



Matthew 19

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Tape #8018
By Chuck Smith

As Matthew records for us the departing of Jesus from the area of the Galilee. Most of the ministry of Christ was centered around the sea of Galilee. He would go to Jerusalem for the feast days according to the law. But the majority of His ministry was centered around the Galilee region. But He is leaving now the Galilee for the last time until after His resurrection when He meets His disciples here. He is on His way to Jerusalem to the cross. And so, Matthew tells us that,

When He had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and He came to the coast of Judaea beyond Jordan; (19:1)

An area known as Perea, on the other side of the Jordan river, and leaving now this area of the Galilee, there are tensions that are built up. As we have mentioned as we were coming through, Herod has heard of Jesus and things are not well there. This tension is building among the Pharisees and so He is moving outside of the area to the other side of the Jordan river for a time. But He continues to minister to the multitudes. So we notice...

Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there. (19:2)

His ministry of healing continued. In the nineteenth chapter, we find Jesus as He, first of all, ministers to the multitudes, then we find Him being challenged by the Pharisees, and then we see Him as He blesses the little children, and then we see Him dealing with the rich young ruler, and finally, with the disciples, His words of comfort and hope for the future.

So, verse three, it's important to note that the Pharisees came to Jesus with the intention of trapping Him. They intend to create a controversy. They intend to split the opinion of the people concerning Jesus. And so the question they asked is a lead question, the purpose is to entrap Jesus and to bring criticism against Him. So the Pharisees also came. There were multitudes coming to be healed, but with them came the Pharisees,

And they were tempting him, and saying, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? (19:3)

They are challenging Jesus on the subject of divorce. Now there was in the law the provision for divorce. It was rather ambiguous, if a man's wife no longer found favor in his eyes and he found some uncleanness in her, let him give her a writing of divorce, it said. There was no provision for a woman to divorce her husband but there was this provision for a husband to divorce his wife. But what in the world does it mean she found no longer favor in his eyes but there was some uncleanness in her? That was the issue. The interpreting of that phrase.

There were two major schools of thought. One led by rabbi by the name of Shmai. And Shmai took a very narrow position on this. He said the uncleanness was adultery. And that that was the only legal grounds for a man to put away his wife or divorce his wife was that of adultery. Incidentally, according to Josephus, there were two causes that were demanding and where divorce was compulsory--the one was adultery, I forget the other. They would say that divorce was compulsory. There was another rabbi by the name of Hallel that took an extremely liberal view of "she found no longer favor in his eyes and he found some uncleanness in her." He interpreted that as meaning anything by which she displeased him. Maybe not fixing his meals to his satisfaction. And he took a very liberal position on divorce. And so the Jewish people were divided between the teachings of the Rabbi Shmai and Rabbi Hallel. So they are seeking to draw Jesus into this controversy, the question is, Can a man put away his wife for any cause? According to Hallel, yes. According to Shmai, no.

So they're trying to put Jesus into the controversy because they know that when people are polarized on an issue, that's the easiest way to divide people. How Satan uses that so often in the church. A divisive tactic

of Satan is to polarize people on issues and it's easy to create division. With the Jews there was the polarizing between the Pharisees and the Sadducees over the subject of spirits, angels and resurrection. The Pharisees believed in all, but the Sadducees believed in none of it. And thus, if you wanted to create a division in a crowd, all you had to do is bring up the subject of resurrection or spirits and you've divided, you've got a big argument going between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Paul recognized this and when he was brought before the Council, knowing that they were divided between Pharisees and Sadducees. Paul said I believe in the resurrection of the dead and for this cause, I've been arrested and I stand here before you. It started an uproar. The Sadducees and the Pharisees began to argue and yell at each other over the issue and Paul just sat down and let them go at it.

Satan so often uses these divisive tactics by just polarizing people in positions and then bringing up the issue, and here we are dividing the church again. I don't like it, I like it... polarized. The people were polarized on the issue, they knew if they could draw Jesus into it, immediately no matter which side He took, He's going to lose the support of half the people.

