**February 7 – Matthew 15**

Welcome to another week of enjoying the gospel of Matthew. Since all of chapter 15 is also spoken of in either Mark or Luke or both, we are going to cover some segments now, and others when we reach them in the other gospel accounts. However, if you have any questions or thoughts regarding these portions of Scripture, I would be overjoyed to receive them from you! For now, consider the following about the first part of the chapter.

**Corban**

I want to help you understand what is going on in the first nine verses. The Pharisees are making an accusation against the disciples of Jesus because they are not washing their hands before they eat. This is much more than a point of hygiene. The Pharisees were making a moral accusation against them. They were conflating the traditions of the religious elders of Israel with the requirements and standards that God had given to them through the Law.

Jesus responds to them as He often does, with a question that traps them. He asks why they are prioritizing manmade tradition over God’s revealed will. He then gives them one clear example of their hypocrisy. Here is what Jesus is speaking about:

In those days, when your parents reached the point that they could not financially or physically care for themselves, the responsibility for housing, feeding, and supporting the parents would fall to the children (as is typically the case to this day). However, the Pharisees and scribes had come up with a really clever way to avoid honoring their parents in this way. There was a tradition that had developed around the concept of giving ‘gifts’ to God. (The word for gift is Corban.) If you give a gift to another person, whatever you give to them leaves your possession.

However, if a Pharisee were to ‘gift’ their earthly goods to the Lord, then they would retain possession of them, but they could only be used for religious purposes. So, the greedy among them would revile their parents by dedicating parts of the homes, wealth, and goods to God as a tactic to avoid supporting them. So, Jesus calls them out for being dishonest with their intentions, dishonoring their parents, AND trying to look super holy in the process. Jesus quotes Isaiah to reveal that all of their lip-service is a misrepresentation of their heart. And that the teachings of the Pharisees are not God’s commands, but man-made inferior substitutes.

As a side note, Ashley and I named the baby that we lost Corban. He was a gift from God, even though we never were able to meet him.

On the practical side, we need to ensure that we are not elevating traditions over the clear commands of the Lord. We also need to make sure that we are not judging others based upon our personal preferences and creating a moralistic or legalistic standard like the Pharisees were doing in this text. As Steve Schultz shared with us a few weeks ago, one of the clearest ways that this has arisen in our current cultural/ecclesiastic moment is in the area of masks and vaccines. Let us never produce a standard for holiness that God does not require.

Beyond this, Jesus continues in the next section of the chapter to explain that what goes into the body does not defile, but what comes out of you does. Verse 20, “These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.” In this section, Jesus condemns all of us. For it is from our hearts that we produce all sorts of evil. We are not a product of our environment. Our sinful actions are not reactionary. We sin because at the deepest level of who we are, we are sinners. This should humble us, and cause us to be more grateful for the amazing grace of Jesus our Savior.

For further thought: A helpful definition of legalism from John Piper - <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-legalism>

**January 8 – Matthew 16**

Matthew 16 is a really important part of the book of Matthew. There is a shift that begins here whereby Jesus begins to inform His disciples about the ‘Master Plan.’ In the next chapter we are going to see the Transfiguration, and after that Jesus is going to make His way south toward Jerusalem where He will be crucified. In this moment of teaching the disciples, I want you to see three simple truths.

1. The disciples got worried because they forgot to pack a lunch. Jesus gently reminds them that He has literally fed tens of thousands of people with just a handful of ingredients by His miraculous power. When we encounter hardships, how often do we just complain and forget the good gifts that God has given? How often do we forget how He has proved Himself over and over?
2. Verse 18 is the first (of two) time that Jesus speaks about the church. This shows us that Jesus’ mission was always to build a covenant community that could not be hindered by Hades itself.
3. Just like Peter’s confession, the only way that any of us are able to see Jesus’ true identity is owing to the fact that “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”

**Take up your cross**

Normally I don’t do this, but I thought that the best way to bless you today was to share with you from the beautiful, compelling, convicting words of Charles Spurgeon concerning what it means to carry our cross today.

