

Dr. Craig Keener, Matthew, Session 15, Matthew 19-22

6-min. Video Overview

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Alright, let's get right into it. We're about to unpack a series of teachings that were so radical, so completely counter-cultural, that they flipped every single idea about power, wealth, and success totally upside down. Welcome to the story of a kingdom where all the normal rules are reversed.

So, let's start with a question that gets right to the heart of everything. You know, in a world that's constantly telling you to get more, to climb higher, to be on top, what if the real path to winning was, well, something totally different? And there it is. What if the path was to just give it all away? That was the exact challenge put to a rich young man who came asking about eternal life.

The price of admission? Sell everything you own. And for him, that cost was just way too high. And this brings us to our very first great reversal.

The cost of following. Because in this new kingdom, being wealthy wasn't some kind of advantage. No, it was actually a huge liability.

That wealthy seeker, he walked away sad because Jesus refused to lower the standard. And then you get this statement, which must have absolutely floored his listeners. A camel going through the eye of a needle? That wasn't just, you know, a difficult task.

It was a common figure of speech for something that was considered pretty much impossible. It just shows how hard it was for the powerful to even get in the door. Now, here's something really interesting.

A lot of us have probably heard that little story about the needle's eye being a small gate in Jerusalem that a camel could just squeeze through. But as biblical scholars point out, that idea was actually made up way later in the Middle Ages. The reality is much more blunt.

Jesus meant exactly what he said. It was a metaphor for impossibility. You know, this whole method of making things really hard for potential followers, it wasn't totally new.

Some radical Greek teachers, like the famous philosopher Diogenes, would do the same thing. They'd put up these huge obstacles to weed out everyone except the most committed students. And that's exactly what Jesus was doing here.

Separating the truly persistent from those like the rich man who just weren't willing to pay the price. Okay, let's move on to the next reversal. And honestly, this one is just as jarring.

This one messes with our whole concept of fairness. It uses a parable about workers in a vineyard to introduce this radical new economy that isn't based on what you earn, but on

what you're given. So the setup is pretty simple, but the result is infuriating if you believe in fairness.

You've got guys who work a full 12-hour day in the baking sun. Then you have others who literally show up for the last hour, and yet they all get paid the exact same wage. One denarius.

I mean, can you imagine how furious those full-day workers must have been? But the landowner's response just flips the whole argument on its head. He basically asks, are you mad because I'm a generous person? He points out that he didn't cheat the first workers. They got the wage they agreed to.

The problem wasn't his injustice. It was their jealousy over his generosity to other people. And this is just a brilliant illustration of the main point.

The economy of this new kingdom doesn't run on our definition of fairness. It runs on grace. It's a system where God's outrageous generosity completely overrides our little human calculations of who deserves what.

And that idea leads us straight into our third big reversal, the redefinition of power itself. See, his own disciples, James and John, they're still stuck in the old way of thinking. They're asking for the best seats in the kingdom.

So Jesus has to show them a completely different model of what greatness even looks like. He tells them to look at the rulers of the world. What do they do? They lord it over everybody.

They're all about status and control. But in his kingdom, he says, it's the exact opposite. True greatness isn't found in having people serve you.

It's found in becoming a servant yourself. And then he uses himself as the ultimate example of this new kind of leadership, the greatest one of all, the Son of Man. He didn't show up demanding to be served.

Nope. He came to serve and ultimately to give up his own life for the sake of others. So when his disciples asked for those seats of honor, Jesus asked them this cryptic question: Can you drink from my cup? And they said, sure.

Not having a clue what he meant. See, this cup wasn't a symbol of glory or power. It was a metaphor for the unbelievable suffering and death he was about to face.

The path to greatness wasn't power. It was shared sacrifice. All right, let's keep going and see how all this builds to a really dramatic climax.

We now come to the fourth reversal, the arrival of the king. As Jesus enters Jerusalem, he goes out of his way to defy every single expectation of what a messianic hero was supposed to look like. So on one side, you have what people were probably hoping for: a warrior king riding a war horse, ready to kick out the Romans.

But what they got was something else entirely. A humble king riding on a donkey, deliberately fulfilling this ancient prophecy about a totally different kind of ruler. Now, that prophecy called the king meek.

And when we hear the word meek today, we usually think weak or timid, but that's not what it meant back then. In the world of ancient kingship, a meek king was a powerful thing. It meant a ruler who was merciful, who was just, and who actively looked out for the poor and the marginalized.

And get this, even the things the crowd was shouting had a hidden meaning. They were quoting from Psalm 118, a really famous psalm. And what's that psalm about? It's about a stone that the builders threw away, that they rejected, which then becomes the most important stone in the whole building, the cornerstone.

It's a perfect foreshadowing of Jesus's own story of rejection and ultimate victory. So all of these reversals about wealth, about fairness, about power, about what a king looks like, they're all leading to this, a final direct confrontation. Jesus is about to take this upside-down worldview right into the heart of the religious establishment, the temple itself.

And his first move is just explosive. He starts flipping over the tables of the money changers. Now, this wasn't just about kicking out some merchants.

It was a symbolic act of judgment. He quotes the prophet Jeremiah, and he accuses them of turning a house of prayer for all nations into a robber's den, a place where they thought they were safe from God's judgment. So the authorities fire back.

They try to trap him with these three rapid-fire, gotcha questions. First, the political hot potato. Should we pay taxes? Then a tricky theological question about the resurrection.

And finally, a question about the greatest commandment. But every single time he masterfully sidesteps their trap and points them to a much deeper truth. And after he handles all of their questions, Jesus goes on the offense.

He completely turns the tables and asks them a question that they can't answer. He quotes from Psalm 110, and he asks them to define the Messiah. Is he just a human descendant of King David, or is he actually David's divine Lord? And that one question just stops them cold.

It silences them. Because it forces them to confront a reality they had totally missed. That this upside-down kingdom wasn't just some new social movement.

It was something far bigger, far more divine than they had ever, ever imagined. So all of this leaves us with a question for ourselves. From wealth and fairness to power and kingship, this entire story is one giant takedown of conventional wisdom.

And it really makes you wonder, in a world that still chases after all those same things, what are the values that we are being called to reverse today?