



gracefellowship

Series: unWorthy: Calling the Outcasts
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Title: The Haves and the Have Nots
Passage: Matthew 19:13-26

Scripture Reading: Matthew 19:1-12

So much of the teaching and ministry of Jesus left people scratching their heads and asking questions. The religious elite couldn't stand the things Jesus was doing. He was disrupting the natural order of things. However, the people who had always been outsiders and considered unworthy or unclean, were thrilled by what Jesus was doing. He was giving a voice to people who had long been forgotten. He was loving and accepting of people who were looked at through wary eyes.

Today we are going to see three different ways Jesus thinks about people and the way his thoughts are different than the general public. The passages we are looking at today deal with divorced women, little children and a rich man.

The passage we read together this morning deals with a very sensitive topic in the days of Jesus, and it's one that still has relevance to us today. The prevailing thought of the culture in the days of Jesus was that men could divorce women for any and every reason. Remember, we are talking about a male dominated society where women have very few individual rights and are financially dependent on their husbands, in most cases, for their financial well-being. The debate among the Jewish people went two ways due to the teaching of two predominant Rabbis prior to the time of Jesus:

1. Men could divorce a woman in the case of sexual immorality.
2. Men could divorce a woman for any reason under the sun.
 - a. Prevailing teaching- if your wife burns your bread out of anger you can divorce her.

What we read earlier this morning gives that perspective and then we get Jesus' reply.

:: Matthew 19:3-9

³ Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"

⁴ "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,'

⁵ and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'?

⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁷ "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?"

⁸ Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.

⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery."

The Pharisees say that Moses **COMMANDED** them to give a certificate of divorce to their wives.

Jesus says Moses **PERMITTED** it because their hearts were heart.

The certificate of divorce was for the benefit of the woman so that she would still have a place in society. From some of what I studied this week I found that if a man divorced his wife for any reason other than sexual immorality on her part, he had to give her a certificate and pay her back her bride price. That way she had money to live on until she could figure out her next step. But what had started happening was that men were just abandoning their wives and out of greed, they were not paying back the bride price, but leaving her destitute with no hope for her future.

Jesus steps into that environment and shows love and dignity for women by saying men can't leave their wives on a whim and leave her high and dry. Moses permitted the certificate of divorce in order to take care of women and Jesus holds to that. But the command of God in marriage is to be united to your wife and become one flesh for a lifetime. That's the very definition of biblical marriage: a man and woman committed to one another for life.

I know that this is incredibly difficult for some of you sitting here this morning because you've experienced the pain of divorce where your spouse went outside the marriage covenant. It is still something that carries a certain stigma in our culture. But I want you to know that in the eyes of God that doesn't make you less worthy of His Kingdom. Jesus was teaching the Pharisees and the crowds listening that women are not less valuable in the eyes of God because of their marital status. Their value comes from being created in His image.

That's going to lead the disciples to say something interesting:

:: Matthew 19:10

¹⁰ The disciples said to him, "If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry."

This is another area of stigma in our society: if you're not married something must be wrong with you! But again, Jesus is going to put value on the position of being

unmarried- whether you have never been married, or remain unmarried after a divorce. Here's what Jesus in response to the disciples:

:: Matthew 19:11-12

11 Jesus replied, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given.

12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it."

If you are single- even if that's not necessarily by your choice- use your singleness to the glory of God and for the sake of His Kingdom. And know that you are not less than in the eyes of God. Again, Jesus is taking some of these cultural stigmas where people have been made to feel like outcasts or unworthy and He says they absolutely have a part to play in the Kingdom of God. Your Heavenly Father has a place for you and values you highly.

This bring us to the second group of people Jesus gives value and worth to that may not have been looked at highly in the culture: children. In fact, if women were below men, then children were below women. And remember what Jesus has just been talking about- marriage and divorce. Some people believe that the people bringing these children to Jesus are divorced women. If a man left his wife without a certificate of divorce he also left the children. They were abandoned and considered to be bastards. That made them unclean, so touching them made you unclean. The disciples of a Rabbi would work to make sure unclean people didn't come in contact with their Rabbi so he would not become unclean by touching them. With that as a backdrop, let's look at this interaction Jesus has:

:: Matthew 19:13-15

13 Then people brought little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked them.

14 Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

15 When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

When people start bringing their kids to Jesus the disciple rebuke them- they are unclean and unworthy of the touch of their Rabbi! But Jesus doesn't think along those lines. In fact, Mark's gospel tells us that Jesus was indignant with this attitude from His disciples. That may be how the rest of the world thought about these children, but that is not how God thinks of them! Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me...the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

I'm so thankful for all the young families and children we have at our church. We place a lot of value on kids here and we want them to know the gospel so they find a relationship with Jesus that will guide their lives. Ashley does an incredible job

leading our kids ministries and we just hired Julia McHolland to lead our pre-school ministry as an assistant to Ashley. But that is also the area of greatest need for us when it comes to volunteer leaders. Right now we need at least 6 volunteers for our preschool ministry in both services. If you can serve 1 Sunday a month, loving on preschool kids, please contact Ashley and let her know. Our children need a biblical foundation as they grow up in a world that is more and more resistant to the gospel and you can play a vital role in introducing them to Jesus!