You do not make your own cross, although unbelief is a master carpenter at cross-making; neither are you permitted to choose your own cross, although self-will wants to be lord and master. **But your cross is prepared and appointed for you by divine love, and you must cheerfully accept it; you are to take up the cross as your chosen badge and burden, and not to stand complaining.** This night Jesus bids you submit your shoulder to His easy yoke. Do not kick at it in petulance, or trample on it in pride, or fall under it in despair, or run away from it in fear, but take it up like a true follower of Jesus.

Jesus was a cross-bearer; He leads the way in the path of sorrow. Surely you could not desire a better guide! **And if He carried a cross, what nobler burden would you desire?** The Via Crucis is the way of safety; fear not to tread its thorny paths. Beloved, the cross is not made of feathers or lined with velvet; it is heavy and galling to disobedient shoulders; but it is not an iron cross, though your fears have painted it with iron colors; it is a wooden cross, and a man can carry it, for the Man of Sorrows tried the load.

Take up your cross, and by the power of the Spirit of God you will soon be so in love with it that like Moses you would not exchange the reproach of Christ for all the treasures of Egypt. Remember that Jesus carried it; remember that it will soon be followed by the crown, and the thought of the coming weight of glory will greatly lighten the present heaviness of trouble. May the Lord help you bow your spirit in submission to the divine will before you fall asleep tonight, so that waking with tomorrow's sun, you may go forth to the day's cross with the holy and submissive spirit that is fitting for a follower of the Crucified.

For deeper learning: Ed Moore preaches on the Contemporary Church’s One Foundation. <https://www.ocbibleconference.org/content.cfm?id=320&download_id=35>

**February 9 – Matthew 17**

As we make our way through Matthew, I can’t get over how dense this book is. There is so much to explore each day. The transfiguration is one of the monumental moments in the ministry of Jesus. The disciples NEVER got over this incredible display of the glory of the Son of God. John does not include this event in his gospel account, but it seems that he references the transfiguration in his first epistle as a way to say, “I am writing what I know and what I have seen in person.” 1 John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Peter likewise highlights this moment of Jesus’ glory on display in 2 Peter 1:16-17. “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.** For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’.”

There is much to say about what took place here, but we will spread out our thoughts across the three synoptic accounts. For now, I simply want you to consider one simple truth. Moses and Elijah were present for this moment. Moses is the figurehead of the Law, Elijah is the figurehead of the prophets. Peter, looking at these two revered men and Jesus decided that he should immediately begin building a dwelling place for each of them. It is likely that Peter perceived this to be the pinnacle of Jesus’ ministry and that He would reign from that mountain top as king alongside the two great saints of old.

But notice that God spoke from heaven and reiterated the declaration that took place at the baptism, only this time with a slight twist. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.” God the Father was declaring Jesus greater than Moses or Elijah. (You or I know that, but it was still dawning on the disciples.) This is not to say that we should reject the Law and the Prophets (the Old Testament). Rather, it is to say that the way we understand them is with Jesus as the center. Jesus taught us that all of the Old Testament is about Him (John 5:39, Luke 24:44-49). The only way we can actually learn the Old Testament rightly is through the lens of the Savior. In doing so, “Listen to Him.”

Temple Tax

If you were a ruler of a small kingdom, and you were collecting taxes in order to support the kingdom, who would you tax? Your kids? Or your subjects? The tax that was being collected here was not the notorious Roman tax that we hear about when the gospels speak about tax collectors. This was specifically collected to keep the temple building operational. By giving this illustration, Jesus was declaring to Peter that the temple was no longer the center of worship. Instead, Jesus Himself is the center of worship. And Jesus put an exclamation point on it by saying, in order to go get that coin, just go fishing. I have often wondered how the coin got there. Did some poor man fall out of a boat and lose that shekel from his pocket? Did a child find it in his parent’s home and throw it in the water? Did God simply form it in the mouth of the fish? Regardless, Jesus was revealing His perfect knowledge, perfect control, and perfect provision. He was basically saying, “Peter, don’t worry about temple worship. Worship me.”

