

Matthew 19 - The Treasure of the Kingdom Community 1

I. Introduction

A. For the last seven weeks, we have been in the fourth section of Matthew looking at the Kingdom Community

1. The first part of the fourth section, the action part, looked at the **Preparation of the Kingdom Community**
 - a. We saw that Jesus' identity was the **Center of the Kingdom Community** - correctly identifying Jesus must be the starting point of the Kingdom Community, the community must know who Jesus is
 - b. And so Jesus' identity fuels the **Identity of the Kingdom Community** - Jesus' people are identified as those who truly know who Jesus is, Peter's confession is the rock on which the church is built
 - c. And Jesus' work is the **Formation of the Kingdom Community** - the perfect Son of God would be sacrificed to call out a new people and reconcile them with God, to set apart the sons of God
2. The second part of the fourth section, the teaching part, looked at the **Practice of the Kingdom Community**
 - a. Last week we looked at Matthew 18 and saw the **Purpose of the Kingdom Community** - What are Jesus' people about? How do they relate to each other?
 - b. And we saw four purposes or four guiding attitudes that are at the center of the Kingdom Community, but more importantly, we saw that each of these purposes was centered on the supremacy of Jesus
3. This week we're going to continue looking at the Practice of the Kingdom Community
 - a. Technically, we are entering the fifth and final section of Matthew this morning, and we see Matthew's guiding phrase: *Now when Jesus had finished these sayings*
 - b. Matthew uses that phrase to set apart each section of his gospel, but I'm going to continue to teach on this section paired with the previous section, and I think we are right do so because each action section relates to the teaching before and the teaching after
 - c. For example, the last action section, Matthew 14-17, was building up to the teaching section in Matthew 18 by showing us the Preparation of the Kingdom Community; but it was also building on Matthew 13 where Jesus promised that He would reveal Himself to those whom He chose - it was connected to both sides
 - d. This fifth section focuses on the topic of judgment, Jesus is going to enter Jerusalem as the King and pass judgment on unfaithful Israel, finishing by pronouncing the seven woes against the scribes and Pharisees
 - e. But in chapters 19-20, Jesus starts by issuing judgments on specific questions, the type of judgments that might be thought of as case law - the same sort of judgments that followed the Ten Word given at Sinai
 - f. So these judgments are guidelines for how the Kingdom Community should act in this world - it is closely related to the previous passage in Matthew 18
 - g. So, if Matthew 18 teaches us the Purpose of the Kingdom Community, I think Matthew 19-20 teaches us the **Treasure of the Kingdom Community** - What things should the people of Jesus value? And how do these valuables cause us to interact with the world around us?

B. I'm going to cover this section in two parts, separating Matthew 19 and 20 into two weeks of teaching

1. They are going together to teach a unified point, but to develop each section is going to take too long to do in one week
2. So I'll cover part 1 this week by looking at Matthew 19, and I'll need to warn you - I don't think this is going to be a complete message, there is going to be a lot of 'do and do not's' without a gospel-centered reason given
3. In a way, I'm hesitant to do that, because 'do and do not's' on their own are dangerous - lists of commands and judgments without seeing how they are a function of loving and exalting Christ can easily devolve into legalism
4. But for time's sake, I will go ahead and do this, looking at Matthew 19 with the 'do and do not's' and then next week concluding the message with the greater gospel purpose - what is the treasure of the kingdom community

C. So Matthew 19 is going to list a lot of things that are not the treasure of the Kingdom Community

1. There are going to be three things that the Kingdom Community should not value, three things that the Kingdom Community is called to give up
2. We'll carefully work through these three things this morning anticipating that next week we will contrast these things with the true treasure of the Kingdom Community

D. Read Matthew 19

E. Proposition: The Kingdom Community has one treasure and so all other treasures must be set aside

1. Your pleasures must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven
2. Your prejudices must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven
3. Your possessions must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven

II. Your pleasures must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven

Matthew 19:1-12 - Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast 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 not man separate." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?" He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery." The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry." But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."

