

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 12

Matthew 18:23 – Matthew 20:34

Parable of the King's Account

Matthew 18: ²³"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴"And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents. ²⁵"But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. ²⁶"The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.' ²⁷"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.' ²⁹"So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.' ³⁰"He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. ³¹"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. ³²"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me. ³³'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴"And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

The Lord tells the story of the king whose servant owed 10,000 talents which he could not pay. The king forgave the servant of his debt. But another man owed the servant a hundred pence and the servant would not forgive him and even cast him into prison. A friend discovers the situation and tells the king who then calls the servant in and chastises him for his lack of forgiveness. The king then throws the servant into prison until all that is owed is paid. The heavenly Father will do the same to those who do not forgive others.

Jesus Leaves Galilee for the Last Time

Matthew 19: ¹ When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ^{19:2} and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.

The Gospel of Luke says that Jesus leaves the territory of Ephraim and travels towards Jerusalem on the east side of the Jordan River. Both Matthew and Luke are correct. Jesus passes through the bottom edge of Galilee and crosses over to the eastern side of the Jordan River to travel through the land given to Ephraim until He arrives in the Judean territory. The crowds from Galilee are still following Him as He travels. As is His custom, He takes the time to teach and heal them.

Divorce

Matthew 19: ³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" ⁴ And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE,

⁵ and said, 'FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED 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 no man separate." ⁷ They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND her AWAY?" ⁸ He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The Pharisees ask Jesus if it is lawful to divorce. The Pharisees and Sadducees are constantly in a bitter debate between their two schools of doctrine about the Mosaic Law found in Deuteronomy 24:1. The school of Shammai takes the strict and unpopular view of divorce for unfaithfulness only but the school of Hillel takes the liberal and popular view of an easy divorce for any reason at all. Both sides hope to encapsulate Jesus in the dispute, drawing Him to one side or the other. He asks them to tell Him what Moses has said on the matter. They tell Jesus that Moses allowed for a certificate of divorce to be given, not adding their specific interpretations in their answers. But He replies that the divorce was allowed only because of the hardness of their hearts; dried up hearts, hard and tough. The certificate was of some protection for the divorced wife and a huge restriction on the husband's ability to lackadaisically rid himself of a wife and take a new one. Jesus continues to tell them that it wasn't supposed to be that way from the beginning. God made male and female and the two become one flesh in the marriage and what God has joined together "let no man separate." The original commandment has never been changed and continues to be in force today. In comparing this passage with the Matthew 5:31 account, Jesus allows for remarriage of the innocent party without the threat of sin; however, the guilty party in the divorce is not without the sin of adultery in a second marriage.

Should One Marry

Matthew 19: ¹⁰ The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." ¹¹ But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. ¹² "For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

Alone, the apostles ask Jesus about divorce and He tells them that whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery. Jesus' stance is more restrictive than the various opinions of the Pharisees and scribes. The twelve are now wondering if anyone should marry. Jesus explains that it is not expedient that all people marry. In most cases, it is a voluntary decision to marry or remain unmarried.

The word "eunuch" actually means bed-keeper or chamberlain. He is a man who cannot father a child because of physical constraints. Sometimes he is born in this condition; sometimes he is surgically altered. In either case, he is not thought to be a threat to a marriage and is used as a servant in the house. Jesus mentions a third type of eunuch as one who has made himself such for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. This man is a eunuch in a spiritual sense, holding himself sacred for the purpose of dedication to the ministry of Christ. For the Lord, if a man can separate himself for the purpose of reaching people for the kingdom, then the Lord will allow it and give His blessing to that spiritual eunuch.

Children

Matthew 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.

The people want Jesus to bless their children, so they bring them in great numbers. No doubt it has been a common occurrence in the Lord's ministry. Everyone wants to touch the Lord and everyone wants to receive His blessing. The apostles are bothered by the children's presence and rebuke the parents, but Jesus stops them. He loves the children and takes them in His arms. He says to the apostles, "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Once again, the Lord is using the children as an example of what adults must do to be accepted into the kingdom of God; they must become childlike in their belief to enter into their faith in Christ.

Obtain Eternal Life

Matthew 19: 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.

A rich young ruler comes to Jesus and asks to be a follower. He has been a good man all his life, never breaking any of the commandments. He wants to know what other good thing he can do to inherit eternal life but Jesus tells him there is only One good in the absolute sense, God. The young man finds himself in a paradox; he has kept all the commandments, and yet he is not satisfied within himself. He has qualified his goodness with the quantity of acts he has accomplished instead of the qualitative nature for which God looks. Jesus tells him that he is lacking one thing; He tells him to sell all he has and give the money to the poor. Jesus' request is a huge demand on this man's life since he is extremely wealthy in earthly possessions. The rich young ruler leaves very sad and grieved. Has Jesus asked too much of him? Does Jesus ask the same of everyone? Is this request for those who are in the grip of earthly possessions? Is the sin of being unwilling to give up all that has been obtained enough to keep someone from Christ?

It is Hard for a Rich Man

Matthew 19: 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."

Jesus then tells His apostles that 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. For the rich young ruler to give up all that he has to follow Christ is impossible. Fraught with the same fear of Jesus' teaching on marriage and divorce, the apostles ask the question, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus tells

them that it is impossible for everyone to give up all they have to follow Christ but it is not impossible for God to look over those impossibilities and bring a person to Him. Peter then responds, not understanding the words of the Lord and thinking of what He has given up to be a follower.