For your edification: Bruce Ware speaks of the glory of Christ. <https://sovereigngracemusic.org/training/resources/beholding-the-glory-of-gods-supremecy/>

**February 10 – Matthew 18**

Groucho Marx once said, “I wouldn't want to belong to a club that would have me as a member”

Sometimes being part of the church can be difficult. Why? Because the church is full of people, and people sin. And we contribute our own issues to the mix. This reality results in occasional necessary conflict.

We are not supposed to simply turn a blind eye when there is sin in the camp. Instead, we are told that it is our Christian duty to lovingly call one another to repentance. Most of the time, people (myself included) would rather ignore the issue rather than deal with it head on because we fear confrontation.

Thankfully, Jesus simply tells us the protocols for how we should handle sin in the church. (This, by the way, is the second and final time that the word ‘church’ will be used by Jesus in the gospels.)

* Step 1: (Informal discipline) Go to your brother and tell him his fault.
* Step 2: (Informal discipline) If he does not hear you, take someone else with you (preferably someone with more wisdom and biblical knowledge than yourself, if possible).
* Step 3: (Formal discipline) If he still does not repent, tell it to the church. Not for the purpose of gossip, but for the purpose of the congregation taking seriously the need for repentance and prayerfully and gently calling back to obedience and submission to Christ.
* Step 4: (Final discipline) If the person still refuses to repent, Jesus commands that they be removed from the church just like tax collectors and Gentiles were removed from common Jewish society.

The purpose of church discipline is never vindictive or malicious. It is always to be done with a heart of grace, knowing that we too are sinners who have fallen short of God’s glory. Galatians 6:1 provides a helpful warning and instruction. “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

I don’t think it is coincidental that the Holy Spirit led Matthew to include the parable of the unforgiving servant directly after the section on church discipline. In this parable we see the lavishing of mercy by the king upon the servant with a great debt. That servant owed 10,000 talents. One talent was the equivalent to twenty years of common wages. Although we could probably figure out the exact sum value using a complex system of conversions and inflation rates, the dollar number that would result would be so high that we could not genuinely comprehend it. It would likely total beyond a trillion dollars. They way Jesus’ original hearers would have calculated it would be to think of it as five thousand lifetimes worth of work (40 years of paid labor = 2 talents). Yet, the king forgave freely.

On the other hand, that wicked servant brutally sought to extract payment from someone who owed him one single day’s wage. Matthew is reiterating something that he has been highlighting multiple times in this book: forgiven people forgive. One of the evidences that you have truly been redeemed is that when someone sins against you, you will have the God-given strength to forgive.

So, if we confront others lovingly in their sin, and they repent and seek to reconcile, we forgive from the heart. We have been forgiven the greater debt. There is nobody that has ever or will ever sin against you to the extent that you have sinned against the Lord. As Steve Schultz has often said to me, “The extent to which we grasp that we have been forgiven is directly proportional to our capacity to offer forgiveness to others.”

For your edification: Definitions matter. Here is a great article by the late great R.C. Sproul on the biblical definition of grace. <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-grace>

**February 11 – Matthew 19**

This chapter begins with a defense of biblical marriage and a proper understanding of divorce. We will hit this passage when we arrive there in Mark’s account later this year. However, there is an unusual passage that is often overlooked. Matthew’s account is the only one that includes the portion about eunuchs. (Just a heads up, if you read these notes with your children, you may want to preview the content before determining if they are ready for what is in store today.)

What is Jesus talking about in verses 10-12? There are multiple issues at play here.

1. Worship

This is the first sign in the New Testament that Jesus is once again broadening the scope of those who are able to worship. According to Deuteronomy 23:1, “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord.” There were a variety of regulation in the Old Testament that limited people from worship based on unalterable physical traits. This was done to serve as an illustration of the holiness of God.

According to that verse (and several others like it), eunuchs were not welcome to worship in the temple. Later, when we arrive in Acts, we are going to see that one of the first people outside of Jerusalem to hear and believe the gospel is an Ethiopian eunuch. This man was permitted to worship God without hindrance or limitation.