A. The first section of Matthew 19 focuses on marriage and divorce

1. The Pharisees come up to Jesus and try to trap him in an endless debate the Jews were having - when is it ok to divorce your wife: there were two camps in Jewish thought, one very permissive and one somewhat more restrictive
 - a. The Pharisees thought that if they made Jesus choose sides, He would alienate a large part of the Jewish population by choosing against their position
 - b. But Jesus doesn't choose either of the Jewish positions, instead He quotes out of Genesis 1 and references how God made marriage in the beginning: *So they are no longer two but one flesh.*
2. Jesus' teaching on divorce is surprisingly simple: *What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.*
 - a. Jesus says that divorce was never and is never God's plan
 - b. Jesus says divorce only happens because of hardness of heart - an unwillingness to submit to God's plan because your heart is set on other desires - so divorce was never condoned in the Old Testament, it was only grudgingly allowed and regulated because it was already happening
 - c. So the Kingdom ideal is that there would be no divorce, that Malachi 2:16 would be realized in the Kingdom Community - *"For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."*
3. In fact, Jesus says divorce is a sin that leads to greater sins
 - a. *And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*
 - b. Divorce is being faithless to the covenant of marriage in the same way adultery is, so remarriage after divorce is exactly equivalent to adultery - it is showing affection to another instead of to your spouse, the wife of your youth
4. So the clear teaching of Matthew 19 is that divorce is not God's plan and should not occur in the Kingdom Community

B. But Jesus does appear to make an exception to the no divorce rule in Matthew

1. Jesus says that: *whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.*
 - a. This is very similar to Matthew 5:32 - *But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.*
 - b. So what does this exception mean and how do we live it out in the Kingdom Community?
2. To understand what this exception means, we should go look to other references to divorce in the New Testament
 - a. As we look at the New Testament, this exception clause is only found in Matthew
 - b. For example, the parallel passages in Mark and Luke do not contain an exception, Mark 10:11-12 - *"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery."*
 - c. And Paul makes a straightforward command in I Corinthians 7:10-11 - *To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband (but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.*
 - d. The other Gospel writers did not understand the exception to be so important that it had to be included, and Paul interprets the command without exception - so whatever the exception is, it can't significantly change the command
3. To understand what this exception means, we can look carefully at the Greek words in Matthew as well
 - a. The Greek word here is '*porneia*', whoever divorces his wife, except on the grounds of *porneia*
 - b. The word '*porneia*' can mean all types of sexual sins, any activity that is against God's design for sex and sexuality
 - c. But, it doesn't always mean every type of sexual sin in every context it is used - sometimes it means generally all types of sexual sin and sometimes it means more specifically ritual prostitution, it has the connotation of prostitution and idolatry

- d. For example, the word is found in Acts 15:20 where there is a list of pagan practices that Gentiles were to abstain from - *but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.* - each of these practices is associated with pagan temples, and sexual immorality probably means ritual prostitution
 - e. So the exception could mean that divorce and remarriage is acceptable if there is any sort of sexual sin, or it could be more narrow - it is only acceptable if there are certain forms of extreme sexual sin
4. So what is the exception?
- a. Even in Matthew we see clearly that the ideal for marriage is God's design, and His design does not include divorce for any reason - a union made by God is unbreakable by man
 - b. So I think Matthew is saying something to the effect of: divorce is not God's design and should not happen except maybe in the rare case of sexual immorality that makes it impossible for the marriage to continue - not a single sin and not 'minor' sexual sins, but a habitual lifestyle sort of exception that makes marriage meaningless
 - c. This understanding would bring this passage into harmony with the other passages in the New Testament, for example, it would be similar to Paul's allowance in I Corinthians 7:12-15 - *To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. ... But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.*
 - d. Paul tells the believers at Corinth not to divorce, but says if there is an unbeliever who walks away from a marriage and seeks another spouse, let them go - divorce is ok in that circumstance, the sexual immorality there, the faithfulness to the covenant is so extreme that there really isn't a marriage left
 - e. So there is an exception to the no divorce rule that acknowledges the real existence of sin in this world, but we shouldn't overuse the exception clause - the exception doesn't exist to see what we can fit into it
 - f. And we should also note, Matthew is not commanding that divorce happens anytime - sexual immorality does not demand divorce, but sexual immorality of such a degree that the marriage cannot continue allows divorce
5. Divorce is not the ideal and it never is the ideal - it may be acceptable in certain situations where the sexual immorality is such that the marriage cannot continue, but it should never be the goal

