
Day 313 - November 9

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

The Final Journey

Readings: *Matthew 19:3-30; 20:17-34; 26:6-13; Mark 10:2-52; 14:3-9; Luke 18:15-43; 19:1-28; John 11:55-57; 12:9-11*

Reflections:

- Pharisees question divorce: The opening question by the Pharisees reveals their desire to have complete freedom to divorce their wives. There were two rabbinic schools of thought in Jesus' day. One was more liberal and allowed divorce under any circumstance and another rabbinic school only allowed it based on sexual immorality. In fact, total freedom to divorce was given under the Law of Moses and so Jesus goes back past Moses to the creation to affirm the ideal for marriage for life. He then clarifies that Moses permitted divorce because of their hard hearts but this was not God's original vision. Now Jesus again restates the shocking declaration: those who follow the Law on this point are committing adultery. Jesus' teaching here as in the Sermon on the Mount is to establish the pervasiveness of law-breaking rather than to set a new rigid standard. We know this because in Paul's teaching on divorce there is no mention of adultery as a universal consequence of divorce and he makes more allowances for it depending on circumstances. Even the conservative church has broadened Jesus' teaching here to allow for divorce based on adultery, abandonment, and abuse. Jesus, through Paul, also allows women to divorce their husbands if they choose not to remarry. So is the remarriage what causes adultery? In the purest sense, yes, according to a law-based world. Yet the Law was an order that Jesus exposed as flawed and passing away. In the era of grace and love, the challenge is to determine case by case what the most loving response is to the painful reality of failed relationships. This is what Paul models for us in 1 Corinthians 7. Make no mistake though, God's ideal is still marriage but the way to deal with failed marriages is through loving relationship rather than blind laws.
- Disciples question Jesus: The disciples do a double take and again Jesus declares that all divorce and remarriage is fundamentally adultery, this time with no qualifier. The disciples conclude that it is better not to marry. Under this paradigm, they have a point. A person could marry, be held hostage in a terribly neglectful or abusive marriage and have no way to escape the abuse. We see that Jesus doesn't back off from his train of thought and allow for more grace but rather points out that this is a teaching not everyone can accept, but only

those to whom it is given. He then goes on to talk about eunuchs, some who are born that way, some who are castrated by others and some who make themselves that way for the kingdom. Certainly Jesus is not promoting castration here but this does bring to mind the notion, "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off." It is probably best to see that Jesus statement about living as a eunuch for the kingdom (never marrying) is meant as the qualifier to the previous statement, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only to those to whom it is given" because he concludes by saying, "The one who can accept this should accept it." What word are they accepting? It is the word that the disciples state: "It is better not to marry," not Jesus' teaching on divorce. The disciples are wondering if Jesus is really saying people should never marry. Jesus says that some are called not to be married but it is only for a limited few that can receive that teaching. Only those called by God to live a single life should pursue that calling.

- Jesus blesses the children: Jesus affirms again children and the way they model for us the kind of heart and vulnerability people need to enter the kingdom. He models blessing children and his own love of kids.
- Rich young man: A rich man wonders what he must do to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus lists a number of the Ten Commandments but leaves out the command "not to covet". The man has kept them all. Jesus commands this man in this circumstance to give away all his possessions. He leaves sad because he ultimately loves his wealth more than Jesus. Following Jesus doesn't require we give everything we have away (unless he asks us specifically). It does require being willing to do whatever he asks of us, regardless of the cost.
- Love of possessions: Jesus again uses impossible language about the wealthy entering the kingdom of heaven, just as in the case of divorce, he uses incredibly pervasive language about divorce causing adultery. It is impossible for a camel to go through an eye of a needle. It is impossible for our self-centeredness to enter the kingdom of heaven. It requires a complete heart transformation, not the mastery of an external code. A wealthy person will never enter the kingdom of heaven unless they are changed from the inside out. "With man (and his Law) this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God (through his Spirit)."
- Forsaking earthly attachments: Peter responds by saying they as the twelve have left everything to follow Jesus. Jesus states that those who have followed him (not just the twelve disciples but all Christ-followers) will sit on twelve thrones (symbolic of complete authority) and will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Those saved by grace will be seated with Christ on his throne (as Paul points out in Ephesians 1) and through Christ will judge those who have chosen to live by Law, the Torah or their own religious law. Those who have lost human relationships or material possessions as the cost of following Jesus will receive a hundred times more of relationships and true wealth in the kingdom. Again, those who seek to be first will find themselves last. Those who serve from a position of being last, will be brought to the front of the line.

