



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Gospel According to St. Matthew

Chapter 19

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Introduction



Chapter Main Points:

- Jesus' teachings related to marriage, divorce, and celibacy
- Possessions and rewards in reference to the kingdom of God

An Overview



- Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)
- Jesus Teaches on Celibacy (19:11-12)
- Jesus Blesses Little Children (19:13-15)
- Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)
- With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- Chapter 19 marks another turning point in the Gospel of St. Matthew
- Jesus finished His ministry in the Galilee and began His journey to Jerusalem to complete all "those things" that must take place before the Old Law can be fulfilled (Mt 5:18)
- This is the final departure from Galilee before the Savior's death

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- From Galilee He followed the route on the east of the Jordan to Jerusalem
- The region where the conversation on divorce occurred is called Perea, which means the land beyond, or east of the Jordan
- Some followed Him to be instructed - some to be healed - some through curiosity - and some to ensnare him

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- The Pharisees approach Jesus again to "test" Him
- The purpose is not to learn His true identity but to discredit Him with the people (Mt 12:13; Lk 11:52-5)
- It is ironic that it is their attempt to "test" Jesus and to reveal to the people that His true identity is not the Messiah, that they reveal their true identity as "children of Satan" who stand in opposition to God's plan for man's salvation

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- The school of the Jewish Rabbis Shammai allowed divorce in the case of adultery, he held the stricter rule
- The school of Hillel, the greatest of the Jewish Rabbis whom Jews have sought to compare with Christ, allowed divorce on any trivial excuse
- He even specifies burning the bread as sufficient cause
- The Pharisees wished to test His consistency, and to see whether on this point He still held with the stricter rule of Shammai, and not with the lenient rule of Hillel

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- Jesus Christ, the wisdom of the eternal Father, silences them with the authority of that Scripture they attempted to bring against him, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24
- He asks them if they are willing to dispute what God has commanded in those passages
- In His declaration Jesus explicitly affirms the sacred nature and the unbreakable of the marriage covenant between one man and one woman, and He affirms God as both the Creator of man and woman and the author of the institution of marriage

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- The bond of husband and wife is stronger than that between children and parents
- Two lives joined into one
- Polygamy, homosexual unions, incest and free unions cannot be defined as marriage and are offenses against the dignity of marriage
- If God has so joined them that the two are one, no human ordinance has the right to separate them
- The act was both against nature, and against law
- Against nature, because one flesh is not to come apart
- Against law, because that when God has joined and commanded it is not to be divided

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- The Pharisees, not satisfied, again attack our Savior
- Implying that He contradicts Moses
- He quickly directs back His discourse to that ancient law, saying that God by His acts at the beginning ordained the contrary
- It is not an unusual for the impure and unholy to seek for justification of their conduct from the law of God itself, and to wrest Scripture to their own destruction

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- Moses indeed permitted you to put away your wives on account of the hardness of your hearts, and to prevent a greater evil, lest through your cruelty you should poison them, or put them to violent death; but in the natural law, signified by *the beginning*, it was not so
- People cannot be lifted from moral corruption to a high standard at once
- Jesus tells them in verse 8 that it is not a command but a concession because of the hard hearts of the Israelite men

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- The decision of our Lord must be very unpleasant to these men
- The reason why they wished to put away their wives was, that they might take others whom they liked better; but our Lord here declares that they could not be remarried while the divorced person was alive, and that those who did marry, during the life of the divorced, were adulterers; and heavy judgments were, denounced, in their law, against such
- He put the Pharisees to silence, He then gives the law with His own authority

Marriage and Divorce (19:1-10)



- It seemed to the disciples as if it would be impossible to live up to so high an ideal
- The words seem to indicate that the permissive view of the school of Hillel was the more popular one even with those who, like the disciples, had been roused to some efforts after a righteousness higher than that of the scribes or Pharisees

Jesus Teaches on Celibacy (19:11-12)



- Jesus Christ takes occasion from the remark of the Pharisees to praise holy virginity, which He represents as a great and good gift of heaven
- Our Lord gave a very wise answer, and well suited to the present circumstances of the disciples
- Neither of the states is condemned
- Notice that Jesus has discussed the sanctity of marriage and the free will choice of celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom in the same teaching
- Both the Sacrament of Matrimony and a consecrated virginity for the sake of the Kingdom come from the Lord and are a gift of grace

Jesus Teaches on Celibacy (19:11-12)



- All Christians are called to live a chaste life outside of marriage and to remain faithful to one's spouse within the covenant bond of marriage
- Fornication, like adultery, is a mortal sin (Exo 20:14; Lev 20:10; Deut 5:18; Jer 7:9; 23:14; Mt 5:27-28,32; 19:9,18; Mk 10:11-12,19; Lk 16:18; 18:20; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:19; James 4:4) and could cost a person his/her eternal salvation (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Heb 13:4; Rev 22:14-15)
- It was a common practice in ancient times for men who were assigned to serve the ruler by protecting and serving the king's wives to endure forced sterilizing or willingly submit to castration to serve as eunuchs in the king's household