C. And, just in case we haven't had enough hard thinking already, Jesus says something perhaps even more confusing here

1. The disciples are astounded at Jesus' teaching - if God's design and command is life-long faithfulness in marriage, then it might be better not to be married - what if you ended up in a marriage that you weren't happy in?
 - a. Then Jesus says something confusing - He says, "you're right, but only for some people": *Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.*
 - b. Jesus says that this saying is true, but it is only true for those to whom it is given
2. So what is the saying? What is Jesus saying should sometimes be accepted?
 - a. First, we should clearly state that Jesus isn't saying that marriage is bad, He isn't completely agreeing with the disciples and we know this because Jesus is upholding the truth of the Old Testament in this passage and the Old Testament rejoiced in the goodness of marriage, for example Proverbs 18:22 - *He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.*
 - b. So the disciples are not right in general, they must only be right in specific situations, and I think the specific situation is something like this: It is better to not be married than to be married and ignore God's design in marriage
 - c. So some can't rejoice in marriage because of sin's marring of physical design and some cannot rejoice in marriage because of actions by men, but some have chosen not to be married (to be eunuchs) for the Kingdom of Heaven - in order to obey their King
 - d. Jesus is saying that marriage is a great gift, but it is not a command or a requirement in the Kingdom of Heaven and giving up that gift to serve the King is a glorious act - it is submitting our desires to His design
 - e. Marriage is a blessing from God, but it doesn't have to be pursued, you can set aside this blessing from God in order to pursue God's greater glory and your greater satisfaction in God
 - f. So Paul says something similar in I Corinthians 7:36-38 - *If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry---it is no sin. But whoever is firmly established in his heart, being under no necessity but having his desire under control, and has determined this in his heart, to keep her as his betrothed, he will do well. So then he who marries his betrothed does well, and he who refrains from marriage will do even better.*
3. Marriage is good, but obeying the king is better

D. Before we leave these verses, I want to take in a broader scope, to try to understand the bigger teaching behind divorce

1. As I've worked through Matthew 19-20, I'm fairly confident that all of these episodes go together somehow, and they start to harmonize nicely when you see the specific situations are each supposed to make a broader point
 - a. And the broader point here is: God's design takes precedence over our desires, our pleasures, our passions
 - b. Our pleasures, our passions, the things that we want can't be our treasure in the Kingdom Community because they aren't ultimate, there are greater things than what we want
2. This broader truth - God's design takes precedence over our desires - is behind the discussion of divorce in Matthew 19
 - a. As I mentioned a minute ago, the Jews were familiar with arguments about divorce, the rabbis had argued about the meaning of Deuteronomy 24 and what grounds there were for divorcing one's wife
 - b. Deuteronomy 24:1 - *"When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house,*
 - c. Some Jews understood indecency to mean sexual immorality while other Jews understood indecency to mean if the husband didn't like his wife for any reason - even if she burned the food
 - d. So one prevailing strain of Judaism thought that a man's desire, his pleasure was the ultimate treasure, so if he was displeased with his wife for any reason, he could send her away and marry a different wife
 - e. But Jesus' answer says, 'No! Your pleasures are not ultimate and they should not take precedence. God made marriage to be permanent and your fleeting desires cannot change that. You must give up your pleasures if you want to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'
3. And divorce is an excellent topic to show the futility of our fleshly desires, because the world is still like this
 - a. Think about the reasons that people get divorced - they are unhappy with their spouse, their spouse does not fulfill them, they want to be 'self-actualized' - the list could go on and on, but they all focus on their own pleasures, their own desires - what I feel in this moment is the ultimate truth and my ultimate treasure
 - b. And Jesus is taking this one example, divorce, and showing us that our fleeting, fleshly pleasures - what we think we want in this world - cannot be ultimate because they are so often misaligned with God's design and demand
 - c. The reason people get divorced is because they think that their desires supersede everything else - their desires are their treasure and so they must pursue that treasure at all cost, even against God's design
 - d. But those in the kingdom community are called to give up their pleasures, their passions in order to follow God's design - your fleshly passions can no longer be your treasure and you can't pursue them at any cost
4. And this is relevant to all sorts of current events in our world
 - a. Why are the arguments for same sex marriage not persuasive? Because they start with the premise that what a person wants must be right - what they want must be their treasure - and we can't withhold their treasure from them. But we respond, 'no, your desires cannot be your treasure if you want to be part of the kingdom community'
 - b. Why are arguments for transgendered normality not persuasive? Because they start with the premise that what a person wants must be right - they must pursue their treasure. But we respond, 'no, your desires cannot be your treasure if you want to be part of the kingdom community'
5. So our pleasures cannot be our treasure
 - a. Pursuing fleshly pleasures will never satisfy in the end - your flesh will entice you toward all sorts of destructive and sinful things and you will find that its pleasures were deceitful in the end - there was no lasting pleasure there
 - b. You can't make your feelings, your passions or your pleasures the treasure of your life and be part of the kingdom community - the kingdom of heaven is opposed to most of your fleshly pleasures and has a better treasure
 - c. So don't make worldly passions your treasure, don't follow your fleshly whims, don't find your joy in pleasing yourself - that is not the treasure that the kingdom community runs after
 - d. Instead, listen to Paul's exhortation in Titus 2:11-12 - *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*

