

The Gospel According to Matthew



Part 3

Group Applications
& Personal Study

Matthew
19:13-22:40

Four Oaks
Killearn

To my wife and daughter, thank you for your grace, support and love.

General Editor

Joe Donaldson

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KING JESUS FLIPS THE SCRIPT

Matthew 19:13-30

Introduction:

The kingdom of heaven has often been called an upside-down kingdom. The first will be last, as Jesus said. Let the children come, He says. He prizes and values what the world disdains and discards. Those whom the world ignores Jesus esteems highly.

However, in our world, we often lose sight of the baffling nature of this concept. We can easily become accustomed to the truth of the gospel. Yet, the kingdom of heaven always upends our expectations. The gospel collides with every culture in different ways.

The rich young ruler in Jesus's time was exactly the kind of person you wanted in your movement. In today's terminology, you want him part of your core group for planting a church. He has both the respect of outsiders and a vast amount of connection and resources. Despite all these exterior markers of status, Jesus sees his heart and uses it as a teaching moment to say that the kingdom actually belongs to those of humble status.

What can the children contribute? They have no money and can only offer their faith and trust. The paradox of this truth is thus: the very reason that the rich and powerful are valued by the world over the children is the very thing that blocks him from the kingdom. His own pride in his qualifications is exactly what blocks him. Such people have a difficult time humbling themselves like a child to enter the kingdom.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations below.

What about God should cause us to be humble before Him? Why can we approach Him as children and not the rich ruler?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

What are some things you have difficulty giving up for the sake of following Jesus? Like the rich young ruler, what blocks you from abandoning everything for the sake of Him?

Jesus says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. Does this mean that we should avoid any sort of wealth or saving money? How can we take what we are given and use it for Christ and His Kingdom in a "child-like" manner?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Think of someone in your life outside of the kingdom. What are some questions you could ask them to help them think through the things blocking them from faith?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were asked to do something really hard. What were the circumstances? How did it go? How did it challenge your faith?
2. This passage begins with parents bringing their children to Jesus to bless them. How do you long for Jesus to bless your children? How do you long for Jesus to bless you as a child of God?
3. While Jesus welcomes and blesses the children, He says some hard things to the rich, young ruler that lead the man to walk away sorrowful. Compare and contrast these two interactions. Why does Jesus address them differently?
4. Jesus says that it is difficult for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. How have you seen or experienced this? How might Jesus’ promise of a future inheritance speak to those who are holding onto riches in this life?
5. When asked who can be saved, Jesus responds: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” How have you seen this promise already fulfilled? How might this promise encourage your heart today? Now, spend some time as a group thanking God and praying for God to do the impossible.

Additional Reading

Clement of Alexandria, “Who is the Rich Man Who Will Be Saved?”

Then to appoint such a reward for liberality, — an everlasting habitation! O excellent trading! O divine merchandise! One purchases immortality for money; and, by giving the perishing things of the world, receives in exchange for these an eternal mansion in the heavens! Sail to this mart, if you are wise, O rich man! If need be, sail round the whole world. Spare not perils and toils, that you may purchase here the heavenly kingdom. Why do transparent stones and emeralds delight you so much, and a house that is fuel for fire, or a plaything of time, or the sport of the earthquake, or an occasion for a tyrant’s outrage? Aspire to dwell in the heavens, and to reign with God. This kingdom a man imitating God will give you. By receiving a little here, there through all ages He will make you a dweller with Him. Ask that you may receive; haste; strive; fear lest He disgrace you. For He is not commanded to receive, but you to give. The Lord did not say, Give, or bring, or do good, or help, but make a friend. But a friend proves himself such not by one gift, but by long intimacy. For it is neither the faith, nor the love, nor the hope, nor the endurance of one day, but “he that endures to the end shall be saved” (Matthew 10:22)....

For [us] He came down. For [us] He clothed Himself with man. For this He voluntarily subjected Himself to the experiences of men, that by bringing Himself to the measure of our weakness whom He loved, He might correspondingly bring us to the measure of His own strength. And about to be offered up and giving Himself a ransom, He left for us a new Covenant-testament: My love I give unto you. And what and how great is it? For each of us He gave His life — the equivalent for all. This He demands from us in return for one another. And if we owe our lives to the brethren, and have made such a mutual compact with the Saviour, why should we any more hoard and shut up worldly goods, which are beggarly, foreign to us and transitory? Shall we shut up from each other what after a little shall be the property of the fire?

KING JESUS' FAIRNESS EXCEEDS OURS Matthew 20:1-12

Introduction:

"The beauty of grace is that it makes life not fair."

