

Dr. David Turner, Matthew

Lecture 9A – Matthew 19-20: Approaching Jerusalem

Greetings, everyone. This is David Turner, and this is Lecture 9A of our Matthew class, as we find our Lord Jesus approaching Jerusalem. He's left Galilee, and now He's heading toward the Holy City.

We are indeed pressed for time in this lecture because there's too much to cover, so we're going to get right at it. First of all, we need to introduce the narrative block between Matthew's fourth and fifth discourses, the discourse on the values of the kingdom in Chapter 18, and the eschatological discourse of 24 and 25. This narrative block begins with Jesus' journey south from Galilee to Judea, beyond the Jordan, 19:1. After a time, Jesus crosses the river to Jericho in the deep rift valley, 20:29, and then He moves further westward up into the hills toward Jerusalem as far as Bethphage and the Mount of Olives, 20:17, 20:11. When proper arrangements are made, Jesus enters the city, 21:10, has a confrontation with the temple leaders, and leaves to spend the night in Bethany, 21:17. The next morning He returns to the city, 21:18, and enters the temple again, 21:23. There He becomes embroiled in a series of heated disputes with various Jewish leaders.

These disputes culminate in the seven woe articles of Matthew 23, after which Jesus leaves the temple for the Mount of Olives, 24:1-3, and there you have the setting for the fifth and final discourse, 24 and 25. In all of this, Matthew's story is very similar to that found in Mark, with a few significant differences. The material in Matthew 19-23 continues such basic themes as Jesus the healer, the opposition of the Jewish leaders, the teaching of the disciples, and preeminently the movement of Jesus ever closer to His suffering in Jerusalem.

But while the themes are familiar, the content is more topically arranged than in the last narrative block. There is comparatively less stress on healing here and passion predictions. The bulk of the material is devoted to Jesus teaching His disciples, 19:10 all the way through 20:28, and also He is confronting the Jerusalem religious leaders, of course, in 21:12-23:39. The disciple-oriented material in 19 and 20 is, in effect, a continuation of themes found in the fourth discourse of Matthew 18 on the values of the kingdom community.

In the material covering Jesus' temple discourse, Jesus' temple confrontation with Jewish leaders, a bad situation, goes from worst to worse, worse in 21 and 22 than it has been, and worse in 23. The structure of the passage in front of us at the beginning of this section, Matthew 19:1-15. 19:1-15 begins with a transition and introduction that sets off the narrative block begun here from the discourse of

Matthew 18. This narrative block begins with a controversy initiated by the Pharisees concerning the legality of divorce in 19:3-9. Jesus' strictures against divorce are the occasion of the disciples' jaded remark on the superiority of singleness, and Jesus responds to this as well in 19:10-12. At this point, children enter the picture, and against the wishes of the disciples, Jesus affirms and blesses them.

So, there are three units in this section, with the initial debate with the Pharisees leading to two discussions in which Jesus corrects the disciples' views of marriage and children respectively. Throughout the section, the key motif is the four answers of Jesus, the first pair given to the Pharisees, 19:4 and 19:8, and the second pair to the disciples in 19:11 and 19:14. Jesus' dispute with the Pharisees on the permanence of marriage and the undesirability of divorce leads naturally into the discussions of singleness and children with his disciples. Well, what does Jesus have to say about marriage here? The permanence and normativeness of marriage are the major points of this passage.

Jesus' citation of Genesis 1 and 2 makes this point explicitly, and his deprecation of divorce as due to sin further supports it. His explanation of celibate singleness as a lifestyle appropriate only for a relatively few, specially gifted people implicitly honors marriage as the norm for most people. Similarly, his affirmation of the children who result from marriage lends implicit support to the institution of marriage itself.

In our day, just as in Jesus' day, divorce occurs all too frequently. Singleness is often exalted over marriage as a more fulfilling lifestyle, and children are often deprecated as a time-consuming drag on one's career. But Jesus speaks strongly for marriage as the divine pattern for his people, a pattern to which all except those specially gifted should aspire.

