

Sent: Wednesday, February 26, 2020 1:26 PM  
Subject: Last Nite's MOB Study on Matthew 19

"And He (Jesus) answered and said: "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So, they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate!" (Matthew 19:4-5)

Matthew 19 opens with Jesus leaving Galilee (thus ending His "Galilean ministry") and coming into the region of Judea, east of the Jordan River, in Perea, which just happened to be in the vicinity where Herod Antipas sought security in his fortified hilltop palace. (Remember that Herod had first thought, when he heard of Jesus' teachings, that he was John the Baptist, who he had had beheaded, returned from the dead, to continue to publicly condemn him!) Large crowds of people continued to follow Jesus, but opposition was mounting! And yet He continued to heal the sick, while focused on preparing His disciples for what was to come (as He was heading to Jerusalem and the "cross")! Meanwhile, some Pharisees were tracking Him wherever He went, trying to find fault with everything He did and said, basically to "trap" Him into saying something controversial that would stir up the people against Him!

And wouldn't you know, they ("some Pharisees") came to Jesus to raise a question about "divorce," which had become a highly controversial issue among the Jews! "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" they asked! Paul Logan called it "an ambush"! There was a variety of opinions prevailing among the people on this subject! A few believed divorce was "unlawful" in all cases. But in mainstream Judaism at that time there were two dominant views: one (the Shammai school) holding that divorce was permissible only for some "gross indecency," the other (the Hillel school), the one most followed, holding that a husband could divorce his wife for practically any reason! (Interestingly, it was John the Baptist's strong "condemnation" of Herod's adulterous relationships that led to his beheading, and the Pharisees obviously knew all about that, so may have been trying to go there again!)

So how did Jesus respond? By taking them back to the beginning, quoting from Genesis, "Have you (guys) not read...Don't you (Old Testament "scholars") know that "He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said that "for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh...What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate!" Couldn't be clearer! (Note Jesus here, by the way, authenticating the Genesis account of creation!)

Let the debate begin! "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away," they wanted to know! Moses permitted it, Jesus responded, but only "because of your hardness of heart! It wasn't that way from beginning! And I say (note the authority!) that whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery!"

God "hates divorce," Malachi 2:16 says! He designed marriage for life! When Adam and Eve were "joined together, they became "complete" and "whole." Hard to image a more powerful and vivid metaphor than "one flesh"! Derived from the creation of the woman out of the man's side to "be bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." (Genesis 2:21-22) "Joined together" carries a sense of permanence or "indissoluble union," confirmed through a sexual relationship, according to Dr. Constable.

The apostle Paul would compare marriage to the most intimate of all relationships: the relationship between Christ and the "church"! Ephesians 5:25-31 says: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her (the "bride" of Christ!), having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So, husbands ought also to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body! For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife and the two shall become one flesh! This mystery is great! But I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church!" Wow!

Also, interesting that Matthew 19 comes on the heels of last week's lesson on Matthew 18, where Jesus gave instructions about humility and protection, and forgiveness and restoration of "brothers"! How much more appropriate for the marriage relationship! (Also important for all of us to recognize that there's forgiveness, restoration, and hope! for those who have gone through divorce!)

And then, back to Matthew 19, where Jesus moves from giving instruction about marriage to instruction about children who, He says, demonstrate the characteristics (particularly, humility and a sense of dependence and trust!) that "belong" to all those who "belong" to the kingdom of heaven (and have salvation and eternal life)!

But Jesus' instruction, in Matthew 19, for His disciples is not finished! Jesus is confronted with the "rich young ruler" who is the "antithesis" of the ones who come with childlike humility and faith! He wonders what "more" (what "additional" act of righteousness) he "possibly" could do that would "earn" him eternal life. And he asserted that he had indeed "kept all the commandments," revealing, as noted by Dr. Constable, not only his "haughtiness," but the "superficiality of his understanding of God's demands! (Reminds us of the apostle Paul, who wrote in Philippians 3:6 how earlier, as "Saul," he had considered himself "blameless, as to the law" – until confronted by God on the "road to Damascus"!)

Well, the rich young ruler "went away grieving," after realizing what it meant to follow Jesus! And Jesus would tell His disciples that "it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God"! Meaning "impossible"! As it is for everyone, based on one's "goodness" or self-effort! Titus 3:6 says it simply: It's "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us!"

Our lesson draws to a close with the disciples again "astonished" at the teachings of Jesus and wondering "who then could be saved" and "what was in it for them...seeing that they had left everything to follow Him"! Jesus assured them that it would be worth it all to follow Him, and that they would "receive many times as much," in addition to eternal life (based on His grace and mercy)!

Paul left us with the great outlook left behind in the diary of martyred missionary Jim Elliot, something that should be encouraging for all who desire to live the Christian life: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose!"

Men: Go with God this week and love your wife!  
Lowell