Relient K

Yes, I opened this reading with a lyric from Relient K, a Christian rock band composed of some of Ohio's greatest sons (excepting the many presidents from the great Buckeye state). But I do this for a reason: grace is *not* fair. I think about this lyric all the time. We demand fairness in this world, do we not? It is central to our system of justice, yet many criminals escape punishment fitting to the crime. Children complain that discipline dispensed by their parents is not fair. Someone receives a promotion we thought was ours. The Psalmist wonders why the wicked prosper.

Imagine a courtroom where the judge takes the place of the condemned and takes his punishment. We would say that's not fair; he did not do anything. We would wonder why the guilty avoided his just fate. But that's precisely the gospel.

Jesus in our section today blows the lid off our concept of fairness. He subverts our expectations of reward and punishment. We live in a world where, even though it is often unfair, we demand evenhandedness. He makes it easy for us by comparing the kingdom to something we all understand: the workplace.

Each worker received the same wage, but some worked more than others. At judgment done, it will not matter if you have been a Christian for years or just now came to Christ.

Christ's sacrifice is just as effectual for each of us, and the glorious reward will be the same: life with God forever.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

How does the grace of God subvert our expectations about fairness? Take a few moments to praise God for showing you grace.

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Where are you tempted to see God as unfair? How does the gospel shift our expectations of God's fairness?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Take some time to think of people you believe deserve justice. How would you feel, or do you feel, if their sins are dealt with at the cross of Christ? Surrender your understanding of fairness and justice to God.

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions:

- 1. Share a story about your first job. What was it like? How was your boss?
- 2. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a master hiring laborers in a vineyard. What is the main point of the parable?
- 3. How does this parable land on you? Why?
- 4. What is Jesus trying to teach you? How might you put it into practice?
- 5. After Jesus tells the parable, He tells His disciples once again that He will be crucified and raised. Why do you think He continues to tell them what will take place? What might this reveal about His heart towards the disciples and towards us?
- 6. Spend some time praying for one another, especially related to your heart towards the kingdom.

Additional Reading

Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*

The last may be first and the first last, but that's only for the fun of making the point: everybody is on the payout queue and everybody gets full pay. Nobody is kicked out who wasn't already in; the only bruised backsides belong to those who insist on butting themselves into outer darkness.

For if the world could have been saved by bookkeeping, it would have been saved by Moses, not Jesus. The law was just fine. And God gave it a good thousand years or so to see if anyone could pass a test like that. But when nobody did — when it became perfectly clear that there was “no one who was righteous, not even one” (Rom. 3:10; Ps. 14:1-3), that “both Jews and Gentiles alike were all under the power of sin” (Rom. 3:9) — God gave up on salvation by the books. He cancelled everybody’s records in the death of Jesus and rewarded us all, equally and fully, with a new creation in the resurrection of the dead.

And therefore the only adverse judgment that falls on the world falls on those who take their stand on a life God cannot use rather than on the death he can. Only the winners lose, because only the losers can win: the reconciliation simply cannot work any other way. Evil cannot be gotten out of the world by reward and punishment: that just points up the shortage of sheep and turns God into one more score-evening goat. The only way to solve the problem of evil is for God to do what in fact he did: to take it out of the world by taking it into himself — down into the forgettery of Jesus’ dead human mind — and to close the books on it forever. That way, the kingdom of heaven is for everybody; hell is reserved only for the idiots who insist on keeping nonexistent records in their heads.

KING JESUS AND THE PATH TO GREATNESS Matthew 20:20-28

Ambition is a word that can make us as believers a bit uncomfortable. So-and-so is ambitious for that promotion, and he's willing to do anything to get there. To some of us then, ambition implies a certain pride, self-centeredness, and even greed. Others may see such ambition as a positive good. After all, what is wrong with desiring to make more money, or to serve with more authority?

Years ago, I remember a pastor discussing this passage and noting that Jesus does not rebuke the request by the Sons of Zebedee (in this case, their mother). While this is technically true, Jesus certainly subverts their ambition in laying out an alternative path to greatness. That itself is a rebuke.

See, we view the path to greatness often as a step over people. And this was part of the request here. Jesus had just promised a throne for each of the Twelve (Matthew 19:28), but the Sons of Thunder want to sit closer.

The path to greatness in the kingdom is not at the expense of others, but to be servants for them in Christ. Authority is not used for your own selfish gain but for the good of others. Ambition therefore can be neutral or even good, and the crux of the matter is the heart behind your pursuit of authority and position and what you do with it.

Jesus Christ had ambition. He came to seek and save the lost. He came to serve, and He came to use his authority to bring us closer to God. And to Him is given the name that is above every name. Jesus could have used His authority in a right-handed fashion, but He used it in an altruistic manner intended to elevate us. For that, He Himself was elevated.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text. 2-3 times Record any Observations.