Jesus Teaches on Celibacy (19:11-12)



- There are three groups mentioned who need not marry
 - (1) Those born physically incompetent
 - (2) those made eunuchs by mutilation
 - (3) those who abstain from marriage to devote themselves, free from worldly cares, to Christ's work
- Those who have made themselves eunuchs, not by castrating themselves, (that is wickedness), but abstaining from marriage, and yet living chastely, (having mortified their lusts, and brought under their body), that they might be less burdened with the cares of the world, and be more free for the work of the ministry, or be able more to give up themselves to a holy life and spiritual conversation

Jesus Blesses Little Children (19:13-15)



- The fact that they were brought indicates that there was something in our Lord's look and manner that attracted children, and impressed their parents with the feeling that He loved them
- The disciples did not consider children important enough to take up the Master's time; Jesus rejected that
- St. Luke tells us that people were even bringing their infants for Jesus to bless (Lk 18:15)
- St. Mark tells us that Jesus was angry that His disciples tried to prevent parents from bringing their children to Him (Mk 10:14)
- The giving of a blessing by the laying on of hands was a custom as early as the origin of the tribes of Israel when Jacob-Israel blessed his grandsons by laying his hands on their heads (Gen 48:8-16)

Jesus Blesses Little Children (19:13-15)



- As He did in Matthew 18:3, Jesus presented the little children as models for His disciples
- The Kingdom of heaven belongs to little children not because of anything they have done but because salvation is a gift that the humble and innocent accept without question
- These words show
 - (1) that the earlier they come to Christ the better
 - (2) that they should not be hindered from coming by misguided teaching
 - (4) that parents should bring them to the Savior

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- Some assumed that this young man came only to try our Savior, as the Pharisees sometimes did, and without any design to follow His advice
- However, we read in St. Mark that, he *went away sorrowful* (Mr10:22)
- We learn that
 - (1) he was a young man (Mt 19:20)
 - (2) he was a ruler, probably of a synagogue (Lk 18:18)
 - (3) he was rich, which probably accounts for his holding office, at an unusual age (Mt 19:22)
 - (4) he came running to Jesus and kneeled to him (Mk 10:17)

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- He seems to have come with sincerity, but without resolution strong enough to leave his worldly goods and possessions
- He appears not to have believed that Christ was God
- Because He came unto Him as a mere man, and one of the common sort, and a Jewish teacher; for this cause then as a man He discourses with him
- Our Savior, to correct his misconception, tells him that God alone is good, insinuating thereby, that he should believe Him to be God, or cease to address Him by the title of good
- He leads him on by little and little, and teaches him to be far from all flattery

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- He has, in saying that no man is absolutely good, said that no man can keep the commandments perfectly
- If eternal life was to be won by doing, there was no need to come to a new Teacher for a new precept
- It was enough to keep the commandments, the great moral laws of God, as distinct from ordinances and traditions (Mt 15:3), with which every Israelite was familiar

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- Agreeably to the meaning of his question, Matthew 19:16, the young man expected to be referred to commandments of a particular kind, and therefore calls for further information
- Not tempting, far from it, but supposing there were some others besides those of the law that should obtain
- The Lord passes over the first four of the ten commandments, throws the young man back to his relations with his fellow-men, compels him to give an account of his moral goodness

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- The young man responds that he has lived in accordance with those commandments and asks what is lacking in his life; he is asking what he can do above and beyond obedience to the Law to please God
- There was, no doubt, great ignorance in this reply
- He was sensible of the fact that there was a lack
- His soul had not found rest in outward duties

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- His question implied a dissatisfaction with himself, a sense of incompleteness, as hungering and thirsting after a higher righteousness
- His answer must have been sincere because St. Mark tells us *Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said to him, "You are lacking one thing ... (Mk 10:21)*
- The injunction of the Lord is manifestly intended to bring out the fact that the young man had made an idol of his riches
- Jesus both says it, and in order to draw him on, He also shows him the reward to be great, and leaves it all to his own

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- He sadly walks away
- He loves God but not enough to be willing to give up all his material possessions and the rank it affords him to follow Jesus from place to place only depending on God to provide for his needs
- He would like to be a disciple of Christ, and an heir of life, but was not ready to pay such a price
- Jesus commanded him to do this, therefore, to test his character, and to show him that he had not kept the law as he pretended, and thus to show him that he needed a better righteousness than his own

Jesus Counsels the Rich Young Ruler (19:16-22)



- This man was required to use his wealth for God and for man; so are we to use ours
- There is just one difference; he was commanded to sell and give away; we are required to turn all over to Christ and to hold it as it His stewards
- Christ establishing the three principles of celibacy
- In verse 12, Jesus recommends celibacy
- Here He proposes voluntary poverty, and immediately adds that of obedience, *follow me*

