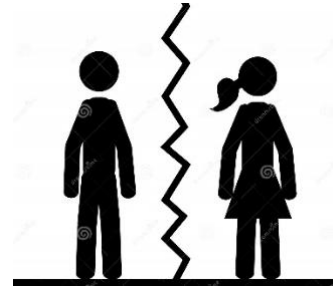
Matthew 19-20

HPC Trinity Class

March 3, 2024

19:1---Jesus left Galilee and went to Judea via “the other side of the Jordan,” which was the eastern edge of the Sea of Galilee, thus avoiding _____.

Hint: rhymes with “malaria”



DIVORCE

What DOES the Old Testament say about divorce??

[READ DT 24: 1-4] This is the basis of the Pharisees’ hostile question.

- In both the OT and NT “it’s a man’s world.” Hear Jesus’ words which he spoke earlier in MT 5:31-32.

- Divorce could only be initiated by the man and could be done “at his pleasure,” meaning at his whim.
- A simple “bill of divorce” was all that was needed...and then he would just send her away.¹
 - For example: “She is not my wife,
And I am not her husband.”
(Hosea 2:2)
 - No reason need be given, but for social purposes at least, the husband was expected to find “some indecency” in his wife. The most common was childlessness. (always her fault.)
 - Almost any reason would be allowed, even simply serving a bad meal.

New Testament times were not much better for women.

- To marry a divorced woman was adultery per all three Gospels (MT 5:32; MK 10:11-12; LK 16:18).
- Joseph, Jesus’ earthly father, initially had considered divorcing Mary because he thought her to be unfaithful.

But I thought they were only engaged to be married?!

There were two schools of Jewish thought in Jesus’ time:

1. Shammai = divorce should be allowed only in cases of infidelity. (Jesus seems to have come from this position also.)
2. Hillel = divorce is allowed for any reason. This was the preferred stance of the Jewish leaders.

¹ “It was not until the 11th Century that the absolute right of the husband to divorce his wife at will was formally abolished.” Also, “Divorce papers issued by a judge in today’s society should not be equated with the Old Testament bill of divorce.” (Key Word footnotes for MT 19:3-9, pg. 1130).

Both schools **required** divorce upon sexual infidelity, as did the Greco-Roman culture of the day. Jesus, however, merely **permitted** divorce rather than required it.

[READ MT 19:7] The Pharisees are wrong: Moses did not command anything like this, he only permitted it. It was the Pharisees who were trying to make it into some kind of divine law. Seeing it this way allowed both people in a divorce to remarry. (MK 10:4 seems to have it right.)

- (Also in Mark 10:12 we finally learn that a wife may now divorce her husband.)

The bottom line: God created marriage to be sacred and permanent. It takes both the husband and the wife to understand this and to stay committed, regardless of life's storms.

19:10—The disciples say that, with all of this disagreement about divorce, maybe they shouldn't get married. Note: they are not astonished; they are simply making a statement.



- Jesus commends celibacy but admits that it is not right for all. Neither Jesus nor the apostles saw celibacy as being holier than marriage. Later, Paul counsels us that a man is better off being married than to burn with passion (1 Cor. 8-9).

BLESSING THE LITTLE CHILDREN²

19:13-15---For a rabbi to bless children with a prayer and a laying-on of hands was a common event. Jesus' disciples, though, were annoyed and they rebuked the parents-- not the children-- who brought them. **Why?**

The disciples possibly thought that more important tasks lay ahead, and that this gaggle of noisy kids was nothing but an inconvenience and a waste of the Master's time.

- **[READ MT 19:14]** "...heaven belongs to SUCH as these." This leads us back to MT 18:2-3: "...become LIKE little children..."