How was Jesus's ambition of benefit to you? Take some time to praise Him for His service on your behalf, a service that continues to this day.

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Is your ambition to serve or be served? Think of this question in various contexts (your occupation, Four Oaks Community Church, your family).

How can we shape our ambition to be more like Jesus's?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Who is someone whom you are praying to come to know Jesus? How might you serve them to bring them to God?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you asked Jesus for something, but now realize your motives (and maybe the actual request) weren't the best at the time.
2. The mother of James & John asks Jesus a question. What was it? How does the request reveal her heart? Can you identify with this mom?
3. What one request would you ask Jesus right now?
4. Jesus contrasts Gentile rulers and their kingdom (v. 25) with Jesus and His kingdom (v. 26-28). Explain the differences.
5. In what way(s) might your attitude and behavior change to be more in line with Jesus and His kingdom? Spend some time praying for one another.

Additional Reading

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: A Commentary on Matthew 13-28*

So what should the ambitious person ("whoever in your group wants to be great") do? Jesus gives a three-word program: *Estai hymon diakonos*, literally, "Be [y'all's] servant"! The *hymon*, plural "your," is emphasized by location, so that Jesus' directive says, "the person in your midst who wants to be great must make the fundamental decision to be the servant of all the rest of you." The imperative *estai*, as Bonnard, 297, shows, "does not describe a long interior becoming, but the immediate acceptance of a way of life." It is the decision, above all else, to be a *servant* of those to whom one is given. This is Jesus' cure for the deep longing to be great. This seems to me to be an entirely new kind of greatness. Jesus is constantly challenging!

Diakonos means, first of all, "table waiter" [with an ignoble ring]; *doulos* is even more demeaningly, "slave." Surprisingly, service is the key to the Christian doctrines of work and leadership. It may also be the key to happiness. In Plato's Gorgias, Callicles asks (characteristically for Greeks), "How can anyone be happy when he is the slave of anyone else at all?" Jesus turns this aristocratic ideal on its head, and in one of cultural history's dramatic reversals he asks, in effect, "How can anyone be happy unless one is the slave of everyone else?"

Because culture so ceaselessly directs us in exactly the opposite direction, up, believers must pray almost daily for the wisdom and courage to go counterculturally *down*. But seeking to be a great "downer," in all imaginative service and with all created and charismatic ambition, is so right that it comes close to being Jesus' definition of a happy life.

KING JESUS IS MORE THAN WE DREAMED

Matthew 20:29-21:10

After an initial glance at today's text, some of you may be confused. This is understandable. We have combined two passages of seemingly disparate stories into one story. We even ignored the chapter division!

It's ok; take a deep breath. I hope by the end of this small page you will at least understand, even if you do not completely agree.

The Bible is a beautiful, rich, and intricately designed series of books. Each book contains high literature and shows the work of a skilled hand, a hand which was guided by the Holy Spirit. We sometimes forget that the Bible is literature, and that as literature more than just a verse or two can impact how we understand a passage.

Our passage at hand has a rich and varied history of interpretation, all of which teaches us about Jesus Christ as our king. But when we look at it considering the story beforehand, different details emerge.

The blind men, though physically incapable of sight, saw Jesus more clearly than the crowd. Ironically, the blind men, called Jesus their king as the Son of David, but needed a prophet to bring healing in a miraculous sign.

In the next story, the crowd called Jesus a prophet, but treated him as a king come to judge the Romans. Only one of these groups truly received Him as He is, and so rested on Him by faith. Thus, we learn that faith is more important than sight, for by the lens of faith we can truly perceive Christ as the Son of God, our Savior.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

Which office of Christ (prophet, priest, king) means more to you at this moment? Dwell on Him as your priest/prophet/king and what that means for your life. Look up different passages.

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Most scholars agree that the crowd cheering Jesus is the same crowd who will scream for His crucifixion in a matter of days. Why was this? What did they misunderstand about Jesus? Do you see this tendency in yourself?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Are people today wanting Jesus to be more of a prophet, priest, or king? How can you talk to people in ways that correct this misunderstanding? How would it inform your evangelism?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you cried out to God for mercy, and He responded.
2. Put yourself in the shoes of the blind men. Imagine their struggles. Then imagine how they must have felt when Jesus approached them and healed them.
3. What difficulty do you face right now? How might this story encourage you?
4. Jesus enters Jerusalem. Imagine what this must have been like for Him.
5. The crowds honor Jesus in word and deed. How might you honor Him right now?
6. Spend some time praying for one another, especially regarding difficulties you currently face and how you want to honor Jesus in your life.

Additional Reading

Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Churchbook: A Commentary on Matthew 13-28*

There are two closely related and yet contrasting points here.