So Jesus answered and said unto them, Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, (19:4)

Notice that Jesus goes back even before the law. In the law it said let him give her a writing of divorcement. But Jesus goes back before the law, in the beginning, God's original intent, God's original purpose. God's divine ideal is that marriage is for life. That is God's divine ideal, that when you make that commitment, when you take those vows, that it is a lifetime commitment. And it takes a lifetime of working out the differences. But you see, God intended that marriage be a process of completion. Plato, I think it was, who said that when God made man, He cut him in half and so there were two, but a person could not be a whole person until they found their other half. There were two halves walking around. And the ideal is to find the other half and thus you become complete. And so the purpose of marriage was complementary, that you might become a complete person through marriage. And that is, God intended that marriage be a completion, that the two become one. So Jesus goes back to the original principle of God in the creating of man, "In the beginning, He made them male and female."

And He said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh? (19:5)

Wherefore they are no more two, but they are one. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder. (19:6)

So Jesus took a very strict and narrow view concerning divorce. "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Now, this is exactly what they were hoping Jesus would say. They sought to close the trap on Him. And so,

They answered and said unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? (19:7)

Everybody recognized that God gave the law through Moses. That was a given. There was no question in their minds that God spoke to Moses the law for the people. And the Torah was recognized as God's Word. Now they have Jesus making a declaration that seems to be in conflict with the Mosaic law. And if Jesus is saying something that is in conflict with the Mosaic law, then how can He claim to be God? Because we know that God spoke through Moses and gave the law, now if Jesus is saying something that is contradictory to that, then we can point out that Jesus cannot truly be of God. And so how is it then... they close the trap, you are in conflict with God's Word through Moses. Jesus answered,

He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts allowed you to put away your wives: but [and again going back] from the beginning it was not so. (19:8)

Jesus is going to the divine ideal in marriage. The two become one. It's a lifetime commitment. But, because of the hardness of the hearts and the inability of people to come to God's divine ideal, God made provision through the law of Moses for a man to then divorce his wife. But that was because of the hardness of the hearts of the people, their failure to come to God's divine ideal. It is God, more or less, accommodating the weakness of man. It isn't really the divine purpose and plan and the best, but it is a provision that God made when people, because of the hardness of their hearts, can't achieve or attain to

God's best. And then Jesus went on to say,

And I say to you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication or adultery, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. (19:9)

Jesus is very strong, very firm in His teaching concerning divorce. But again acknowledging that God made provision for people whose hearts are hardened and cannot and will not come to God's divine ideal. So that divorce and remarriage is not an unpardonable sin. It is a failure to rise to the divine ideal.

His disciples said unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is better not to marry. (19:10)

Man, if you got to stick with her the rest of your life, better not to marry.

But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying,

There are those whose hearts are hardened. They can't receive this.

...only those to whom it is given. (19:11)

And then He introduces the subject of eunuchs,

For there are some eunuchs,

They are talking about better not to marry, and there are some who are eunuchs which were born with that physical deformity.

from their mother's womb: there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs by men:

This was a common practice in the eastern culture, those men who had charge of the harems of the potentates were castrated, as well as the priest in the temple of Diana of the Ephesians.

and then there are some which are eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. (19:12)

Origin, one of the early church fathers, in reading this passage of scripture, castrated himself and later on realized that he had made a wrong interpretation of it but it was too late.

Then there were brought to him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray:

The mothers wanted Jesus to bless their little children, to lay His hands on them and pray for them.

and the disciples rebuked them. (19:13)

The disciples felt that they were doing the right thing. Jesus was under a lot of pressure at this point. He had been talking to them about His death. They knew that trouble awaited Him in Jerusalem. They knew the tension that was existing over Jesus throughout the country. And thus they thought that they were protecting Jesus by telling the mothers don't bother Him with your babies. He's too busy for that and He's too involved with other things.