Children make up 25% of the global population. And Jesus loves every single one of them! He even makes the point that the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these. Here's what is interesting as you read Matthew's gospel, over and over again he is going to call all of us children. Matthew clued in that Jesus wants His followers to come to Him as children. We are going to talk about what he meant by that in a few minutes.

So far this morning we have been talking about how Jesus felt toward people who were the "have nots" in society- women who had been left high and dry, kids who may have been abandoned, or just simply didn't have a lot of intrinsic value to the culture- but now let's shift our attention to someone who seemingly had it all.

Matthew puts this interaction immediately on the heels of Jesus blessing the children.

:: Matthew 19:16-26

16 Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony,

19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

This conversation Jesus had with the rich man had to leave the disciples a little confused. What does Jesus mean it's difficult for a rich person to get into heaven? In the first century mindset, rich people were in good standing with God- that's why they were rich, they had God's blessing!

We may not look at rich people in today's society and think because they are rich they are good with God, but we certainly hold rich people in high esteem- for the most part! And in a lot of ways it's easier to be rich today than ever before. Ask most kids or teenagers today what they want to do with their lives and they will say they want to be an influencer and make millions of dollars on YouTube! Everyone wants to be rich and famous.

This guy comes to Jesus and he's already rich, but he's asking how he can get eternal life. But it sounds like a business transaction, right? He wants to be validated that he's already done everything right and deserves to have life with God because he's earned it. He is even bold enough to say that he's kept the commandments perfectly! But when Jesus tells him the one thing he lacks is to go sell all his possessions and give them to the poor then come follow Him, the man goes away sad because he's really wealthy.

This man wasn't destitute, like the women and children, but he couldn't bring himself to a place where he could let go of what he held most valuable- his money. Here's the truth, because compared to the vast majority of the world, most everyone in this room is incredibly wealthy; we just don't think of ourselves that way.

We need to be desperate for God even if we aren't destitute.

The truth is our wealth can cause us to take our eyes off God because we can handle most anything that comes our way by throwing money at the problems we have. But you can't get to heaven that way. Salvation requires faith in Jesus that puts Him at the center of everything in our lives.

So, if it's hard for rich people to get into heaven, who gets in? He actually has already told them:

The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who come to Jesus like children.

In Matthew 18 there was another instance where Jesus was with the disciples and they were arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus called a child over to him and said:

:: Matthew 18:3-5

³ And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

When Jesus talks about children inheriting the kingdom he is talking about a posture of heart. We have to be willing to humble ourselves and come to Jesus in full dependence.

Think about what children are like:

They are dependent for being fed, being clothed, being sheltered, being protected...

Jesus wants us to come to Him like a child. He wants us to come in our dependence and understand that we can't achieve or earn salvation on our own. Entering the kingdom isn't about knowledge, accomplishments, social status or religious posturing. We come to Jesus as children and humble ourselves before Him in faith knowing that He does not turn us away.

I love that in this passage we get such amazing glimpse into the mindset of the disciples and Jesus. The disciples are enamored by the wealthy man who has it all. Jesus is enamored by women and children who have nothing!

It's so easy in our world to hold the rich and powerful and beautiful in high regard while ignoring the lowly and destitute. But Jesus reigns over a very different kingdom than what we see in our world. If you think back to what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount you see the kind of kingdom He is building.

:: Matthew 5:3-12

He said:

**³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.**

**⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.**

**⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.**

**⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.**

**⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.**

**⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.**

**¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say
all kinds of evil against you because of me.**

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The things we see and attribute value to on the outside are not the things of real importance to Jesus. He is more interested in our heart condition. He is looking for people who come to Him hungering and thirsting for Him rather than being full of themselves.

In Matthew's gospel one of the primary ways he talks about followers of Jesus is to call us children of God. If we want to be in God's family we have to come to him in faith, like a child, and live in dependence of His goodness.

As disciples of Jesus we need to see people the way Jesus does and look for ways to impact the world and advance His kingdom by loving and serving the outcasts and those the world says are unworthy.

Closing Prayer:

**Father, help me to live this day to the full, being true to You, in every way.
Jesus, help me to give myself away to others, being kind to everyone I meet.
Spirit, help me to love the lost, proclaiming Christ in all I do and say.
Amen.**

Life Group Discussion Questions:

Read Matthew 19:1-26

(If you are using the story method, read 1-15 and have someone share 16-26 from memory.)

1. What events are taking place in this passage?
 - a. Jesus challenged on the teaching of divorce (and women's place in society)
 - b. Jesus teaching about the worth and value of children
2. How does Jesus respond to each event? (break this down and talk about each one specifically)
3. What is Jesus' concern for the women, children and the rich ruler?
4. What is easy or difficult to accept about what Jesus is showing us and teaching us in these three events?
5. What does it mean for us to come to Jesus like a child? How child-like would you say you are at this point in time?
6. Is there anything you feel the Holy Spirit is leading you to do in response to our conversation tonight?