III. Your prejudices must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven

Matthew 19:13-15 - *Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." And he laid his hands on them and went away.*

A. The next episode in Matthew 19 returns to the little children theme of Matthew 18

1. The people were bringing children to Jesus so that He could bless them and pray for them
2. But the disciples were indignant and rebuked the people - Jesus had more important things to do than talk to little children - the little children weren't like the disciples and weren't worthy of Jesus' time
3. Jesus disagrees, though - He says, "Let them come - do not hinder them!" - the disciples shouldn't be preventing the children from coming, they shouldn't be judging them as inferior or unworthy, for to them belong the kingdom of heaven

B. Now, remember that little children are a picture of a disciple who has come with humble dependence to Jesus

1. This is the meaning of Jesus' final phrase here: *for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.*
 - a. Jesus isn't saying that children are automatically saved, but rather that children are a picture of those who are entering the kingdom of heaven - those who have come to Jesus with humble dependence for His supply
 - b. Those who come with humble dependence - to them belongs the kingdom of heaven, they should be welcomed and not hindered regardless of how different or how inferior or how unimportant they might seem
 - c. The smallest, the humblest, the least in the kingdom of heaven is the greatest as Jesus told us in the last chapter - the disciples haven't truly grasped this truth yet, otherwise they would rejoice when the little children came
2. And this brings us to our broader scope: Jesus' desires take precedence over our affinities
 - a. The disciples thought that the little children were too different and too unimportant to warrant Jesus' attention, so they turned them away
 - b. But Jesus says that the least are important in the kingdom of heaven - the kingdom community cannot choose one group over another because they think it is more important, they shouldn't be drawn to certain groups of people because of their affinity for such people, how similar they are to them
 - c. These affinities, these prejudices that would act to exclude, whether actively or passively, others from the kingdom of heaven have no part in the kingdom community
3. It is very easy to value people who are like us, who share our background, understanding, enjoyments, passions, and these affinities can start to become our treasure - we seek out people like us to give us joy
 - a. But Jesus is saying, your affinities, your prejudices, who you are drawn to cannot be your treasure - you must set your natural affinities aside if you want to be part of the kingdom community
 - b. We shouldn't show partiality toward or against different groups of people, as James says in James 2:1, 8-9 - *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory... If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.*

C. So we shouldn't allow our prejudices to hinder the gospel of Christ - we can't let our prejudices be our treasure

1. We cannot choose to exalt our natural affinities in the kingdom community - we can't choose to interact with one group of people more than or to the exclusion of other groups of people in the church - the community of the church should not be valued based on how similar it is to you
2. So, like this passage, perhaps we are drawn to those who are similar in age to us - we don't like interacting with those who are much younger or much older than we are
 - a. Now, as a family integrated church, we are trying to combat this common prejudice - the desire to interact mainly or only with those of similar age and stage in life to us - so we have all ages worshipping together as one
 - b. But the organization of our church isn't enough - we must choose to actively seek relationships with those who are different than us - if you are young, seek out those who are older in our church, if you are old, seek out the young in our church - don't primarily or especially only spend time with those who are very similar in age or life stage as you are
 - c. Our affinity for others, our value in others should not be based on their age, but rather on whether they are depending on Jesus with us

