

OPENING PRAYER

Proper 28¹

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written
for our learning:
Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn,
and inwardly digest them,
that we may embrace and ever hold fast
the blessed hope of everlasting life,
which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

MATTHEW 19²

Teaching about Divorce

19 When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. 2 Large crowds followed him, and he cured them there.

3 Some Pharisees came to him, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, “Have you not read that the one who made them at 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. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” 7 They said to him, “Why then did Moses command us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” 8 He said to them, “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”[a]

10 The[b] disciples said to him, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” 11 But he said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. 12 For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”

Jesus Blesses Little Children

13 Then children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, 14 but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” 15 And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

The Rich Young Man

16 Then someone came to him and said, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” 17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” 18 He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. 19 Honor

¹ Episcopal Book of Common Prayer pp.236

² All Bible quotations and footnotes are from Biblegateway.com, New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE) Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

your father and mother. Also, you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 20 The young man said to him, “I have kept all these;[c] what do I still lack?” 21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money[d] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” 22 When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

27 Then Peter said in reply, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” 28 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or[e] children or fields for my name’s sake will receive a hundredfold[f] and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.

Footnotes

- 19.9 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery*
- 19.10 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *His*
- 19.20 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) add *from my youth*
- 19.21 Gk lacks *the money*
- 19.29 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack *wife or*
- 19.29 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) read *manifold*

GOSPEL COMPARISON³

Pericope⁴	Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
Departure to Judea	10:1	19:1-2	9:51	
On Divorce and Celibacy	10:2-12	19:3-12	16:18	
Jesus Blesses the Children	10:13-16	19:13-15	18:15-17	
The Rich Young Man	10:17-22	19:16-22	18:18-23	
On Riches and the Rewards of Discipleship	10:23-31	19:23-30	18:24-30 22:28-30	

³ Source: <http://www.gospelparallels.com/>

⁴ An extract from a text, especially a passage from the Bible, "a book of pericopes"

PERSPECTIVE

Chapter 19 deals with everyday life: marriage, divorce, children, celibacy, and money. It covers in greater depth topics from the Sermon on the Mount and introduces a new topic, celibacy.

19:1-12 Teaching about Divorce

Jesus starts on the road to Jerusalem and is teaching about his standards for the kingdom. The question about divorce is set in the context of testing Jesus by the Pharisees. Matthew’s addition to Mark is to write: “whoever divorces his wife, *except for sexual immorality*,” (Gk. *porneia*) which does not appear in the other three divorce prohibitions in 1 Cor 7:10, Luke 16:18 or Mark 10:2-12. This exception is important for many Christian churches traditionally viewed Jesus’ prohibition as normative.⁵

In Deuteronomy only the man can sue for divorce on fairly broad terms. Matthew narrows the grounds for divorce relative to Deuteronomy:

Deut. 24:1	Matthew 5:31-32	Matthew 19:9
“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house;	31 “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ 32 But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality , causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.	9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality , and marries another commits adultery, and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”[a]

Matthew expands the grounds for divorce relative to Mark for the male, but does not include the woman as Mark does:

Mark 10:11	Matthew 19:9	Luke 16:18
11 “Whoever divorces his wife	9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife,	18 “Anyone who divorces his wife
	except for sexual immorality ,	
and marries another commits adultery against her,	and marries another commits adultery,	and marries another commits adultery,
12 and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”	and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”[a]	and whoever marries a woman divorced from her husband commits adultery.
	[a] 19.9 Other ancient authorities (manuscripts) lack <i>and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery</i>	

Divorce:

Mark includes women, which Matthew does not continue, and Matthew adds the caveat “*except for sexual immorality*” which parallels the Torah and is broader than Mark’s rule. This reflects Matthew’s interest in having Jesus uphold the Torah in his teaching. Both the Jewish tradition and the early Christian tradition of making an allowance for divorce as a reality of community and married life.

