

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

AUGUST 29TH-30TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY (MATTHEW 19:23-30)

Jesus' encounter with the wealthy young man in vs. 16-22 was surprising to His disciples because it challenged their understanding of wealth.

- Many Jews believed that riches were an evidence of God's blessings, therefore wealthy people who'd been blessed by God must be "good".
- But Jesus had challenged this young man's perception of his own "goodness" and shown him that eternal life isn't something that can be earned.

It's, "only with great difficulty that a rich person can enter the kingdom of heaven" (vs. 23).

- Many understand wealth only as a blessing, but often it can be a barrier.
- The love of money and desire for riches (1 Tim. 6:9-10) plunges people into ruin and destruction; and so often those with wealth can slip into a mindset where their security and hope is grounded in a bank account and not God.

If you're wealthy and comfortable in this life, the idea of sacrificing and giving it up to find life in the coming Kingdom is a hard sell.

- This is why Biblical Christianity is unpopular in America- there's very little we lack.
- The impossibility of a camel (the largest animal known to most people in that region) going through the eye of a needle is more impossible than the impossibility of a rich person entering the Kingdom (vs. 24).

With astonishment, the disciples asked, "who then can be saved?" (vs. 25)

- People in themselves don't have what it takes to enter the kingdom, but with God all things are possible (vs. 26).
- Eternal life isn't a merit badge for the successful or virtuous- it's a free gift for sinners.
- What a person can't do to save himself, God does through sovereign grace.

Unlike the young man, the disciples had left everything, and Peter asks if it's worth it (vs. 27).

- Jesus responds by assuring Peter that the rewards that await those who give up everything to come after Jesus are better than anything the world has to offer (vs. 28-29).
- Our radical surrender is actual a prudent investment with an 100 fold rate of return!

"The first will be last, and the last first" (vs. 30)- the respected and wealthy were turned away, while the ignored and overlooked were received.

- We're not to use a human yardstick when measuring eternal rewards-in the Kingdom economy radical surrender equals radical reward.
- The question for us is whether we will choose to live for short-term pleasures we can't keep or for long-term treasure we can't lose.

THE FIRST WILL BE LAST (MATTHEW 20:1-16)

Jesus illustrates the truth of vs. 30 by telling the disciples a parable about workers in a vineyard.

- Perhaps this is told partly in response to Peter's question in vs. 27 about the kind of rewards that await disciples who had given up everything.
- The mindset of the disciples might have been one of entitlement and spiritual pride born out of comparison, so the story addresses the issue of merit and motivation.

In the parable, day laborers were hired to work in a vineyard (vs. 1).

- A typical workday at that time lasted from 6am to 6pm, and pay was a denarius.
- In this parable some workers were hired at the beginning of the day, some at 9am, some at 12pm, some at 3pm, and others at 5pm (vs. 3-7).
- The workers were paid in reverse order, and everyone received the same (vs. 8-9).

The workers who were hired first, and thus worked longer than the rest, complained about those who'd been hired last being equally compensated (vs. 11-12)!

- By all accounts, this structure of compensation is absolutely unfair.
- The Jewish work ethic stated, "According to the labor is the reward"- therefore, if you get something good, you must've earned it.

But this landowner wasn't being unfair-he paid what was promised to those whom he hired at the beginning of the day (vs. 13) and he could do with his money whatever he pleased (vs. 15).

- What bothered the workers was that those who didn't seem to earn it as much as they did were rewarded as generously as they were.
- That seemed VERY unfair because of their sense of comparison and entitlement.

Jesus was revealing was that God's grace are not given according to our human standards.

- When we see rewards handed out in heaven, we're going to be in for some surprises- the "last will be first, and the first last" (vs. 16).
- None of us deserve eternal life or God's rewards- but He'll give them all the same to us by His standard of generosity, not our merit.

Grace could be defined as, "when the person from whom I have the right to expect nothing gives me everything".

- God's grace isn't fair- if we demand totally effective, instantaneous fairness, then we should ask for God to send us immediately to hell.
- God's grace is sovereign and He dispenses it as He pleases- even to broken, rebellious, wicked sinners like us that He's under no obligation to save.

So is this parable to show the contrast of the original Jewish disciples with gentile converts? Is it about lifelong Christians who have grown up in church and deathbed conversions?

- None of that's clear, but the point is obvious- the blessing of eternal life will be the same for all who receive it and God's rewards will be given on the basis of His standards, His grace and generosity.
- In the Christian life, our focus is to be on the grace of God, not the merits of our virtue.

SUFFERING IN JERUSALEM (20:17-19)

Jerusalem was situated on a ridge at 2,550 feet above sea level, so Jesus and His disciples were quite literally "going up" to Jerusalem when Jesus took them aside along the way (vs. 17).

- He has predicted His death twice already, but now in this third prediction Jesus gets graphic and gives detail (vs. 18-19).
- Why does such a prediction of His death follow the parable of the vineyard laborers?

The parable tells of gracious landowner who gives generously and extravagantly to those who don't really deserve it.

- And now Jesus describes in graphic imagery His arrest, trial, sentencing, and execution at the hands of both Jews and Gentiles.
- In His mercy, God will graciously give His Son to be murdered by sinners for their sake so they can have eternal life.

The gracious owner of all things (God) is going to give generously and extravagantly to those who don't deserve it and could never earn it.

- Jesus, God's Son, would be mocked and flogged-beaten with a whip of leather thongs with jagged bits of metal and bone that rip the flesh off the victim's back.
- But the most astonishing part of Jesus' prediction was that He would be crucified.

Crucifixion was a slow, tortuous death which usually lasted for several hours or even days, and it was the most humiliating and inhumane punishment used by the Roman Empire.

- It often involved torture, a public and humiliating death march, and an embarrassing and sadistic execution where the victim was hung naked on a cross by roadways with their crimes inscribed on a plaque for all bystanders to take notice.

Sometimes the victims were simply tied to the cross using ropes, and would die after several days as a result of exhaustion, dehydration, and even carrion birds eating their flesh.

- Other times victims were nailed to the cross and died after several hours as a result of hypovolemic shock and asphyxiation.
- The disciples were probably shocked and confused by Jesus' willingness to still go up to Jerusalem when that's what's waiting for Him there.

Heb. 12:2- Even though it was going to involve unspeakable pain and agony, Jesus knew that on the other side of the anguish there was a priceless reward.

- That reward was the redemption of sins made available for all of fallen humanity.

Jesus' great love for humanity and His desire to please the Father kept Him obedient and steadfast in the face of the suffering that awaited Him as He went to Jerusalem to face the cross.

- Jesus would pay the ultimate price through His death to give us what we could never earn- eternal life with God.
- But He wouldn't just die- He would be raised from death on the third day (vs. 19).

DISTORTED PERSPECTIVES.

- The love of money and the desire for riches can choke out your spiritual life, distort your perspective on what really matters in life, and become a great barrier in your relationship with God (19:23-30).
- Comparison and entitlement can distort your perspective of God's grace in your life (20:1-16)
- But it's the cross of Jesus that brings everything into perspective (20:17-19).

Am I living for the riches of this world, or the Kingdom to come?

Am I entitled and do I compare myself to others?

Is the cross of Jesus the lens through which I see all of reality?