3. Or perhaps we are drawn to those who are the same race as us - we don't like interacting with those who have different backgrounds, different cultures, and different histories (race)
 - a. Fortunately, I don't sense that this is the case in our church, but it has been a significant problem for the church that the church, in general, needs to deal with and to guard against
 - b. Even this last week, the Southern Baptists made a huge step in recognizing how they, at least historically, had strongly favored one race over another and how that had hurt and fractured relationships within the body of Christ
 - c. And I'm not picking on the Southern Baptists, I grew up in the Southern Baptist church and I respect many of their pastors and teachers, I'm using them as an example of what has been a common problem for all ages of the church
 - d. Paul actually spoke about this often, for example Colossians 3:11 - *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*
 - e. Or again, Galatians 3:28 - *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*
 - f. Someone's cultural or racial background does not make them any less than anyone else - if they have come with childlike dependence to Jesus then we must fully welcome them as a brother or sister in Christ
4. Or perhaps we're drawn to people for other reasons - we don't like interacting with those who are different than us
 - a. I see this happen in the church in many different ways
 - b. Maybe we have a distinct area of life that we are passionate about, maybe a certain form of diet or some other passion, and we like to look down on those who do things differently, who don't care as much about this area
 - i. We can be drawn to those who value the same things in this world as we do - but Jesus says we shouldn't be accepting or rejecting people based on anything besides their dependence on Christ
 - ii. Paul exhorted the Colossians in the same way, Colossians 2:16 - *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath.*
 - c. Or maybe we have an certain lifestyle, a way of life, and we like to look down on those who live in different ways
 - i. Perhaps we live in the country or in the city and we value people who live like us, perhaps we have big families or small families and we value people who live like us and we naturally are drawn to them and interact with them
 - ii. But Jesus says we shouldn't be accepting or rejecting people based on anything besides their dependence on Christ - we ought to value people who are different than us in the kingdom community
 - iii. Now, I'll be careful here - I'm not suggesting that we accept any lifestyle, as the world would call us to - there are sinful ways to live and some 'lifestyles' are contrary to participation in the kingdom community
 - iv. But unless someone's lifestyle is contrary to the kingdom community, we shouldn't value others based on how or where they live
 - d. Or maybe we have money in this world and we like to look down on those who have less
 - i. It is easy to look down on those who have less than us, to be drawn to those who have succeeded in this world similarly to us - it is easy to start to make judgments about how someone who has less is less wise or has made foolish decisions - it is easy to value those who are like us
 - ii. But, again, Jesus says we shouldn't be accepting or rejecting people based on anything besides their dependence on Christ - we ought to value people who are different than us in the kingdom community
 - iii. James 2:1-4 - *My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*
5. All of these natural affinities, these prejudices, whether big or small, must be set aside in the Kingdom Community
 - a. The thing that should draw us together in the Kingdom Community is our common dependence on Jesus Christ - so we welcome any and all who have this same dependence, we do not hinder them or turn them away
 - b. Our affinities for certain people should not be our treasure, it is a treasure that is earthly and will fail - Jesus says, there is a better treasure than being with people like you

IV. Your possessions must be set aside to enter the kingdom of heaven

Matthew 19:16-30 - *And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*

A. Our third episode this morning is the famous episode of the rich young ruler

1. The rich young man approached Jesus and asked Him how to enter the kingdom of heaven, how to get eternal life
 - a. Now, this young man obviously had several misconceptions about the kingdom of heaven
 - b. First, he was severely deluded about how to enter the kingdom of heaven - he thought that entering the kingdom of heaven was about doing something good instead of listening to Jesus' words in Matthew 11 - *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*
 - c. But, also, the young man was severely deluded about his ability to keep the law - Jesus turned his question on him and held up the law of Moses, but the young man believed he had done well at keeping the law, ignoring Jesus' words in Matthew 5 - *For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*
 - d. The rich young man had a serious misunderstanding of justification - he neither understood how bad he was nor how much he needed Jesus to rescue him
2. But, Jesus doesn't seem to think that this the young man's biggest problem - he had a bigger delusion
 - a. Jesus called him to look at his own desires - did he really want to enter the kingdom of heaven, or did he desire something else more? Was there something in his life more valuable than eternal life?
 - b. The young man's riches were dangerous, so Jesus calls him to give them up, and instead have treasure in heaven
 - c. Which would the young man desire more - the treasures of earth or the treasures of heaven? Jesus told him that he can't have both, he can't rejoice in both, he has to choose one over the other.
 - d. Unfortunately, the young man found his desire for his riches was greater than his desire for eternal life, and he went away sorrowful - his great possessions had captured his heart
 - e. He was a living illustration of Matthew 6 - *Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
 - f. This young man had much treasure on earth and his heart had been drawn to it, he found that he could not give them up because his life had become entangled in riches