1. Singleness

Jesus was speaking to his disciples when he made his statement about eunuchs. We know that Peter was married because we encounter his mother-in-law in Mark 1. Whether she was alive still at this point in the timeline is never made clear. However, it is likely that many of the disciples in Jesus’ hearing were single men.

After hearing about divorce, the disciples say to Jesus, “If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.” Jesus tells them that this is not something that is given for everyone. Rather, singleness is a unique gift given only to some. Jesus is not delegitimizing the institution of marriage (in fact he just spent the earlier part of this chapter affirming it). Nor is Jesus attempting to say that marriage or non-marriage is the superior option. Rather, Jesus is making clear that some people are called to be single.

This is when Jesus begins explaining the three categories of eunuchs.

1. Some are born with a physical abnormality that would categorically make them a eunuch.
2. Some are “made eunuchs” by others. This was done forcibly on occasion in the ancient world as punishment, or when someone was purchased or won in battle as a slave, or when a man would be set as a caretaker over a woman.
3. Then the last category is those who purposefully prioritize the kingdom of God in such a way that they forego the joys of marriage in order to serve a different role in the kingdom of God. There are some people who will serve the Lord without what Paul calls “worldly troubles” that naturally accompany those who are married. (For example, when I was a single man I could serve on the mission field and sleep on people’s couches and take a day off from eating every couple of days. Now that I have a wife and children, that kind of lifestyle would be not only inconsiderate, it would be negligent and sinful.

The simple truth that we land on here is one that I think I have often failed to address. Those who are single, God has not abandoned you. He is working in you in such a way that your life is able to, right now, strengthen and edify the church. Perhaps the Lord has marriage plans for you. Perhaps he does not. But, either way don’t squander the time that you have being single. Use it to the glory of God to advance the kingdom.

For your joy: here is a sermon that I preached about the rich young ruler back in 2017. <https://www.gatewayli.org/sermons/sermon/2017-04-09/the-almost-disciple>

**February 12 – Matthew 20**

Once again, our focus is going to land on the part of this chapter that is exclusive to Matthew’s gospel. In this case that means that we are going to examine verses 1-16.

In order to properly understand why Jesus is even telling this story, we need to dip our toes back into chapter 19 for just a moment. At the end of that chapter there is a wealthy young man who approached Jesus, but went away sad when Jesus told him the cost of discipleship. Jesus told him that he would have to sell everything and give the proceeds to the poor, effectively leaving this once rich rule completely dependent and destitute without outside support.

After that teaching moment, Peter asks a very Peter-like question. “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” Jesus promises blessings (which I believe are rewards that will be experienced in heaven). It is into this very conversation about rewards that Jesus interjects this parable. Jesus has just set the expectation very high for the rewards that will be received. But now Jesus uses a story to clarify two main truths.

1. Everyone who serves Christ will be rewarded.

This is true of those who started working in the vineyard when the day was young and the labor was most extreme. It is also true that God rewards those whom He calls into His fields late in the day. It has been long debated what “later in the day” symbolizes. The typical perspective is that Jesus is speaking to those who come to faith later in life. It is also possible that this is not supposed to be a reference to how long someone has been saved, but to how much they have given up to serve.

So far, these concepts would not be offensive to any of the disciples. How could it be? Jesus promises to bring you into His vineyard to work, and He promises to give a reward for your labor. But the next point that Jesus makes is one that shatters most people’s concept of fairness.

1. Jesus will distribute these rewards in ways that are unexpected.

Let me clarify what Jesus is not saying here. He is not saying, “Don’t worry about godliness or holiness because no matter what you do in this life, you will end up with the same reward.” No! In fact, Jesus just described his followers sacrifice two verses earlier by saying, “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

The point is that we should not make our service about the rewards. God will give us in accordance with the promise of the gospel. Nobody who gets to heaven will be disappointed. None of us will despise the rewards we are given. Instead of laboring for the rewards, we should labor because we love the King of the vineyard.

I hope you have had a blessed week in the Lord and I look forward to worshiping with you tomorrow. ☺

For your kids – If you have children 3 years old – 6th grade, they will be practicing the following song to sing for us on Easter Sunday. Give it a listen, and if you have kids help them practice at home. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xghu9K8i5Vs>