

Title: Matthew 19-22

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Session 15

Sponsor: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Discipleship, Temple cleansing, Parables, Sadducees, Pharisees, Resurrection, Messiah, Craig Keener, Ted Hildebrandt

Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Craig Keener examines Matthew 19–22, a critical period of escalating tension between Jesus and Jerusalem's religious authorities. Jesus challenges traditional assumptions regarding wealth, status, and piety, reinforcing that the kingdom of God demands total, persistent devotion and absolute self-surrender. Through parables like the wicked tenants and the wedding feast, Jesus declares that divine grace does not align with human expectations of fairness, yet calls for genuine, heart-level holiness. This confrontation culminates in the temple cleansing and a series of theological debates where Jesus identifies himself as David's Lord, asserting his ultimate authority over religious hypocrisy.

- **I. Introduction and the Cost of Discipleship (Matthew 19:16-30)**
 - **A. The Rich Young Ruler and Eternal Life (Matt 19:16-22)**
 1. Obedience to God and the challenge of material wealth
 2. Persistent seekers versus those easily deterred by initial obstacles, contrasting the rich ruler with persistent seekers like the Canaanite woman, the centurion, and the blind men
 - **B. The Standard of Absolute Commitment (Matt 19:21-22)**
 1. Pedagogical parallels in Greek philosophical training, where radical teachers like Antisthenes, Diogenes, Zeno, and Crates demanded that disciples throw away wealth and face obstacles to prove their sincerity

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2. The demand to forsake material resources and prioritize Christ as Lord

- **C. Sacrifice and Heavenly Reward (Matt 19:23-30)**

1. The "camel through the eye of a needle" as a figure of impossibility, debunking the medieval myth of the "needle's eye" gate in Jerusalem
2. Exceptions of wealthy followers like Zacchaeus and Joseph of Arimathea, who made profound material and life-threatening sacrifices to follow Jesus
3. Jesus' promise of the kingdom and eternal life to those who prioritize him, framed by the inversion of the "first being last and the last being first"

- **II. Parable of the Vineyard Laborers: Grace is Not Fair (Matthew 20:1-16)**

- **A. The Landowner and the Harvesting of Workers (Matt 20:1-7)**

1. The landowner as a traditional representative of God
2. Workers hired at various intervals (early morning, midday, and 5 p.m.) due to harvest demands

- **B. Generosity and Jealousy (Matt 20:8-16)**

1. The payment of a full denarius (a standard day's wage) to all laborers regardless of hours worked
2. Human complaints of unfairness countered by divine sovereignty, benevolence, and grace
3. Inclusion of the "last being first" statement as an *inclusio* framing the entire section (19:30; 20:16)

- **III. Greatness, Service, and the Cup of Suffering (Matthew 20:17-28)**

- **A. The Request of James, John, and Their Mother (Matt 20:20-23)**

1. Maternal advocacy used to secure prestigious positions on Jesus' right and left in the kingdom
2. Jesus' question regarding their ability to drink "the cup" of suffering

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3. The "cup" defined as his suffering, covenant blood, and impending crucifixion, symbolized by the two robbers on his right and left

- **B. True Leadership as Humble Service (Matt 20:24-28)**

1. Contrast with Gentile rulers who lord their power over subordinates
2. Servanthood and humility as the standard of greatness, using the biblical contrast of Hannah's pure heart versus the high priest Eli
3. The Son of Man as the ultimate model, coming to serve and give his life as a ransom for many (reflecting the suffering servant of Isaiah 53)

- **IV. The Triumphal Entry and Christ as the Meek King (Matthew 21:1-11)**

- **A. Fulfilling Zechariah 9:9**

1. Requesting a donkey and its colt to fulfill the prophecy precisely
2. Signifying "meekness" as a merciful, kind, and thoughtful king who cares for the lowly, rather than a triumphant military ruler on a stallion

- **B. Acclamation of the Crowds (Matt 21:8-11)**

1. Hailing Jesus with branches and garments, quoting Psalm 118 (part of the Passover Hallel)
2. High Galilean pilgrim support contrasted with the curiosity or skepticism of the Jerusalem locals