(1) In this story even more than in the previous one, Jesus, as it were, "comes out of the closet" and publicly acknowledges his Messiahs hip.

(2) Yet by choosing a donkey for this "confession," Jesus perfectly illustrates his modest Messiahship. Thus we have another text in which the two great truths about Jesus are illumined - what early theologians called the doctrine of the two natures (Jesus' true deity and true humanity) or what modern exegesis calls the authority and the lowliness of Jesus.

It is of critical importance to the health of the church - it is a main issue - that the church preaches Jesus in fidelity to both truths. If she does not, she tilts unhealthily in either a spiritualistic or a secularistic direction. Jesus must be defined in two ways: he is the crucified Messiah (16:13-21), the modest King, the lowly Lord, the human God. The NT gospel revels in this duality. Deny either Jesus' true deity or his true humanity and the spell of the gospel is broken.

KING JESUS IS MORE THAN WE DREAMED

Matthew 21:12-22

Miracles are signs due to the fact that they always point to something else. This is very clear in the Gospel of John, where Jesus often follows a miracle with a teaching (see John 6). However, even if that sequence is not as clear in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), it nonetheless still exists. We see in all the evangelists that Jesus is never arbitrary. He was always on the mission given Him by the Father.

But of the many miracles, the cursing of the fig tree seems almost random. You can picture the disciples saying, "What did that tree ever do to you?" One time, my professor, Dr. Lanier, was teaching on the Gnostic gospels where adolescent Jesus does some weird things like turning stones to birds to attack people mean to Him. My instructor called this, "Harry Potter Jesus." This text seems like that Jesus, willy-nilly doing miracles for very human reasons.

Once again, we must recall how purposeful Jesus was, especially with His disciples. The scant explanation He gives does not help matters. But, as is so often the case, if we zoom out, Jesus was giving a word-picture, a tangible parable, of the lesson He taught in the last two sections. His supernatural power points to His judicial power. In the miracle, He is shown to be the One coming to judge the living and the dead.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 Times. Record any observations.

How do we see the compassion of Jesus in this passage? How is it connected to the righteous anger He displays here?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Jesus's heart in this passage is that we bear fruit. But, He also said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing." Why then do you think the Pharisees failed to produce fruit (see next question for a hint)?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

In your ambition to produce fruit, are you relying on Jesus or your own efforts?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time you were angry for a righteous cause. What was the situation? How was it resolved? If you could go back, would you change anything?
2. Jesus is angry. Why?
3. To what extent do you resonate with Jesus' desires for God's house and God's people? How might your thoughts, affections, and actions change to be more in line with His?
4. Why do you think Jesus cursed the fig tree? What does this action reveal about His character?
5. Jesus tells the disciples, "Whatever you ask in prayer, you will receive if you have faith." What does this mean? What does this not mean? How might you apply this promise to your life?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for one another, trusting in God's promise to hear and answer prayer.

Additional Reading

St. Augustine, "A Figurative, Prophetic Act" (Sermon 89.3-6.10)

Now in order to convey this truth, the Lord acted prophetically. By this I mean that in reference to the fig tree, it was not his will merely to exhibit a miracle but rather through this sign to convey an intimation of that which was to come. He often taught and persuaded us by such means. So even when our wills resist, he persuades us and brings us to faith.

We first ask how was it the tree's fault that it had no fruit? Even if it had no fruit in its proper season, its season of mature fruit, still the tree would bear no fault. For the tree is without sense and reason, so it could not be blamed. But to this perplexity is added another, which we read in the narrative of the other Evangelist who expressly mentions this: "It was not the time for that fruit." For this was the time when the fig tree was just shooting forth its tender leaves, which come, as we know, long before the fruit.

This sequence has a spiritual meaning. The time for fruit was soon coming with the day of the Lord's Passion, which was at hand. And so to make this clear, the Evangelist, to his credit, notes that "the time of figs was not yet." So then, if it was only a miracle that was being demonstrated and not something to be prophetically prefigured, it would have been much more worthy of the clemency and mercy of the Lord if he had found a withered tree and restored it to life. This would seem more in accord with his healing of the sick, cleansing lepers and raising the dead.

But to the contrary, as though against the ordinary rule of his charity, he found a green tree, not yet bearing fruit, even before is fruit-bearing season but still awaiting the hope of fruit, and what does he do? He withers it straight away! This is a prophetic anticipation of things soon to come, by which he in effect says to us: "I have no delight in the withering away of this tree. By doing so I want to convey to you that I am not acting absurdly but for a lesson you might take more seriously. It is not this literal tree that I have cursed. It is not on an insensible tree that I have inflicted punishment. Rather, I have made you fear, whoever you are who considers this matter, that you should not fail Christ when he is hungry and that you might hope to be in the coming season of fruit than to be in the preparatory season of leaves." ...