THE RICH YOUNG MAN, aka "Rich Young Ruler" in LK. **[READ MT 19:16-22]**

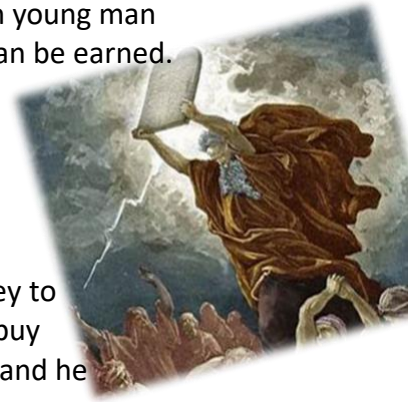
A very similar story is found in Mark and Luke. This is the only account in all of the Bible where someone is asked to sell all of his/her possessions, so it should not be a guide for everyone.

This man is used to getting what he wants. He goes straight to the point: "How do I get eternal life?" And he's wanting it in the most efficient and quickest way: "Which of the Ten Commandments must I obey?" His view of God and eternity were skewed: he wanted answers now and wants to take any shortcuts possible.



² "Little children" (*paidia*) refers to those ranging in age from babies to pre-teens. In Jesus' day young children were of little more value than livestock. Their job was to dutifully learn from the parents and grow up quickly so they could make themselves useful to the family.

- This is in stunning contrast to those of child-like faith. The rich young man sees glorification in heaven as some kind of challenge which can be earned.
- v. 18—Jesus lists (in order) the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and fifth Commandments, and adds “love your neighbor as yourself” from Leviticus 19:18.
- v. 21--“If you want to be perfect...” Here the word “perfect” takes on an OT flavor, meaning undivided loyalty and full-hearted obedience to God. But wealth has always been the key to this man’s world, and now he is disappointed that he cannot buy or earn his way into heaven. Self-surrender to God is the key, and he can’t/won’t do it.³
 - Jesus is not saying that only the poor enter heaven and the rich do not. After all, Godly men such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Solomon, etc. were tremendously wealthy. Jesus instead uses a common proverb of the time, “eye of a needle,”⁴ simply to give an idea as to how difficult the task can be.⁵



19:27---Peter is thinking like his Jewish brethren (see footnote below). The Greek *aphekamen* (“left everything”) signifies that this is a once-and-for-all event. There’s no turning back for any of the disciples!

[READ MT 19:28-30]

Both MK and LK stress the present and future rewards of following Jesus; here in MT only the future side is mentioned, possibly because of political and religious persecution during Matthew’s time. The self-sacrificing of these twelve men—their families, houses, fields--- will be rewarded in heaven.

It’s as if Jesus is saying, “At that time you [Peter and the rest] will see that many values will be reversed from what they are here. Today’s earthly standards will no longer apply.” Surrendering *everything* to Christ is the only path to the ultimate reward.

³ “Most Jews *expected* the rich to inherit eternal life, not because their wealth could buy their way in, but because their wealth testified to the blessing of the Lord in their lives.” (Carson, pg. 425)

⁴ Some commentators think this was a narrow gate in Jerusalem called “eye of a needle,” which was very narrow. However, this gate didn’t exist for another millennium. Rather, Jesus’ comment is merely a metaphor. (Zondervan, comments on 19:24, pg. 1971.)

⁵MT and MK use the Greek word *rhapidos* (sewing needle). Luke, the physician, uses the medical word *belonēs* (surgical needle).

20 WORKERS IN THE VINEYARD PARABLE (found only in MT)

Jesus uses this parable to reinforce what he just said about the rich young man: The last will be first and the first will be last (19:30). The basis of this is God's free grace, not in our own works.

[READ MT 20:1-16] What does this parable NOT imply?



1. That those who work just a bit do as much as those who work all day?
2. That the latecomers are more able and willing than the others?
3. That Gentiles are the latecomers and Jews were those first hired? (This is a common way people often view the story today.)

Landowner = God	Laborers = believers	Vineyard = Kingdom of Heaven
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Roman denarius

An average workday for foot soldiers and common laborers was @10 hours (sunup to sundown), plus one or two breaks. Normal pay was one denarius per day, equal to @\$20 today. The denarius, which replaced the Greek drachma, was the most widely circulated coin of Jesus' time and region. (FYI--The most common coin in the entire Roman Empire was the "as," a bronze {later copper} coin. One denarius = 16 asses.)