Matthew’s “for any cause” shows knowledge of more liberal and prominent Hillelite position, which provides a range of grounds for divorce. The question then is whether Jesus agrees or disagrees with the broader more liberal view of divorce or holds a more conservative position.⁶

⁵ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 193-195

⁶ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

What is *porneia*? The Greek word covers a wide range of immorality which may be too broad. Some interpret the word as adultery. Like marriage without divorce, Jesus sees both marriage and celibacy in an eschatological context which impose demands on people in this world might seem as impossible to meet.⁷

It is important to note that the Pharisees ask why Moses “commanded” a certificate of divorce, and Jesus responds that Moses giving permission. Moses did not command divorce he allowed for it as seemingly the lesser of two evils in some circumstances.⁸

The problem of whether 19:9 allows remarriage for the innocent party cannot be answered. 19:10-12 is the discussion of chastity. Jesus seems to come down on the side that chastity is good but not for everyone. 19:9 does not exclude the possibility of remarriage if there has been a divorce for adultery. In contrast to the teaching on chastity that affects relatively few people, many people are impacted by divorce.⁹

Jesus’ response hinges on Genesis 1:27 “So God created humans in his image” and Genesis 2:24 “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” He is raising the issue because God’s intent is permanence. The Torah/Laws permit divorce (Deut 24:1) because of the moral decline of the post-fallen state of mankind. Jesus does not undue Deut 24:1, but rather distinguishes the perfect will of God from the commandments which reflect human sinfulness. Jesus demands conformity to the will of God, in part because the kingdom of God is at hand and that will be like being restored to humanity’s original state in creation.¹⁰

Celibacy:

Many early Christian movements rejected marriage, the Marcionites, the Encratites and the Eustachians, and they were all, for this reason and others, labelled heretics by the early Christian majority. Most Christian communities have viewed marriage as either a covenant made between two people and God, or as a sacrament. At the same time, it is a long-standing view that celibacy is a higher state than marriage and that virginity is preferred by God. In Matthew, the most Jewish Gospel, marriage is part of the natural order from God, despite the eschatological change that was coming. It may also be seen that God calls some people to remain separate, celibate, and un-married, but that call is not for everyone.¹¹

19:13-15 Jesus Blesses Little Children

The scene is that some people have brought children to Jesus to bless, and the disciples want to block the way to Jesus. Jesus both physically and verbally confirms the instincts of the parents bringing their children to him and rebukes the disciples. This pericope reinforces the sympathy for children found elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew (14:13-21¹²; 15:21-8¹³, 29-39¹⁴; 21:15¹⁵). Children should be received, and disciples should be childlike, without power or status, and the lesson is to be kind to children and embody humility. It is possibly that the matter of infant baptism and welcoming children into the church was already an issue in the Matthean community.¹⁶

Jesus teaches that children should be received because this teaches the disciples humility, which means a lack of concern for worldly status, without power or position. Throughout the gospel of Matthew Jesus

⁷ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 193-195

⁸ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

⁹ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

¹⁰ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

¹¹ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII, The International Critical Commentary pp. 1-65

¹² 14:21 “And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.”

¹³ 15:28 “And her daughter was healed from that moment.”

¹⁴ 15:38 “Those who had eaten were four thousand men, besides women and children.”

¹⁵ 15:15 “15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did and heard[d] the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became angry 16 and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’”

¹⁶ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

shows sympathy for children. They are objects of Jesus' mercy. They are to be imitated. And they can receive miraculous insight.¹⁷

19:16-22 The Rich Young Man

This section is on wealth and kingdom. The topics were extensively addressed in the Sermon on the Mount, indeed the statement that it is impossible to serve God and mammon (6:24) is concretely demonstrated here. The subjects of treasure in heaven (6:19-21), generosity (6:22-23), eschatological reversal (5:3-12), and perfection also resurface here. The section also reinforces Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teachings on the Torah. Jesus is affirming the OT/Torah and at the same time demanding more.¹⁸

19:16-22 recount a call to discipleship. To the question about eternal life, Jesus responds with a question, a theological assertion, and an imperative. His imperative to "follow me" changes the metaphor from a market to a road, Jesus demands not purchase but pilgrimage. Calvin commenting on this passage said that right action is proof of right religion.¹⁹