Therefore, beloved, I must tell you and teach you according to my poor abilities that which the Lord has given me for your benefit. I must convey to you what you may hold as a rule in the interpretation of all Scripture. Everything that is said or done is to be understood either in its literal signification, or else it signifies something figuratively; or it may contain both of these at once, both its own literal interpretation and a figurative signification also...

Thus Christ, wishing to convey this lesson to us, wanted us to produce fruit and in this way set forth for us a figurative story which is not a deceiving story but a story worthy of praise.

KING JESUS DESIRES ALLEGIANCE

Matthew 21:23-46

Words such as "allegiance," "authority," "king," "kingdom," and "fealty" may seem foreign to us as citizens of the United States. After all, 250 years ago we fought a war to overthrow a king we deemed a tyrant. Here in the USA, we have never been ruled really by a king. There was an early push to call the president, "His Highness," but George Washington, that embodiment of the values of these United States, simply wanted to be called, "Mr. President."

Yet king and kingdom are indispensable biblical words. We cannot do without them. Part of God's plan to bring about His promises was to build a kingdom. When His people went into exile, our Lord comforted them with the hope of a new and better Son of David, a sovereign better than their past kings in every way.

Jesus is the fulfillment of these promises. But He is not just king over a small strip of land sandwiched between the Arabian Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. He is king over *everything*. He is the Son of God, the Branch of David, and Lord of all.

As the Lord of all creation, all authority has been given to Him. So, when the Pharisees question such authority, Jesus lays it all out in stories that reveal their hearts. Despite claiming to be the people of God, they are not loyal to God's chosen king, rather they are loyal to only themselves. They seek to preserve their own power and authority instead of acknowledging its rightful source.

And so, the question comes to us: who are we loyal to? Is it to ourselves or to God? Where is your allegiance? We can either willingly bow to the Son or ultimately be forced to at the day of judgment. Either way, every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is King, to the glory of God the Father.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

Why is Jesus the only king worthy of our allegiance? What gives Him the authority to be Lord? (see Philippians 2).

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Does your life show God as your king, or is your allegiance to someone else, perhaps something else? Repent of false allegiances in your life.

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Read 1 Peter 2:11-12. Why is it important for our mission to the world that we live as citizens of heaven?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a time when you experienced authority being used in an unhealthy way. How did that impact you?
2. The chief priests & elders and Jesus both exercise authority. Compare and contrast their use of it. Which are you more drawn to and why?
3. Jesus tells two parables. What is the main point of each parable?
4. Where do you see yourself in these parables? How might you respond to Jesus' teaching today?
5. Take some time to pray for those whose hearts are hard towards Jesus. Also, spend some time praying for one another—that your hearts would not be hardened but softened towards Jesus more and more.

Additional Reading

Robert Farrar Capon, *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*

Between the fear that Jesus will upset their political balancing act with Rome and the resentment they feel at his attacks upon themselves, they decide that his (to them) pretense of *exousía* (authority) has to be stopped forthwith. Hence their question, “By what authority...?”

But Jesus' *exousía* — his unique claim to an authority based on who he is, not on what he can prove himself to be — is not something he can justify to their satisfaction. He is asking them to believe in him; they, at best, are trying to decide whether they can find room for him in their minds. And because Jesus knows there is no way of ending such a standoff, he simply contents himself with parrying their thrusts. In the face of their questions, he continually frustrates them by being what he always was, a fox, a rebel, a bad boy who refuses to answer except with questions of his own. “Tell me,” he says. “The baptism of John — was it from heaven or from men?” In an instant, he has put them in a bind. If they say, “From heaven,” they know he will ask them, “Why then didn't you believe (*episteúsate*) him?” and if they say, “From men,” they will have to answer to the people, “because all held that John was really a prophet” (Mark 11:29-32). Accordingly, they run for the first shabby intellectual cover they can find: “We do not know,” they answer him. And Jesus, diving nervily into the same cover, replies, “Neither will I tell you by what *exousía* I do these things.”

In its form, this exchange is simply an example of Jesus' facility with the tricks of rabbinical argument; but in its substance, it is far more than that. As far as he is concerned, there are only two central considerations in his ministry, now or ever: his own authority — his *exousía* as who he is — and their trust (*pístis*) or distrust in him personally. He is not in the business of giving them arguments that will prove he has

some derivative right to their attention; he is only inviting them to believe. This is the hard stone in the gracious peach of his Good News: salvation is not by works, be they physical, intellectual, moral, or spiritual; it is strictly by faith in him. And therefore it is not just these present, official questioners whom he refuses to answer: Jesus never answers any such questions.