This pattern can be abandoned by legal divorce only after it has been broken by sexual infidelity. The obligations of this pattern are preferable to the seeming freedom of singleness except in cases of special divine endowment. The offspring of this pattern are to be affirmed and blessed.

In a sense, marriage can be viewed in terms of Jesus' teaching on taking up one's cross and denying oneself, 16:25. Divorce, singleness, and childlessness may seem to be the way of success and fulfillment, but in the end, the seemingly carefree life will be a lonely, lost life. Marriage and parenting may appear to be a burdensome so-called life, but in the end, being married with children will prove to be the richest possible life because it is life according to the Creator's pattern for his creatures.

In the present fallen world, the ideal relationships involved in the created pattern are not easy to attain, yet the inauguration of the power of the kingdom enables disciples to live to a great extent according to the created pattern. Many genuine followers of Jesus have failed in one or more of these areas, and the Church must

reach out to those who have failed and restore them to obedience and fellowship. Nevertheless, it is better to avoid sin than to be forgiven of it.

Prevention is superior to cure. Now we move on to discuss Jesus' views on divorce and remarriage. It's likely that the Pharisees' question in 1903 was directed toward Jesus' understanding of Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

In its original context, this passage prohibits a woman who has been remarried and divorced from two different men from remarrying her first husband. Deuteronomy 24, therefore, is not a divine mandate to divorce, but it's only a concession due to the hardness of hearts. Jesus interprets the original one-flesh implications of marriage in Genesis 2:24 as requiring permanence.

He will indeed permit divorce only in the instance of sexual immorality, which breaks the one-flesh character of the union. Except in cases of infidelity, divorce leads to adultery. The language here assumes, as did the Old Testament, that a man could divorce his wife, but a wife could not divorce her husband.

However, a wife could appeal to community elders for redress of grievances, as is made clear in the Mishnah in section Ketuvot. Matthew 19:9, compare 5:32, has been understood in a variety of ways, and its exegetical difficulties are compounded by textual problems. Look at Metzger's textual commentary to get help on that.

One difficulty is the meaning of the word *pornea*, which has been understood variously as marital infidelity, premarital infidelity, as in 1:19, or incest, as in Leviticus 18 and 1 Corinthians 5:1. All in all, the approach of the New Living Translation, for example, seems best because the context does not restrict the general sense of *pornea* in any specific way. Another major difficulty is the scope of the exception clause, unless his wife has been unfaithful.

The question is whether this clause permits both divorce and remarriage if infidelity has occurred, or divorce alone. Most Protestant scholars take the former view, but there are notable exceptions. Those who take the second view tend to view 19:11, and 12 as spoken specifically to the celibacy required of those who have been divorced.

It appears that this issue cannot be resolved by grammatical arguments, but the view that both divorce and remarriage are permitted in the case of infidelity seems best. Freedom to remarry is the essence of divorce, it seems to be meaningless otherwise. Further, it seems arbitrary to think that divorced people are universally given the gift of celibacy.

Rather, repentant individuals who have been divorced due to infidelity should have the freedom to get it right the second time. For an especially helpful discussion of

the many exegetical difficulties here and a reference to scholarly literature, see Carson's commentary. The disciples of Jesus are in Paul's thinking a new creation in Christ, according to 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:11, and other passages.

Participation in Christ's kingdom amounts to being a new humanity whose identity and relationships are drawn from the identity and relationships of humanity before the Fall. Similarly, when Jesus says that divorce was not what God originally intended in this passage, he implicitly tells his disciples that their identity is to recapitulate the identity of the relationships of humanity before the Fall, when hard hearts begin to pervert God's intention. Jesus' disciples look forward to the time when the world is made new, according to Matthew 19:28, but they also long for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, 6:10.