We have Left Everything

Matthew 19: 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.

Peter mentions that they have left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus tells them that because they have done so for His sake, they have increased their families and possessions as well as their persecutions, but it will all lead to eternal life. But the first shall be last and the last shall be first.

In verse 28, the Lord makes a promise to the apostles; it is a new promise never heard by the apostles before and not explained in detail here. Sometime in the future He will sit on "His glorious throne" and they will sit on twelve thrones beside Him as judges over the entire nation of Israel. Later, Jesus will explain the generation and the timing of this event, but not at this point in the story. Even though He makes this great promise to the twelve, He makes an even greater promise to the rest of His followers. They will "... receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life." It is another paradox. The apostles are the first to be selected by the Lord for a special work and they will be blessed with the reward of sitting on thrones as judges over their own people, but their blessings and rewards will pale in view of the rewards that will be given to those who might be considered the least in the kingdom of God. In heaven, the ones thought to be at the end of the line will end up at the start and from an earthly perspective, not all the rewards will seem fair. However, from a heavenly perspective, all will be fair.

Parable of the Land Owner

Matthew 20: ¹ "For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. ² "When he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius for the day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³ "And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the market place; ⁴ and to those he said, 'You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.' And so they went. ⁵ "Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did the same thing. ⁶ "And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, 'Why have you been standing here idle all day long?' ⁷ "They said to him, 'Because no one hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' ⁸ "When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last group to the first.' ⁹ "When those hired about the eleventh hour came, each one received a denarius. ¹⁰ "When those hired first came, they thought that they would receive more; but each of them also received a denarius. ¹¹ "When they received it, they grumbled at the landowner, ¹² saying, 'These last men have worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the scorching heat of the day.' ¹³ "But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵ 'Is it not

lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

False hopes have been raised in those who are hired early in the day. They have bargained for a day's wage and expect to get it. But when they see those who have come along at the end of the day being paid the same amount, they are indignant. "Not fair," might be their cry. The ones who worked an hour are paid a penny. The ones who worked the entire day are expecting more when they are paid. But the owner has paid them all what He thinks is fair and he pays them all exactly the same rate. The laborers are unhappy with the injustice of the owner. Their eyes are envious, yet the owner is generous. The point of the parable is not the begrudging of the workers but the will of the owner. He can do as he wishes with his own property. Be aware of the point Jesus is making. It does not matter whether you have been in the service for the Lord for 80 years or one day when He calls you home; He will reward you according to His kind wishes, not your expectations. The first will be last and the last will be first. You will be rewarded, but many of you may have had your reward here on earth whereas others have struggled on earth and therefore will receive a greater reward in heaven.

About To Go To Jerusalem

Matthew 20: ¹⁷ As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, ¹⁸ "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, ¹⁹ and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up."

Continuing on His road to Jerusalem, Jesus tells the apostles about his impending death once again. He tells them He will be arrested by the priests and scribes, delivered to the Gentile courts, scourged and killed. But three days later He will rise again. It is Jesus' attempt to help the apostles understand the events of the next few days and hours. The context of the passage shows that for all practical purposes, His words fall on deaf ears.

Sons of Zebedee

Matthew 20: ²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. ²¹ And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." ²² But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." ²³ He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, James and John, Jesus' cousins, ask that her boys will have the privilege to sit on His right and left hand in glory. She presents it as a small thing but it is for the two chief thrones among the twelve promised by Jesus. Frankly, it is the most inopportune time for a request like this when Jesus has just announced His impending death and resurrection. It shows the complete disregard for His instructions concerning the first and the last. It is a selfish request. It is an ignorant request. What little understanding they have about the future! First, Jesus tells them that they are not ready to bear the cup or baptism that He is about to endure. They are not ready to face the martyrdom that He is about to experience. Secondly, He tells them that the seats to the right and left are not His to give because they have already been promised to those for whom they were prepared.

An interesting point can be made at this junction. Among the deaths of the twelve, Salome's son James will be the first to die in AD 44 at the hands of Herod Agrippa. Her son John will die last; a peaceful and natural death in AD 96 or 97.⁸⁹

The Indignant Ten

Matthew 20:²⁴ And hearing this, the ten became indignant with the two brothers.²⁵ But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them.²⁶ "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave;²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

The other ten apostles become indignant when they hear the request for James and John, perhaps taking advantage of their kinship with the Lord. Jesus quickly addresses the situation. If they want to be first in the kingdom, they must become last on earth. They must not try to be leaders in important positions; they must become servants of the people. Neither should they lord their positions over others. Even Jesus did not come to earth to be served, "but to serve, and give His life a ransom for many." It is a complete reversal of the popular thought of Jesus' day, as well as ours today.

Healing of Two Blind Men

Matthew 20:²⁹ As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him.³⁰ And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!"³¹ The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"³² And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?"³³ They said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened."³⁴ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

Just outside Jericho, two blind men are sitting as Jesus arrives. Hearing that Jesus is near, they call out to Jesus to heal him. Jesus touches their eyes and they are healed.

Some confusion exists in the Synoptic Gospels. The Mark and Luke passages mention only one man, Bartemaeus, who cries out to the Lord and is healed. In these accounts, Jesus is entering the city of Jericho. In Matthew's account the two men are healed as Jesus leaves Jericho. Some commentaries say these are the same healings. But there are enough differences between the two to ascertain that they are two separate healings at two different times; one occurs when they enter town and the other, while leaving.

⁸⁹ John is the only apostle to escape a violent death.