- **V. Cursing of the Fig Tree and Judgment of the Temple (Matthew 21:12-22)**

- **A. Cleansing of the Outer Court**

1. Cursing of the fig tree and cleansing of the temple as symbolic, prophetic acts of imminent divine judgment

2. Protest against the ethnic segregation in Herod's Temple, where the outer Court of the Gentiles was treated as less holy and crowded with money changers, preventing foreigners from praying

- **B. Scriptural Justification of the Act**

1. Isaiah 56:7 – God's design for an international house of prayer welcoming all nations
2. Jeremiah 7:11 – The temple turned into a "robber's den" where people mistakenly felt safe storing their "loot" while continuing to sin
3. The historical warning of Shiloh's destruction, reinforcing that outward religion is insufficient to stay judgment (drawing a parallel to Augustine's explanation of the sack of Christianized Rome)

- **VI. Parable of the Murderous Tenants (Matthew 21:33-44)**

- **A. Vineyard Context and Isaiah 5 Imagery**

1. The vineyard representing Israel and the tenants representing the ruling religious establishment (specifically the Sadducean priestly aristocracy)
2. The extreme wickedness of the tenants who beat and slaughter the landowner's messengers (historically representing the martyred prophets)

- **B. Sending of the Son**

1. The landowner's extreme benevolence in sending his own son, bordering on naivety in human terms but showcasing God's grace
2. Tenants' treacherous plot to kill the heir and claim the inheritance, illustrating the unveiling of the messianic secret

- **C. The Stumbling and Crushing Stone (Matt 21:42-44)**

1. Rejection of the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22)

2. Scriptural links via *Gezerah Shavah* to the crushing stone of Daniel 2:44 (the kingdom of God supplanting worldly empires) and the stumbling stone of Isaiah 8:15 and 28:16

- **VII. Parable of the Wedding Banquet and Inappropriate Garments (Matthew 22:1-14)**

- **A. Treasonous Rejection of the Royal Invitation**

1. Standard ancient practice of double invitations (RSVP followed by a summons when food is ready)
2. Trivial excuses and the slaughter of messengers treated as a direct insult, which in the context of a king constitutes treason and a prelude to war
3. Severe military judgment and the burning of the rebels' city, foreshadowing the historical destruction of Jerusalem

- **B. The Inclusive Call and the Wedding Garment**

1. Lowly individuals, travelers, and outsiders invited from the streets to fill the banquet hall
2. The guest without a wedding garment symbolizing a nominal disciple who claims entrance but disrespects the King by failing to prepare or transform
3. Cast into "outer darkness," a term stretching realism to emphasize the reality of final divine judgment

- **VIII. Legal Confrontations with Jerusalem Elites (Matthew 22:15-46)**

- **A. Paying Taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15-22)**

1. A joint Pharisee-Herodian trap using the highly controversial Roman denarius bearing Tiberius Caesar's image and claims to divinity
2. Jesus' reply: Render to Caesar what bears his image (coins), and render to God what bears God's image (human lives)

- **B. Debate on the Resurrection (Matt 22:23-33)**

1. A hypothetical levirate marriage trap involving seven husbands set by the Sadducees (modeled after Sarah in the Book of Tobit)
2. Jesus' scriptural defense of the resurrection using the Torah (Exodus 3:6 – God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, meaning He is the God of the living, not the dead)

○ **C. The Greatest Commandment (Matt 22:34-40)**

1. Weighing in on an active Pharisaic debate: loving God with all your heart (Deuteronomy 6:5) and loving your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)
2. Connecting these two commandments using *Gezerah Shavah* (both starting with *vayahavta*, "you shall love") to show that the entire law and prophets hang on these principles

○ **D. Whose Son is the Messiah? (Matt 22:41-46)**

1. Jesus turning the tables on his interrogators using Psalm 110:1
2. Demonstrating that the Messiah is not merely a subordinate human descendant of David, as David himself addresses the Messiah as "my Lord"