When Jesus is asked what parts of the Torah to follow, he responds with parts that stand in for the whole of the Torah. (19:19) Jesus goes on to not just require alms from the supplicant, but everything he owns. (19:21). This is something not in the Torah/OT. It is a novel change engendered by the nature of discipleship and the greater righteousness announced in 5:20, "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven".²⁰

Perfect/Complete:

But what is meant by "If you wish to be *perfect*" (5:21)? This verse does not imply that those who sell all will be perfect, while the others will be in "a second degree of virtue" (Jerome). Calvin said that Jesus is not "proclaiming a general statement that is applicable to everyone, but only to the person to whom he was speaking". This passage is a call story, and the rich man being invited to follow Jesus is a specific case. This circumstance determines what is asked of him. One cannot generalize 19:21 or for that matter 8:21 "leave the dead to bury their own dead" as general orders for all disciples. In 19:22-26 the rich man loses salvation not perfection by his actions²¹.

What then is meant by perfect? In 5:48 the connotation of completeness is foremost, but whereas there it is the completeness of love, here it is the completeness of obedience. In Matthew perfection is obedience. The rich man will be perfect if he exhibited obedience to Jesus Christ.²²

19:23-30 On Riches and the Rewards of Discipleship

Mark 10:23-27	Matthew 10:23-26	Luke 18:24-27
23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"	23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven.	24 Jesus looked at him[d] and said, "How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"
24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, "Children, how hard it is[e] to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than	24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."	25 Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

¹⁷ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII, The International Critical Commentary pp. 1-65

¹⁸ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

¹⁹ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

²⁰ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

²¹ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

²² Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.”		
26 They were greatly astounded and said to one another,[f] “Then who can be saved?”	25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?”	26 Those who heard it said, “Then who can be saved?”
27 Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.”	26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”	27 He replied, “What is impossible for mortals is possible for God.”

Note: the consistency across the three Synoptic Gospels of Jesus’ position on wealth as an inhibitor to entering the Kingdom of God, and the necessity for God’s action to enable it. It is an interesting hedge position, condemning wealth, but not demonizing it. It is also interesting that in all three Gospels the disciple’s assume that wealth is a sign of God’s favor to someone, which is not an assumption Jesus shares. Matthew also does not include Mark’s “24 And the disciples were perplexed at these words.”

19:23-26 Jesus turns from the rich man to his disciples and gives a commentary on what just happened. The disciples response presupposes that wealth is a sign of God’s favor, and that if not even a rich man can enter the kingdom, then what hope is there? Jesus’ response lies in God’s omnipotence, which is antithetical to human impotence. Only God has the strength to elevate someone to the kingdom. But God does have that strength. God’ omnipotence does not guarantee everyone’s salvation, 19:26 is not a comfort for the rich, and it does not cancel 19:23-4.²³

On Wealth:

Note: Matthew’s thesis is that wealth is a barrier to faith and devotion to God. It is not that wealth is inherently evil, but the love of wealth supplants the love of God, which is evil and idolatry. This insight stands in contrast to the cultural view that “Wealth a blessing, poverty a punishment” which the disciples may have upheld. Matthew specifically advises that:

Matthew 6:19-21, 24	Matthew 13:22	Matthew 19:23-26
19 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust[h] consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust[i] consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 24 “No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.[j]	22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of this[b] age and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.	23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astounded and said, “Then who can be saved?” 26 But Jesus looked at them and said, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.”

Peter then asks how things stand for those who have given everything up for Jesus and his mission. (19:27-30) Jesus responds with congratulations and promising a future reward. These happy words will

²³ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

be balanced by 20:1-16 with words of caution. 19:28 “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Refers not to one time judgement, but to Lordship – it points to the disciples’ authority in the future (20:20-21). As the twelve tribe rulers/chiefs once directed the twelve tribes under Moses, so it shall be at the end with the disciples.²⁴

Matthew 19:28 includes an important promise to the disciples of an exalted role in the kingdom of heaven when it occurs. The disciples also appear to be the judges of the twelve tribes of Israel or possibly the new Church. The reward has an upside-down nature, it is not given to the first and most powerful of the world, but to the last who have given up everything for the name of Jesus.²⁵