But Jesus said, Allow the little children, and forbid them not, to come to me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. (19:14)

And he laid his hands on them, and He departed from there. (19:15)

I love it that Jesus is always touchable. Never too busy, never too pressured even to take time with little children. How far that is from some of these important people that we see on television today who sort of isolate and insulate themselves, and become untouchable.

And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? (19:16)

And he said unto him, Why do you call me good? there is none good but one, and that is, God:

This man had a consciousness that life must be more than what he had yet experienced. Aware of an emptiness, there was that lack of fulfillment. He saw in Jesus a quality of life that was higher, he desired it. And he was looking for some good thing that he might do in order to earn this extraordinary life, eternal life, this age abiding life. It's interesting how that so many people are endeavoring by good works to be saved. But "by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, and not of works lest any man should boast." And yet there are always those who are endeavoring by their good works to be acceptable by God. But in reality, our good works are like filthy rags in God's sight. And by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. And though throughout the Bible the justification by faith is declared, proclaimed, illustrated, emphasized, it seems like man is just an inveterate religionist who feels that by good works and good efforts, he can be accepted by God. All of the religious systems of man have an emphasis

upon the good works and prescribed works for those that would enter into the kingdom of heaven. But in Christianity, it's not by works of righteousness that we have done, and our works avail nothing as far as our salvation is concerned. And thus he was making the common mistake that so many people make, feeling that somehow he could earn his salvation by some good work. "What good thing shall I do that I might have eternal life?"

I think that the reason why we are so attracted by good works is we love to boast, and if we could be saved by good works, then think of how we could boast about that. If God would say, Well, you've got to read so many chapters and you've got to pray so many hours and you got to lead so many people to Jesus and you got to do... and we could keep all of these lists, then we could say, Hey look, I've got gold stars all the way! And there is that tendency to glory in our flesh. Or desire to glory in our flesh. And so this man is just so typical.

It is interesting that the Jews today have a whole system of righteousness by works. And the most holy day of the religious calendar, Yom Kippur, the day when in the past the priest would go into the Holy of Holies to bring the blood of the goat to atone for the sins of the nation; rather than looking to the sacrifice for the covering of their sins, Yom Kippur today is a day of reflection, you sit and you think of all of your evil works this past year and then over against them you weigh all of your good deeds of the past year. And you sort of put them in the scale balances and hopefully, your good deeds will overbalance your evil. And thus you can feel confident another year... but that's why the week before Yom Kippur they're all going around helping little ladies across the street and trying to build up points on the positive side so that when they have to stop and reflect, they've got the credit there of I've done so many things. Here he is, caught up in the religion, "What good thing shall I do? Good Master..." But Jesus said, "Why do you call me good? there is none good but one, and that is, God:"

Jesus is saying one of two things: He is saying I am no good, or He is saying I am God. And He's trying to quicken this man's conscience. The reason why you called me good is that you recognized something in Me. Something that is true, I am God. Why did you call Me good? There is none good but one and that's God. You call Me good because I am God. That's what you see in Me. That divine life is that which you are desiring, it's that which you see that I have, that brought you to Me with the question. And He's trying to just draw him and to lead him with His question into an understanding that was there subconsciously but He wanted him to really comprehend the truth. What you see is God.

And then Jesus said,

but if you would enter into life, keep the commandments. (19:17)

He saith unto him, Which?

That's a peculiar question because if Jesus would say keep the commandments, I would think all of them. But he is wanting a definition here, which? And so Jesus gave to him the commandments from the second table of the law, the commandments that deal with man's relationship with his fellowman. The first table of the law dealt with man's relationship with God, Jesus didn't mention that here. And that to me is very interesting because the first table of the law is really basic to and necessary for the second table of the law. You cannot have a right relationship with your fellowman until you have a right relationship with God. The right relationship with God precedes the right relationship with your fellowman. And so why Jesus would just jump to the second table of the law is an interesting enigma, in my own mind.

Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, (19:18)

Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (19:19)

Second table of the law.

The young man said unto him, All of these things have I kept from my youth up: [I've done all of these] what lack I yet? (19:20)

I've done these but I'm still not satisfied. I still haven't achieved or attained... I'm still feeling this need for something more. I'm not fulfilled. What do I lack yet?

Now here is an interesting problem. The last of these commands that Jesus gave to him is, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. And we read that he was very rich, he had great possessions. It would seem if

he loved his neighbor as himself, he would have been helping some of his unfortunate neighbors who didn't have enough. Wouldn't you think? And yet he said I've done all of these from my youth up. We oftentimes, I think, have a view of ourselves that differs from God's view of us. And many times we're prone to overlook our flaws and our faults. We've justified ourselves. We can give good reasons for why we reacted as we did and why we continue to react that way. But are they valid in the eyes of God?

Jesus said unto him, If you would be perfect, then go and sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. (19:21)

Now He's getting to the first table of the law. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." And rather than just give him that commandment, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," had Jesus said that... Well I don't have any other gods, no doubt he would have said that. But Jesus points out that he does have a god. It is his possessions. They are mastering his life.

Riches are not wrong in and of themselves. But if your riches master your life, if you are ruled by your riches, if they are the most important thing to you, if they have precedence over your relationship with God, then they are wrong. There were many people in the Bible that God blessed with great riches, it isn't sinful to have riches. It is wrong when riches are above God in your life. And that was the case for this young man. His riches were the thing that was standing in the way of his following Jesus Christ. The real essence of the word of Jesus to him was follow Me. And that's, if you want eternal life, follow Jesus. That's the essence, that's the heart of it. You want eternal life, follow Jesus.

This "Go and sell what you have and give to the poor" is not universally applicable. If Jesus were talking to you tonight, it may be that He would put His finger on something entirely different in your life, that which is holding you back from following Him completely. That which has captured your heart and that which has become sort of the master passion in your life, that which is ahead of God and keeps you from following Jesus. That's the thing that He would finger in your life tonight. With this young man, it was riches that was standing in the way, but that doesn't really affect many of us. But there are other things that can stand in the way of your following Jesus, that hinder your following Him. And so Jesus put the finger on the issue in his life that was keeping him from following the Lord.

The promise is you will have treasure in heaven. Come and follow Me. That's the heart of the message. I am God. You want life? You want this divine life, this age abiding life? Follow Me.

But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (19:22)

We're told that he was a ruler by Luke, we are told here that he was a young man, verse twenty and again in verse twenty-two, and we're told that he had great possessions. And so it's called the story of the rich young ruler. Notice he had what most of us feel, If I just had that, man, I would be fully satisfied. As the old saying goes, "Too soon old, too late smart." Youth, if I was only young again and knew what I know now, if I only had enough riches, I would be satisfied, I would be happy, I would be content. But this fellow had it all; he had the riches, he was moral—when Jesus flashed on him these commandments, he said I've done all of those from the time I was a youth, I've kept these—he was moral, he was wealthy, he was young, but yet he was aware of a lack. There was still something unfulfilled. He lacked this life, this eternal life.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples,

As this young fellow was walking away, head down, sorrowful. He came with all kinds of expectations and hopes but he goes away sorrowful. When the Lord puts His finger on the issue in your life that's holding you back from following Him, that is when that choice must be made. Do I deny myself? Do I bring these things to the cross that I might follow Jesus? Or do I go away and walk my own path apart from Him? Decision time. When the Spirit of God speaks to your heart and shows you those things that are hindering your walk with Jesus, those things that are keeping you from following Him completely. Then Jesus said to His disciples,

Truly I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. (19:23)

Another gospel said how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (19:24)

What is Jesus saying? Easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. There are those who will say, at the great gates of the city there was always a small little gate so that at night when the gates of the city were barred and someone would come and need entrance into the city, they could get down and squeeze through this little sub-gate which was called the eye of the needle. There are those, and you can read commentaries that will tell you that to get the camel through that little sub-gate, they had to pull on the thing and push on the thing and it just took all kinds of effort to get the camel through. There are those that would like to think that they are like the rich young ruler who are looking for some good work that they can do to be saved and they like to think that if you work hard enough, push hard enough, pull hard enough, you can make it. But Jesus eliminated all of that when He said...