In this light, the permanence of marriage ought to be a matter of course in the Christian community, an aspect of its present life which mirrors and anticipates the righteousness which will come with God's kingdom to the earth. If Moses did not command divorce, certainly neither did Jesus. Even in cases of marital infidelity, divorce should not be the first, let alone the only option.

Are not the admittedly deep wounds caused by marital infidelity susceptible to healing by the love of God? Should not couples contemplating divorce, even in cases of infidelity, be made to consider the implications of Matthew 18-21 and following? Forgiveness must be rendered in every situation, including this one, and such forgiveness can often lead to a restored relationship and renewed testimony to the power of Jesus' kingdom message. If God hated divorce under the old covenant, Malachi 2:14-16, how much more so now that the kingdom has dawned? Now we move on to the familiar pericope of Jesus in the Rich Young Ruler. The Rich Young Ruler episode is one of the gospel texts that is frequently viewed as instructive for those who do personal evangelism, along with passages like John 4, where Jesus met the woman at the well.

But this passage can be misunderstood. By his stress on the second table of the law, Jesus was not teaching a way of salvation by mechanical observation of the commandments. Jesus' use of the term perfect in 19:21 does not imply a notion of two levels of discipleship.

Jesus is simply answering the young man's question by gradually showing him his root problem, covetousness. Jesus begins by shifting the focus from preoccupation with self to preoccupation with God. Instead of being preoccupied with good deeds, the man should be occupied with God's goodness 19:16, and 17.

Perhaps the man was asking Jesus to assign him one good deed that would bring him the eternal life he wanted. When Jesus directs him to the commandments, he seems

confused as to which commandments are relevant. When Jesus cites the second table, he affirms he has kept the commandments, but still lacks something.

At this point, Jesus gets to the heart of the problem by commanding the man to give his wealth to the poor and become a disciple, which will bring heavenly treasure. In a sense, Jesus asks the man to reprise a role previously scripted in two parables, 13:44 to 46. Jesus demands not alms, but he demands everything, Davies and Allison correctly comment.

The man will lose everything, but he will gain Jesus in the kingdom. This is what he has lacked all along. But his sorrowful departure makes it clear that he had not kept all the commandments since he had not loved his neighbor as himself, 19:19.

Jesus does not cite the tenth commandment, thou shalt not covet, notice Exodus 20:17, but the man's response clearly shows that he had broken this commandment also. Jesus brought the man to the point where he acknowledged what he lacked by his refusal to obey Jesus. His wealth has become a God which takes priority over the true God, which violates the first commandment, Exodus 20, verses 2 and 3. Thus, the ruler's refusal to do a good thing, divest himself of his wealth, and follow Jesus shows that he did not acknowledge the goodness of God in his life.

He serves money, so he cannot serve God, 6:24. His materialism prevents him from seeking the kingdom first, 6:33. But his sorrow indicates not only that he is not ready to follow Jesus, it also indicates that now he knows what he lacks, and it's perhaps not too much to hope that he eventually did follow Jesus' instructions, since with God everything is possible.

Jesus in the kingdom. It's noteworthy that in this context, five terms are used in a very similar way. In 19:24, Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God in tandem with his more characteristic term, the kingdom of heaven in 19:23.

This is in response to the young man's question about inheriting eternal life, 19:16 and 29. Jesus further describes the same concept as being perfect in 19:21 and the disciples call it being saved in 19:25. Two conclusions can be drawn from this semantic interplay.

First, as is already evident from synoptic comparisons such as Matthew 13:31 and 32, Mark 4:30 to 32, and Luke 13:18 and 19, there is no real difference between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven in Matthew. Rather, the term kingdom of God is occasionally used for subtle literary and contextual reasons to describe the same referent as the more common term kingdom of heaven. Second, while the language here about inheriting eternal life and entering the kingdom may imply that the kingdom is future, the language about being perfect and being saved implies that the kingdom may be truly, if not totally, experienced in the present life.