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- *It is easier for a camel*, This might be a common saying, to signify any thing impossible, or very hard
- Some by a *camel*, would have to be meant *a cable*, or ship-rope, but here is commonly understood a true *camel*
- The problem isn't the wealth but it is the self-sufficiency wealth gives a person
- The wealthy often do not feel they need God because they believe their wealth affords them the power to handle any crisis they may face
- That is why Jesus listed "poverty of spirit" as the first Beatitude

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- Acknowledging we need God is the first step in the spiritual journey to salvation
- The Lord does not say that a rich man shall not enter, but that he shall enter with great difficulty
- Mark says that when Christ uttered these words the disciples were astonished, and then Jesus explained by the words, How hard it is for them 'that trust in riches' to enter into the kingdom of God, which shows the sense in which he spoke the words of this verse (Mk 10:24)
- A man may trust in riches who has \$100, as well as one who has \$100,000

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- The apostles did not imagine there was any difficulty of rich men coming into the kingdom of the Messiah, which they took to be a worldly one, and would be filled with rich men; for so they understood Christ; though He meant by the kingdom of heaven a spiritual kingdom
- The significance of verse 26 is that salvation is a gift of God "it is not something one can work for or purchase
- Human efforts alone cannot save a man

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- The young man was zealous in keeping the commandments, but there was a great lack
- The grace of God only can save
- It can break down the trust in wealth, take away the love of wealth, and fill the heart with the love of Christ
- It is the love of money, not money, that is the root of all evil

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- Peter observing that our Savior laid not the stress of men's salvation either upon riches or poverty, but upon the frame of men's spirits, their humility, self-denial, their obedience to and readiness to follow him; rejoins these words, and says, *we have left all*
- *One may wonder*, St. Peter had been but a fisherman, always poor, living by his industry, and gaining his bread by the sweat of his brow; yet with great confidence he says, we have left all. (St. Jerome)

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- We are not to consider what he left, but the will with which he left his all
- The apostles denied themselves even the desire and tendency of possessing any thing
- The Apostles understand that they have answered to the higher calling and want to know what their sacrifice will mean
- Jesus assures them that they will share in a rich spiritual inheritance

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- "Judging" in verse 28 refers to the authority to rule or govern which Jesus has given them in 18:18
- It is the opinion of many of the Fathers, St. Jerome, St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and others, that all apostolic men, i.e. such as, renouncing the goods of this life, adhere to Christ in mind and affection, and by every possible means promote His reign and the propagation of His gospel, will be so far honored as to sit in judgment with Him at the general resurrection
- This leaving of all for the sake of Jesus may take place without persecution, simply by one's choosing to follow Him as a disciple; but it may also be forced upon one through persecution

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- In the days of Jesus, those who followed Him were obliged, generally, to forsake houses and home, and to attend Him
- In our time it is not often required that we should literally leave them, but it is always required that we love them less than we do Him, that we give up all that is inconsistent with religion, and that we be ready to give up all when he demands it
- *hundred-fold* is to be understood of the blessings in this life, of interior consolations, of the peace of a good conscience, and in general of spiritual gifts and graces, which are much more valuable than all temporal goods

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- And besides these spiritual graces in this world, he shall have everlasting glory in the world to come
- *But many that are first shall be last,....* This may refer unto, or be occasioned by, either the young ruler; signifying that he, and others like him, who were superior in riches and honor, were first in this world, of the first rank and figure, should be the last in the world to come
- *and the last shall be first;* the apostles, who were last in this world, being poor, lowly, and humble, should be the first in the other

With God All Things Are Possible (19:23-30)



- Or to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were in the chief place, and highest esteem, in the Jewish church, and yet least in the kingdom of heaven; when, on the other hand, the publicans and sinners, who were in the lowest class, and in least esteem, went first into it
- Some of the Church Fathers like St. Cyril suggested this saying refers to the Old Covenant Church versus the New Covenant Church
- The Israelites were called first to salvation but rejected the Messiah, whereas the Gentiles were called last and because they embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior they will come first in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ (St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragments on the Gospel of St. Matthew*, 226)



Conclusion

- What did Jesus say about divorce?
- What exception does Jesus allow for divorce? Otherwise, what occurs?
- What are the three conditions Jesus gives for celibacy?
- What did Jesus say about little children?
- What is the connection between Jesus' blessing of the children and his previous discussion on divorce?



Conclusion

- How did Jesus counsel the rich young ruler?
- How does the young man respond to Jesus' invitation to discipleship? Why?
- Why is it hard for the rich to enter the gates of heaven?
- What did Jesus promise to His apostles who left all to follow Him?
- What is the meaning of Jesus' promise to the disciples that they will sit on twelve thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel?



Conclusion

- What did Jesus promise to all willing to leave much to follow Him?
- Compare the attitudes toward marriage current in our culture with the attitude of Jesus in these verses. Is your attitude toward marriage more like the culture's or like that of Jesus?
- What is your personal attitude toward celibacy? Do you regard it as an opportunity to serve the kingdom of heaven or as an impossible burden rendered unnecessary in the modern age? If you are not married, what consideration have you given to a possible vocation to a celibate way of life?