Note that none of these workers were actively looking for work when hired. Lesson to be learned here: "Apart from God's gracious call, life has no purpose. Before we become servants of Christ, our lives account for little more than standing around in the marketplace."⁶

The point here is that we cannot earn God's grace. The way he bestows his graciousness may not seem fair by worldly standards, "but in the kingdom of God the principles of merit and ability may be set aside so that grace can prevail."⁷

JESUS AGAIN PREDICTS HIS DEATH (MT 20:17-19) but this time he also tells how he will die: by crucifixion. Only Romans (not Jews) could crucify someone.

The twelve disciples and their leader were not alone in "going up to Jerusalem." Passover was drawing near and the roads were probably clogged with people and animals travelling in the same direction. Jesus must have pulled the disciples aside, off the road, to give them this grim news.



SUFFERING AND SERVICE

⁶ Barton, pg. 388.

⁷ Carson, pg. 428, citing Simon Kistemaker's *The Parable of Jesus*, 1980.

Again, as in chapter 18, the disciples are hung up on the question of rank. This time it's the mother of James and John who begs a favor. [READ MT 20:20-28] In Mark's version (MK 10:35 ff.) James and John, not their mother, approach Jesus.

- An aged mother, kneeling and pleading, may have been regarded by Matthew as being a more sure way to get Jesus' approval for her sons. ---It didn't work.

v. 22—"drink from my cup" is OT symbolism. It reflects God's power, but it also emphasizes judgement. Yes, these brothers will drink from "the cup," with James becoming the first apostolic martyr (Acts 12:2), and John being permanently exiled.



v. 23---Jealousy ensues among the other ten disciples. Jesus calls a team meeting: no one but God alone can determine "who sits where" in heaven.

- **Right hand of God:** In the NT this alludes to Jesus. From OT through the NT the right hand symbolized authority, power, and strength (GE 48:14-19). Today we still use this language in business and social matters by declaring an assistant to be "a right-hand man."
- **Left hand of God:** The Bible doesn't say who is on the left.
 - As Stephen was dying at the hands of a mob, he looked into heaven and "saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55). He did not see anyone seated on the left. That includes the Holy Spirit, which one would expect from a three-in-one Godhead.

v. 24-28---Again, Jesus reminds us that the last shall be first, and the first last.

BLIND MEN SEE [READ MT 20:29-34]

Jesus is now close to his destination of Jerusalem: it is only a day's walk from Jericho. Matthew mentions the large crowd (v. 29), but again, this is Passover season, with many faithful Jewish travelers heading for Jerusalem. The road to Jerusalem would have been an excellent venue for roadside begging, what with so many passersby.

Only two blind men are mentioned here but the Near East was replete with blind people.⁸ The Jericho region produced large quantities of balsam, believed to be very beneficial for many eye defects. (Kohl, similar to charcoal, was also used as eye treatments.) Blindness was frequently associated with sin, though the medical cause was often a severe form of conjunctivitis, highly contagious.

⁸ The Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (@ 1700 B.C.) shows us that medicine was more advanced than previously thought. For instance, the Code mentions a bronze lancet being used when operating on the eye. (*Interpreter's*, vol. 1, "Blindness," pg. 448.)

This tale is similar to the one of the two blind men in MT 9:27ff.⁹ Regardless, it points out that Jesus was continuing to help the needy and poor even when he knew his death was imminent. Unlike MT 9:30 Jesus gives no command to the healed men to remain silent: what would be the use, with his time so near!



Works Cited

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⁹ Some commentators see this as simply being doublets (i.e., the same story, same characters, told twice.) Others view each as a unique event. The latter view rests upon the fact that blindness was (and still is) very common in this part of the world.