The kingdom of God is both present and future, and those who do not recognize both its aspects truncate the riches of scriptural truth and spiritual blessing. The description of the future kingdom in terms of the twelve tribes of Israel would appear at first blush to justify a belief in the eschatological conversion of the nation of Israel to faith in Jesus as Messiah. This would be in keeping with Matthew's overall emphasis on the fulfillment of scripture preeminently through the words and deeds of Jesus the Messiah.

The followers of Jesus, the ultimate teacher of the Torah, constitute Israel within Israel, the eschatological remnant. In the end, they will judge or govern the nation as a whole. Yet somehow, certain commentators view this language as indicating that the Gentile church, which replaces Israel, will rule over the nations as a whole.

Among the problems with this view is that it is dissolving the distinction made by Jesus between the rule of disciples over Israel in 19:28 and the reward of all who sacrifice to follow Jesus in 19:29. If the church supersedes Israel, this distinction would be meaningless. Now, a summary and a transition to chapter 20.

The flow of Matthew 19 all actually carries over to 2016, since the parable of the workers in the first part of chapter 20 is the conclusion of Jesus' answer to Peter's question in 19:27 about rewards. And it's significant that immediately after this answer comes Jesus' third passion prediction, which again stresses geographical proximity to Jerusalem in 20:17 through 19. Following another answer to another question about rewards in 20:20 following, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem occurs, and the Passion Week begins.

In this way, the geographical movement of Matthew 19:1 signifies the beginning of the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. Now in Matthew chapter 20, we want to deal first with the interpretation of the parable of the vineyard workers. If a parable is, as the old saying goes, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, then one wonders about the heavenly counterpart of the earthlings described here.

Most would agree that the vineyard stands for Israel, Isaiah 5:1-7, Jeremiah 12:10, Matthew 21:28, and 33. And that the landowner here represents God, who is sovereignly and graciously bestowing rewards upon his servants. The harvest speaks of eschatological judgment, notice 13:39.

Beyond this, the identification of the first and the greatest with the last and the least is more controversial. Perhaps those who are first represent Peter and the disciples, given Peter's question in 19:27. If so, Peter and the disciples are warned not to assume upon God's grace just because they have sacrificed to serve in his kingdom.

They'll be fairly rewarded for their rigorous service, but they must not grumble if others who seem to have sacrificed less receive as great a reward as they do. In every case, God's generosity far outstrips human expectations, and we should not side with those who ask the question of 20:12. The servants may not complain if they receive a reward appropriate for their work.

In the kingdom, human standards of merit are replaced by divine generosity. This seems to be a true accounting for the details of the parable in its immediate context, but there are other interpretations. There are several approaches to the reversal described in the crucial bracketing saying in 19:30 and in 20:16.

Some take it as involving a social reversal in which at the final judgment, the poor will be enriched and the rich will be impoverished. Matthew has indeed spoken of such a reversal in the Beatitudes in chapter 5, verse 3. Some would take it as a religious reversal in which tax collectors and sinners who enter the kingdom last are preferred by God to the Jewish religious leaders. This is also a key Matthean theme, Matthew 9: 11-13, 11:19, and 21:31.

A third approach to the reversal is that it is a redemptive historical reversal, seeing that in God's plan, Gentiles instead of Jews will come into prominence. Matthew indicates in many places that surprisingly many Jews reject the kingdom and many Gentiles receive it. This may well be the most prominent view throughout the history of the church.

Others take it as an ecclesiastical reversal in which those among the disciples who wish to be prominent will be humbled, but those who are humble will be considered truly great. At least two important Matthean texts underline this key point as well, chapter 18, verses 1-4 and 20:25-28. Others take it in a very general way as an anthropological reversal in which, at the consummation, God's sovereign grace will humble proud people and exalt humble people.

While this is true, Matthew seems more concerned about the community of disciples than humanity at large. The problem with all these above approaches to the reversal is that they're not supported specifically by the immediate context, which addresses the parable as a warning to Peter and the disciples that they should not presume on God's grace and rewards. They are the ones who are in danger of grumbling against God when others who come into the kingdom later are rewarded.