The disciples when they heard that, they were amazed, and they said, Who then can be saved? (19:25)

And Jesus said, With men it is impossible;

With men, it is impossible, there is not a single work that you can do or combination of works that you can do to save yourself. Salvation is beyond man's capacity. With men it is impossible, by pulling and pushing and exerting a lot of effort you'll never make it. By being honest and moral and sincere, you'll never make it. By being religious, you'll never make it. With man it is impossible, man cannot save himself with his greatest efforts. Salvation is of the Lord, and with God, it's even possible to save you.

With God all things are possible. (19:26)

I rest on that.

Then Peter answered, he said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed you;

This fellow was called upon to go sell, give to the poor, come and follow Me, you'll have treasure in heaven. That was the promise. Peter said, Lord, we have forsaken everything, we've left it all and followed You.

what are we going to have? (19:27)

And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That you which have followed me, in the recreation [literally in the Greek, the making new, in this new order that I am bringing, in this new creation, new order] when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, you also shall sit upon the twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (19:28)

What shall you have? When we bring in the new order, God's divine order, then you will sit with Me, as I sit upon the throne of His glory, you will sit upon twelve thrones and judging the twelve tribes.

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brothers, or sisters, or fathers, or mothers, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake,

If your receiving Jesus Christ has caused you your earthly relationships... In those days, for those Jews many times it was at the price of earthly relationships. And even to the present day in Orthodox Jewry, if a son or a daughter received Jesus Christ, they'll be disowned by the family. They will even in extreme cases have funeral services for them and don't even recognize that they live anymore. They treat them as though they were dead. There is a tradition of the early church that says that Paul actually had to give up his wife for the Gospel's sake. Some early church traditions say that Paul was married and had two sons. To be a member of the Sanhedrin, which Paul was, marriage was required. In fact, they taught that if you weren't married by the time you were twenty years old, that you were disobeying the law of God. And the only excuse not to be married by the time you were twenty, is if you were studying the law. But you should be married by the time you were twenty years old and that you should have children because the law of God was to replenish the earth. But the early traditions say that Paul had to actually give up his wife for the cause of Christ.

Now this is interesting going back to what Jesus had said earlier concerning divorce. And now He is saying, if you gave up a wife... so this is not for adultery's sake, this is just for the kingdom of God's sake, because the breach between you and your wife was created because of your faith in Christ and her lack of faith. Paul seems to confirm this in Corinthians when he says, If an unbelieving wife is not willing to... or when an unbelieving husband is not willing to remain with the believing wife, let him depart. She is not under bondage in such cases. And so there are times when the faith in Jesus Christ, determining to follow Jesus Christ, does cause you your family. And no one has forsaken houses or homes or brothers or sisters or

fathers or mother or wife or children or lands for My Name's sake, if you do this, you...

shall receive a hundredfold and inherit everlasting life. (19:29)

God will not be a debtor to man. You can't give up anything but what God doesn't replace it a hundredfold. He'll not be a debtor to you. And if for the kingdom of God's sake you give up anything, you can be sure that God will make it back to you over and over again, a hundredfold.

But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first. (19:30)

Many of the important people of the earth will be last, those that have first prominence today. And many of those that are last will be first, the new order established by Jesus.

Father, we thank You for Your Word, plant it now in our heart, as seed may it produce in us the fruit of the Spirit. Lord we thank You for Your Word and we ask Your blessing now, water it, cultivate it in our hearts until it springs forth into fruit. In Jesus' Name we pray, Amen.