KING JESUS INVITES US Matthew 22:1-14

A key theme in the New Testament is that of mystery. In our parlance, mystery refers to stories about characters figuring out some hidden secret, usually who committed a heinous act, or stole some artifact from a museum, etc. The apostle Peter saw the Old Testament authors as detectives of a sort, writing, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” (1 Peter 1:10-11).

Our story today begins to unfold this mystery by providing a deeper glimpse into the reality of God's salvation in Christ. Paul tells us that this mystery is Jesus, but not just Jesus, that God would somehow save his covenant people, the Jews, and even include the Gentiles, or the nations. Perhaps referencing this parable, the apostle will even write that “this mystery: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Romans 11:25).

Jesus teaches us doctrine in story form, as He so often does. This parable reveals the mystery: some Jews will reject Jesus, so the door can open to the Gentiles. The prophets saw glimpses, and now Jesus pulls back the veil. Those that are invited, that should have come to the feast, instead rejected the offer. This is the hope of glory: that now salvation in Christ is offered to all who believe.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

Where do we see the grace of God in the parable? Where do we see His wrath?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

According to verse 11, what allows people into the feast? What do you think this refers to (see Romans 13:14)?

According to the above, what gives you the right to enter the feast? What are some things you are tempted to believe get you into the kingdom?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

What do verses 9-10 teach us about evangelism? Who are we to invite? Does your reaching out reflect this?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share about a wedding (could be yours!) and why it was special to you.
2. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. Talk about the parable and what sticks out to you.
3. What does this parable reveal about God's character and kingdom? What does it reveal about peoples' responses to God's character and kingdom?
4. How do you personally relate to this parable? How is Jesus inviting you to respond to Him today?
5. There are many who are currently not "worthy" to enter the wedding feast. Who is on your heart to pray for? How might you join with God in inviting them to the wedding?
6. Spend some time as a group praying for one another and for those who you long to respond to God's invitation to come to the wedding feast.

Additional Reading

Jared C. Wilson, *The Storytelling God: Seeing the Glory of Jesus in His Parables*

The invitation is similar to that of the previous parable. The excuse-making [from the Pharisees] is less explicit but still there. We have misbehaving servants in this case, much like the unfaithful servants in other parables. But in this story we encounter something strange: a guest at the party without the proper attire.

It is probably best not to overanalyze. The point of the parable, really, is that there will be no one in heaven who got there by mistake. You cannot sneak in. There is only one way, and it is to receive the invitation and obey its restrictions, which include clothing yourself in righteousness. And to be clothed in righteousness is to be clothed in Christ alone (Eph. 4:24; Gal. 3:27). Therefore, union with Christ through faith is the only way in.

The legalist expects to attend the wedding feast dressed in his personal best. He would be astounded to find his earthly lessers there, dressed much finer than he. As it turns out, the garb of the self-righteous is pretty ragged anyway (Isa. 64:6).

Those whom we categorize as "bad" as well as those we consider "good" will be in the kingdom of heaven, so long as they are dressed in the wedding garment of the gospel. And so we find, like the Pharisees in Jesus's view, we have as much goodness to repent of as badness. Like Paul, we must consider even our goodness as loss. Jesus is for losers.

KING JESUS AND TAXES PART TWO

Matthew 22:15-22

Once again, Jesus's enemies are seeking to trap Him in the area of politics and faith. Though a hotbed topic today, in first century Palestine the political climate was a bomb ready to explode. So, the Pharisees ask him about taxes. They knew that if Jesus told them to pay to Caesar, the Jews would reject Him, but if He said no, the Romans would seek Jesus out for crucifixion.

Scholars are divided on what exactly Jesus means. But it is clear that our Lord is brilliant. His answer is not his attempting to evade the issue. But He cuts at the heart of the issue, and in a way that disentangles Him from their trap.

As Christians, we are citizens that straddle the spheres. Jesus is Lord of all, but right now, we do live in a world dominated by sin, Satan, and the flesh. We are part of the church, the spiritual kingdom of Christ over which He reigns.

Yet, in a way, Jesus is Lord of both kingdoms. So, we pay taxes and do our civic duty, not for the sake of the ruler themselves, but because Jesus is the One who sovereignly placed them over us. We pay the tax because He commands us to. But the second of those duties, to the state or the church, conflict, we follow and serve one Lord, whose kingdom will one day fill heaven and earth.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

How do we see the genius of Jesus in his answer? What if he had answered differently?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

In his answer, Jesus treads the line between total compliance and resistance towards the government. Where do you tend to fall in that? How does Jesus's teaching course correct your posture?