They must accept whatever reward God graciously gives them, and they must not compare themselves with others. Thus, the parable of the landowner anticipates the problem of Zebedee's sons ambitiously seeking the greatest rewards in the future kingdom, chapter 20, verses 20 and following. Now Jesus' prediction of his death in Matthew 20, verses 17-28.

Matthew 20, verses 17-28 narrates the third and fullest prediction of Jesus' passion, verses 17-19, followed by an episode stressing the disciples' ambition in verses 20-28. In this passage, Matthew contrasts Jesus' humility and suffering with the disciples' pride and desire for glory. The structure of 20:17-19 contains the main elements of the two previous passion predictions: betrayal, death, and resurrection.

There are also unique elements. The structure of the second part of the passage involves a dialogue which turns into an occasion of teaching, the dialogue in 20-23, the teaching in 24-28. First, Jesus responds to a request from the mother of Zebedee's children in verses 20-23.

When the rest of the disciples learn of the request, their anger becomes another opportunity for Jesus to teach his disciples about genuine greatness in his kingdom. This teaching takes the form of two parallel statements about worldly greatness, 20:25, in antithesis to two parallel statements about kingdom greatness in 20:26, and 27. True greatness involves following in the steps of Jesus along the path of sacrificial service, 20:28.

In this passage, the reader is influenced to respond in sympathy to Jesus and antipathy to the disciples. Their ignorance, false confidence, and pride contrast with Jesus' knowledge, resignation to the Father's will, and humility. Now also here notice Jesus' passion predictions.

This is indeed the third one, and you have in front of you in the supplemental materials on page 36 a chart that compares those three predictions. We could spend some time doing that prediction, those comparisons, but due to lack of time here in this lecture, I'm going to ask you to look over that chart on page 36 and note some of the similarities there, the constants which remain true in all three of them, but also how this final prediction does give some key details which are not mentioned previously. Now, notice how the passion prediction of Jesus gives quite a melodramatic setting for the ambition of the disciples.

Matthew 20:28 is a remarkable study in the definition of authentic greatness. Ever since the fall of humanity, greatness has been defined in terms of prestige, power, and glory. Jesus alludes to this state of affairs in 20:25, and he immediately repudiates it in 20:26.

His definition of greatness in terms of service turns the world's model on its head. His disciples are to follow his example of sacrificial suffering servanthood, even to the point of death. Paul clearly grasped this radically altered definition of greatness according to 2 Corinthians 4:5, 10:1, 12:9, and 10, and Philippians 2:3 and following.

One can do no better than to reflect on these words of Jesus from Luke's account of the Last Supper. Who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who

serves at the table? I am among you as the one who serves, Luke 22:27. John's account of Jesus' explanation of his washing the disciples' feet is also highly relevant here, John 13:12-17.

Jesus has now spoken of his coming sufferings in Jerusalem three times, but inexplicably, his disciples have forgotten their previous grief over this prospect. It's instructive to compare the selfish request of the mother of Zebedee's sons with the selfless request of the Canaanite woman for her daughter back in 15:21-28. One would have thought that the mother of the two disciples of Jesus would have had more spiritual insight than the Canaanite woman, but sadly, this was not the case.

The disciples are preoccupied with thoughts of their own glory instead of concern for their Lord's suffering. Later, Peter and the very disciples who wished to sit at Jesus' right hand, right and left in the kingdom, sleep as he agonizes in the Garden of Gethsemane, 26:36-46. As Jesus had predicted, he did not sit on a throne in Jerusalem, but was crucified with thieves on his right and left hand.

How shocking it is to contemplate the disciples' insensitivity to Jesus' priorities. But it's all the more shocking to realize that many professed followers of Jesus still today don't seem to grasp the nature of greatness in his kingdom. Now, Jesus as a ransom for many, a theology of redemption in Matthew.