After the man leaves Jesus teaches that a wealthy person entering the kingdom of heaven is like a camel passing through the eye of a needle, impossible for humans, but possible for God to enable. Regarding salvation only God has strength – 19:26 speaks of what is. Possible not the probable. God’s omnipotence does not guarantee the salvation of any. 19:26 is often misunderstood as comfort for the rich – it does not cancel 19:23-24.²⁶

Clement of Alexandria commenting on Matthew 19:16-30 does not deny the riches are seductive and dangerous, and an obstacle to the way to God. But he observed that many other things are also obstacles. He advised the use of wealth to meet the needs of the hour. And he advised that wealth could become the master and not the slave to the virtuous. Clement called for “freedom for obedience” that is freedom to do what God wants done with wealth.²⁷

REFLECTIONS

This chapter can be seen as a series of teachings on the conflicts between our human desires and society and God’s will and the kingdom.

Divorce: the Bible does not provide a systematic discussion of marriage or divorce. Mal. 2:14-16 and Matt 19:9 indicates that divorce is displeasing to God and in violation of God’s intention for marriage. How do you interpret the different teachings by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels on divorce? Where is God’s mercy in these teachings on divorce?

Celibacy: How do we interpret Jesus teachings on celibacy – it is good for some and not for others.

Humility, which means a lack of concern for worldly status, without power or position, is a central virtue of Jesus and his teachings. How do you interpret Jesus’ behavior and teachings on humility in your own life and attitude?

Perfection/Completeness: In Matthew perfection or completeness is construed in the context of both love and obedience to God. What is Jesus trying to get at about how to follow him. Is it we must love and obey God completely?

Wealth: Jesus in Matthew preaches to guard against loving wealth. What is the balance between loving God and working to provide for your financial well-being? When does the seeking financial security cross over into idolatry and sin?

²⁴ Barton and Muddiman Editors, Dale C. Allison Jr., Matthew Contributor, Oxford Bible Commentary, pp. 868-870

²⁵ Brown, Raymond E., S.S., An Introduction to the New Testament, pp. 193-195

²⁶ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII, The International Critical Commentary pp. 1-65

²⁷ Davies, W.D., Allison, Dale C. Jr. Matthew Volume II Chapters VIII-XVIII, The International Critical Commentary pp. 1-65

CLOSING PRAYER

We thank you, heavenly Father,
for the witness of your apostle and evangelist,
Matthew, to the Gospel of Beatitude and Grace
which you have given us in your Son, our Savior;
and we pray that, after his example,
we may with ready wills and hearts obey
the calling of our Lord to follow him;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

The Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun

SLOW RELIGION: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW



The Inspiration of St. Matthew, Caravaggio, 1602

Slow Religion, The Gospel According to Matthew is a lay person-led adult education weekly class for Christians and seekers. Slow Religion uses a literary and historical approach to the ancient texts to identify and apply insights from the Gospel to today's world.

Matthew's gospel is worth studying because the author attempts to uphold Jesus' Jewish past, with Jesus ministry, death, and resurrection, in the context of the 1st Century CE Jesus movement and early church, and in a hostile Hellenistic and Jewish world.

21st Century readers recognize Matthew as the source of many of the best-known stories and sayings of Jesus as well as a social philosophy that many non-Christians believe in. Famous for its Sermon on the Mount, The Beatitudes, and other teachings, Matthew is often called the most Jewish of the Gospels, while also contributing with the Gospel of John to antisemitism.

The class is created and led by Joe Jennings and advisors include: the Rev. Zoila Schoenbrun, St. Stephens Episcopal Church, Belvedere, CA; the Rev. Br. Richard Edward Helmer, Episcopal Church of our Saviour, Mill Valley, CA; the Rev. Heather Wenrick, the Episcopal Church of the Ascension, Seattle; and the Father Vincent Pizzuto, PhD., vicar at St. Columba's Episcopal Church, Inverness CA and Full Professor at the (Jesuit) University of San Francisco, New Testament and Christian Mysticism, in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies.

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