- Death foretold a third time: Jesus is not being perfectly clear about what is to happen and the disciples simply do not understand. He has spoken so often in hyperbole that they are not sure if this is yet another example of some extreme symbolism.
- Request of James and John: Both James and John's mom (good Jewish mom) and James and John themselves want to be number one and number two in Jesus' kingdom. Talk about pride and the pursuit of power. Jesus asks them if they can drink from the cup (his suffering and death) that he will drink. They say yes and in fact Jesus doesn't doubt them. James will die a martyr and John will die in exile as an old man. Jesus simply won't answer them but says that these positions are already determined by God.
- Jesus teaches humility: In response to their prideful request, Jesus teaches again on the nature of servant leadership as opposed to the world's approach to leadership, top down and pyramid style. We are called to follow the ultimate servant leader as we seek to serve others. This lesson is something that is easily lost in the church as people pursue power and control rather than grace and humility.
- Zacchaeus receives Jesus: The story of Zacchaeus reveals the true humility of this wealthy tax collector. Tax collectors were viewed as betrayers of Israel and terribly corrupt. He was a sinner of the sinners. Yet he willingly humbles himself to see Jesus by climbing a tree. Jesus has dinner with him and reaches out relationally. Zachaeus then commits to giving away half of what he has and making total restitution for any money he has wrongfully taken. For his response of faith, Jesus announces that he has received salvation. He didn't have to give it all away. The command to the rich young ruler isn't the new law. Salvation comes through faith and complete surrender. It is a matter of your heart position, not the laws you follow.
- Blind Bartimaeus healed: This healing reveals how simple it is. Just ask in faith and you will receive what God has for you. No hoops to jump through or ladder to climb.
- Parable of the ten minas: His disciples think the kingdom would come immediately (the renewal of all things) and so Jesus tells them a parable to say basically it is going to take a long time and so be wise stewards of what God gives you. If you have been blessed with much, you are expected to have a big impact and to receive much authority when all things are renewed. If you simply hide and wait for Jesus to return, you will lose the authority, however big or small it is, at the renewal of all things. Make the most of your time because God doesn't want his children to selfishly hoard the gifts he has given or hide the talents he invested in them. At the end of this parable he also warns of the final judgment that will fall on all those who reject his lordship.
- Traveling toward Jerusalem: The journey continues toward the cross.
- Arrest planned for Passover: The religious leaders become more and more organized and intentional in their plans to arrest and execute Jesus.
- Mary anoints Jesus: This is one of the most beautiful stories of love and devotion. This is most likely the second time this has happen. One was an act of devotion for a woman who

had received incredible grace. Mary simply pours out her love on Jesus for everything he has done for her and her family. Judas objects to this lavish act of love and asks why the perfume wasn't sold to give the money to the poor. As the money keeper, he wanted the money because he was stealing from the purse. When Jesus indicates she was right to do this because he is going to die, the poor will always be present, and this is a testimony for all time; Judas most likely at this point realizes that Jesus is not going to start a revolution but is planning to die. He is not going to set up an earthly kingdom where Judas can become rich and powerful. It makes sense then that this becomes the turning point for Judas as he switches sides and decides to force Jesus' hand. He must believe that if Jesus and the Pharisees square off, the revolt will happen.

- Plot to kill Lazarus: At the same time, the religious leaders plan to kill Lazarus as well to put an end to the influence of his miracle and people coming to follow Jesus because Lazarus was raised from the dead.
- The stage is now set! The final showdown is about to begin!