What is of ultimate concern to you: politics or Christ? How does placing Christ first in our hearts allow us to live as good citizens?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

There is much disagreement on politics today. How does a proper view on faith and politics allows us to love our neighbors more? How does having Jesus as our king center our witness on what is most important?

Sermon Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Share a funny (not a serious one!!) story about taxes.
2. Jesus is asked about His view on taxes, but there was more to this question. What were the Pharisees seeking to do?
3. Summarize Jesus' answer. What other passage(s) might further articulate what our posture should be towards the government?
4. In what way(s) might your attitude and behavior change to be more in line with Jesus' instructions to relate to our earthly rulers and our heavenly king?
5. Jesus' answer not only provided direction for how we should think about taxes but also silenced the Pharisees. Reflect on Jesus' wisdom displayed in this situation. How might you follow His example when others seek to "trap" or "trick" you?
6. Spend some time praying for our rulers, our country, and our world. Also, pray for wisdom in how best to live as citizens of both a temporary, earthly kingdom and an eternal, heavenly one.

Additional Reading

Rev. Dr. Timothy Keller, "Arguing About Politics"

The point [is]: Jesus the Galilean is envisioning a revolution... a different sort of revolution than Judas the Galilean [the disciple who was a zealot and a rebel against Rome]. Jesus Christ was advocating neither acceptance of the system nor straightforward political revolt.

Yes, Jesus is saying, "There will be a revolution happening. The temple will be cleansed, but not in the way you envision." So that's the reason why they're amazed, because Jesus is not saying acquiesce, be a good citizen, but he's also not saying revolt, don't pay the taxes. He is saying something really different. He says, "I am a revolutionary, but not the kind of revolutionary you've ever seen before."

Some groups said, "We're not going to be part of the political system at all. The way we're going to deal with the corruption and the injustices, we're just not going to have anything to do with it. We're going to live our own lives. We just want to be happy. We're just going to move over here."

And Jesus says, "No... You must render to Caesar. You may not [withdraw]." He does not allow his followers to opt out of the system and to become unpolitical and have absolutely nothing to do with the system...

He won't let his followers drop out of the political process or see the political process as the only or main way in which to deal with injustice. And yet Jesus will not give up on this idea of the Kingdom of God. He says, "There is an authority of God over Caesar."

A king without a quarter, a king without any money at all. A king who says, foxes have holes and birds have their nests, but the son of man doesn't have a place to lay his head. This kind of king is not just bringing another, you know, a better, he's not going to be a better king. He's bringing an utterly different concept of kingship, and therefore he's bringing an utterly different concept of revolution. His revolution revolts against revolts. It revolutionizes revolutions.

KING JESUS IS LORD OF THE LIVING Matthew 22:23-33

Like other doctrines, heaven is a marvelous mystery. But unlike others, it is perhaps the one concerning which we have the most questions.

We ask, "Will my dog be in heaven?"

Or, "Will we work in heaven or worship?"

My question is, "What is the thermostat set to in the afterlife?"

So, it is no surprise that Jesus is asked about the resurrection and eternal life. Everyone has questions about it, all which we will not have solid answers for until we arrive. Jesus, of course, knows the answers because he is from there that He came.

But the Sadducees do not question Him with our innocent curiosity tinged with anticipation. They ask seeking to trap Him. His answer to the question about the eternal status of our dog would not earn Him the ire of those in the highest positions of religious and political power as these questions would.

I conceive of Jesus as a White House Press Secretary, parrying question after question in rapid succession in an environment of intense pressure. But our Lord is far more gifted, and His answers astound all and divide them. Some see genius, and His divinity and identity as the Son of God and Son of Man. Others wring their hands in frustration.

Jesus Christ is Wisdom and Truth incarnate. He shows it in His answer here, giving His people hope that He is the God of the living, and confronting His doubters with an astonishing answer.

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

As you consider eternal life, what questions or hopes come to your mind? How does Jesus ground our hopes in who God is for us in the midst of our questions?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

How does Jesus's statement that He is the God of the living help and comfort you as you consider loved ones that have died in the Lord?

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

What does Jesus's answer to the question about marriage in heaven teach us about the purpose and reality of marriage?

Discussion Questions

1. Share a crazy, preposterous story with your group. The crazier the better!
2. The Sadducees share a crazy story about marriage and the resurrection to trap Jesus. What was it and what were they trying to do?
3. Jesus' answer helps us better understand what our future will be like. What do you learn about marriage and heaven from this passage? What excites you? What confuses or challenges you?
4. Jesus says, "You know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God." How would you assess your knowing of these things? How might you grow?
5. Once again, Jesus not only answers his enemies' questions but also silences them and astonishes all who listened. To what extent are you in awe of Him today? How might you grow in seeking His wisdom?