B. Then, starting in verse 23, Jesus Himself starts to draw out the broader scope of this episode

1. Jesus, as he watches the rich young man walk away sad, turns to his disciples and says that riches are incredibly dangerous - *Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.*
 - a. We shouldn't overlook this passage or try to explain it away - Jesus is saying our stuff is dangerous to us, and when we build up stuff here, every penny we add to our possessions here makes it harder to want eternal things
2. Now this goes against the grain of everything that is understood in this world
 - a. Those who have riches are understood generally to be wise, to be powerful, to be the best of society
 - b. It was that way 2000 years ago and it is still that way today - we are often drawn to value someone's wisdom and worth based on how much treasure he has been able to store up on earth, we use wealth as a proxy of value
 - c. So, it is no wonder that the disciples were baffled by Jesus' teaching: if the best of society - those who have earned and stored up riches - find it hard to be saved, then who can be saved?
 - d. And Jesus says, "You're right - if the rich can't earn their own salvation, then no one can earn salvation. If a leopard cannot change its spots then a rich man cannot set aside his riches."
 - e. But God can do what man cannot, God can take our hearts and set them on a better treasure and God can make a way for us to embrace that treasure - God can turn even a rich man's heart away from his riches

- f. So Jesus says that we can't value our possessions, instead we must set them aside in favor of a better treasure
- g. Peter asks Jesus - we have given up everything, we've walked away from our jobs, our families, our reputations, everything and we've followed you - will it be worth it?
- h. And Jesus says 'yes' - *And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*
- i. Jesus says that everyone who sets aside their possessions in favor of a better treasure will win that better treasure!
- j. And possessions are a broad category to Jesus, really it is anything you could possess in this world - it might be money or land or houses or family or even children - these things are all things you have in this world
- k. So we can't cling to these as our joy, we can't make these our treasure, we can't hoard them up on earth - instead we are called to set them aside, even to get rid of them, in order to find a better treasure

C. The western church really should not overlook Jesus' teaching here

1. The western church is full of riches and so often we like to explain away these verses, saying things like, "Jesus doesn't command everyone to give up their riches." "We don't need to give up riches, we just can't value them."
 - a. Arguments like this are often indicative of a heart that wants to deceive itself into thinking it is not entangled in the danger of treasure in this world - a heart that doesn't want to give up earthly treasure in favor of heavenly treasure
 - b. As R. H. Gundry says - "That Jesus did not command all his followers to sell all their possessions gives comfort only to the kind of people to whom He *would* issue that command."
2. Because, actually, the New Testament is surprisingly homogenous in its exhortation to those with riches
 - a. Matthew 6:19:21 - *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*
 - b. Matthew 13:22 - *As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.*
 - c. Matthew 19:23 - *And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.*
 - d. Luke 1:53 - *He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty.*
 - e. Luke 6:24 - *"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.*
 - f. Luke 12:32-34 - *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*
 - g. I Timothy 6:17-19 - *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*
 - h. James 1:9-11 - *Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.*
 - i. James 2:5 - *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?*
 - j. James 5:1-3 - *Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.*
3. Scripture is incredibly clear: riches are a deadly danger to the kingdom community
 - a. Possessions are dangerous because they distract you from a better treasure, they dull your desire for the treasures of heaven - the command to set aside your possessions isn't a legalistic requirement, it isn't something that Scripture commands you to do to earn eternal life; it is a loving warning - when you have these things, your heart will be drawn after them and they will lead you away from the best treasure
 - b. So take care and guard yourself so that your joy, your pleasure, your desire, your treasure is not in your things
 - c. Jesus would say - don't let your possessions strangle you, instead just get rid of them and come have my treasure

D. And that's the conclusion of Matthew 19 - set your treasures aside, there is a better treasure

1. Whatever else might be your treasure - get rid of it! And I don't mean theoretically but really, get rid of it, set it aside!
2. Instead, Jesus invites you to come and have some of His treasure - you can't bring any of your own treasures to the table, but if you set aside all of your treasures to come have His treasure, He will give you the best of treasures

Matthew 6:24 - *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.*

Matthew 13:44-46 - *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*

Luke 6:16-21 - *And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*

Luke 16:19-25 - *There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.*

Luke 19:2-10 - *And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."*

Acts 2:45 - *And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*

Acts 4:32-35 - *Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*

II Corinthians 8:1-15 - *We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints--- and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us. Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. But as you excel in everything---in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you--- see that you excel in this act of grace also. I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. And in this matter I give my judgment: this benefits you, who a year ago started not only to do this work but also to desire to do it. So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have. For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what he does not have. For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened, but that as a matter of fairness your abundance at the present time should supply their need, so that their abundance may supply your need, that there may be fairness. As it is written, "Whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack."*

II Corinthians 9:6-15 - *The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.*

You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission flowing from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

Hebrews 10:34 - For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Hebrews 13:5 - Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

Sell all you have (imperative or descriptive) - 8