In giving himself as a ransom for many, Jesus is paying a price which frees them from slavery to sin. Compare Mark 10:45, Luke 1:68, 2:38, 1 Timothy 2:6, Titus 2:14, Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 1:18. The concept of ransom probably draws on Old Testament passages like Exodus 30:12, Psalm 49:7-9, and especially Isaiah 53:10-12. Matthew 20:28 recalls 1:21 and anticipates 26:28. In 1:21 it's stated that Jesus will save his people from their sins. This affirmation, a play on the meaning of the name Jesus, indicates that the problem of Israel is not its occupation by Rome, but its sin against God.

But how will Jesus deliver his people from their sins? By paying a ransom which will free them from the bondage of alienation from God, according to 20:28. In view of the background in Isaiah 53:10-12, the haunting question of 16:26, what can a man give in exchange for his soul, and the use of the Greek preposition *anti* which means instead of or in behalf of in 20:28, Matthew indeed teaches that redemption is vicarious. It comes when Jesus substitutes his own life for that of his people. But when will Jesus pay this ransom? According to 26:28, the wine of the Last Supper was intended as a sacred sign of the blood of Jesus shed for the remission of his people's sins.

His blood was shed at his crucifixion, and clearly this is when the ransom was paid. Now we move on to Jesus healing the two blind men in 20:29-34. Jesus has told his disciples that they're on their way to Jerusalem and that he will be betrayed and

crucified there in 20:17-19. When they leave Jericho, Jerusalem is only 15 miles away, and it's inevitable that the ominous events predicted by Jesus will occur soon. But Jesus cannot focus on his own concerns.

As usual, he and the disciples are accompanied by a large crowd, but this time his compassion is exercised to help two blind men. At their first cry for help, the crowd disdains them, but their faith is strong, and they beseech Jesus again and yet again. Jesus has just told his disciples that greatness in the kingdom is calculated on the scale of service, not power.

He now uses his power to serve the blind men, who respond by following him on the way to Jerusalem. Now there is no need to command the blind men to be silent, contrast 8:4 and 9:30, for Jesus' hour has come. Their cries to the Son of David will soon be echoed by others on the approach to Jerusalem, but the religious leaders there do not join in the chorus, sadly, 21:9, 21:15, and 16.

Now we need to briefly discuss a transition from chapter 20 into the rest of the narrative in Jerusalem. Matthew 20 begins with the parable of the landowner and the workers in 21 through 16. As noted in the last chapter, this parable, the last part of our discussion, is actually the conclusion of Jesus' answer to Peter's question in 19:27. The ominous saying, the first shall be last and the last shall be first, brackets the parable, compare 19:30 and 20:16. Following the parable there is a significant mention of Jerusalem in connection with Jesus' third passion prediction, 20:17 through 19.

Then the mother of Zebedee's children voices her ambitions for her son in 20 to 28. The chapter concludes with the healing of two blind men at Jericho as Jesus draws ever closer to Jerusalem in 20:29 to 34. It's important to note that Matthew 20 revolves around Jesus' proximity to Jerusalem and His plan to go there.

His passion prediction is made all the more dramatic by this nearness to Jerusalem. Comparison passages like 19:17 and 18 and 29 and look at chapter 2 verse 1 and verse 3, 3:5, 4:25, 5:35, 15:1, 16:21, 21: 1 and 10 and 23:37. The mother of Zebedee's sons makes her request at a late hour in Jesus' earthly career and Jesus' response stresses that His humble service to mankind involves His sacrificial death, 20:28. The healing of the three blind men features their messianic confession that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. This is a confession which is soon echoed in Jerusalem at the triumphal entry, so-called in 20 verses 30 and 31, 21:9 and 15.

All these things tend to pique the reader's interest in the apocryphal events that are about to be accomplished in Jerusalem. And as we continue, we come to the part of this gospel which Matthew has been leading all along, the time where our Lord goes to the great city, the holy city, Jerusalem only to be rejected by the leaders but to

accomplish the redemption for His people and to send them forth in mission to the world.