Additional Reading

"The God of the Living," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-of-living>

Assuming the life to come will be just like life in the present led the Sadducees to ask Jesus what they considered a resurrection-disproving question: Which of the seven brothers would have as his wife the one woman they all married in succession before they died (Mark 12:18–23)? The Sadducees believed such a situation demonstrated that people will not rise from the dead. Their scenario would make one or all of the brothers guilty of adultery if all of them were living and married to her (Lev. 18:16; 20:21), and surely God would not cause people to break His law by raising them to an adulterous situation.

Jesus responded by criticizing the Sadducees for not knowing God's Word (Mark 12:24). First, they wrongly assumed that life in the resurrection would be exactly the same as life in this present world. There will be continuity, but there will be no marriage in the resurrection. We will be like angels, who do not get married (v. 25).

More importantly, the Sadducees were wrong about the resurrection of the dead because Scripture proclaims that we will rise from the grave. Even the five books of Moses, the only portion of the Old Testament that the Sadducees used for their theology, teach the resurrection. Jesus pointed to Exodus 3 as proof for the resurrection, noting that God said to Moses, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Mark 12:26–27). Implicitly, our Lord argued on the basis of both the verb tense and theology. If death ended the patriarchs' existence, God would have said, "I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Our Creator's use of the present tense implies that they live on to worship Him.

Moreover, the Lord always keeps His promises, and His promise to the patriarchs—long life in the Promised Land, ultimately, the new creation (Gen. 12:1–3; Matt. 5:5)—can be fulfilled only if they will live forever.

KING JESUS COMMANDS LOVE

Matthew 22:34-40

The Jewish leaders continue to pepper Jesus with questions. This time, it is about the greatest commandment. They are trying to peg Jesus as caring about one thing more than another. If He says the seventh, for example, well then, He is a teacher who cares more about sexual purity. Or maybe they can then accuse Him of hypocrisy. After all, does He not fellowship with prostitutes?

Our Lord is so wise though. He cuts through the question with astonishing wisdom.

He offers a summary of the law, showing its true purpose and pointing us to the reality behind the shadow of those stone tablets. The substance is love.

Jesus, also, is asked which is the greatest commandment. And they want one. Does He care more about worship or ethics? But again, in his answer, Jesus shows that one cannot exist without the other. Love for God moves a person towards love for the neighbor, with the latter only really being possible once God is adored and worshipped as Lord.

It is a lifetime endeavor perhaps impossible for us. Only one human has ever done it truly. Thankfully, He did it for us. He showed us the way, covered our failures in our attempts, and now makes it possible for us to do so empowered by His Spirit. What a Savior!

Personal Reflection

TREASURE (Questions about God)

Re-read the text 2-3 times. Record any observations.

Dwell on Jesus's answer. How does it reveal His deep concern for the heart? In what ways do we stray from this teaching in our teaching on what it means to be good?

GROW (Questions about you, your sin, and your relationship to God)

Who is on the throne to your heart? Is love of self, love of neighbor, or love of something else in place where the love of God should be? Lay this before our Lord and ask Him to take His proper place in your affections.

GO (Questions about your relationship to the world)

Why is love for God and all that it entails essential for love of neighbor? Why only when God is in his proper place in our hearts can we actually love those around us?

are doing our best. Yet Jesus does not say that we will learn to love our neighbor only when we have learned to love ourselves; he says that we will be able to love ourselves only when we learn to love ourselves as God loves us and our neighbor. Neither Aristotle nor Jesus knew our modern distinction between egoism and altruism. That distinction has encouraged many to assume that the love Jesus recommends is complete self-giving altruism. Jesus's combination of the two commandments, however, challenges the assumption that we know ourselves well enough to be capable of altruism. Rather, to learn to love our neighbor as ourselves requires that we learn to be befriended by God so that we will have selves sufficient for love.

God is love. The heart of the life of the church and of every Christian is love. Love, however, is not easy, but difficult and hard. Unfortunately, the emphasis on love as the defining characteristic of the Christian life not only resulted in the Christian accommodation to the world's standards of the good, but also made it difficult for Christians to understand what it might mean for us to face the hard demands of love. In particular, the separation of love from the one who has come to teach us what it means to be loved by God by making us disciples tempts Christians to sentimental accounts of love. As a result, accounts of Christian morality are often hard to distinguish from utilitarianism. Once Christians make love a relatively unspecified ideal, they are tempted, if not willing, to do great evils that goods may come because they have lost the skills necessary to discern good from evil. Much hangs on how the law and the prophets fit with Jesus's response to the lawyer concerning which commandment is the greatest...

To be a Christian is to be called to a life of love, but that calling is a lifelong task that requires our willingness to be surprised by what love turns out to be.