

INTRODUCTION: We return to Matthew's Gospel full of the truth of Israel's words of confession from the period of the Judges, when they confess in 1 Samuel 12:19 that, throughout their history, they have, "added one sin upon another". Is that not also our history as wretches saved by grace? We need the Gospel each and every week, for example, in order not to wither under our Lord's high standards for marriage in Matthew 19:1-9, when we see our own marital failures compared to His commitment as the Groom of the Church. We also need His continual forgiveness and renewal, since the "deceitfulness of wealth" in Matthew 19:21-24 makes it impossible for us in our own strength to love God above all the possessions and blessings which we covet. Like the disciples, we can despairingly ask, "Who then can be saved?", (Matthew 19:25), when we hear Jesus' convicting words about the danger of our sinful desires for things in this world. But may our hope in this week's notes flow from Jesus' promise in Matthew 19:26: "With men this (salvation) is impossible; but with God *all things* are possible."

Monday: read Matthew 19:13-15. What a relief to be able to come to Jesus in all our weakness and need, to ask Him to "place His hands" on our needs and our lives. Such hands are indeed for blessing – though soon they will be nail-pierced by the very men who argued with our Lord about marriage in the first half of our chapter. How beautiful to see Jesus' hands so busy to bless these children who wait patiently to come to Him, despite efforts to bar them!

Meditate and Pray: *"Lord Jesus, thank you that you bring the very goodness of the storehouses of Heaven down into our lives. We don't deserve your blessing, but thank you that yours is a grace-filled goodness, which enables you to bear with our sinful desires, and to replace those desires over time with what is truly good, wholesome and holy. Help us to crave God's blessing upon all that we have, all that we do and all that we desire, and help us to seek such blessing from the Father through your love-scarred hands. Amen."*

Tuesday: read Matthew 19:13-15 and Genesis 48:15-16. What does it mean for our Lord Jesus to bless these children brought to Him in Matthew 19:13? Well, to put it simply, such blessing meant that Jesus as Mediator would ask the Father for real spiritual blessings in these children's lives. How could we think that Jesus would ask for anything less than the fundamental covenant blessings listed below? As God's Spirit inspired Jacob to seek covenant blessings for his grandchildren in Genesis 48, so we may be sure that the same Spirit was inspiring our Lord along the same lines of blessing. He asked God to ...

- 1) Walk with these children all their lives long in covenant fellowship, as He had walked with their fathers in the faith, Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 48:15).
- 2) Shepherd them and be their God, even as in the Covenant of Grace, God promised to, "Be God to you and your children" (Genesis 17:7 & 48:15).
- 3) Most significantly, Jesus asked God to be their Redeemer – even as Jacob declared the pre-incarnate Christ, (the "Angel of the Lord"), to have been *his* Redeemer in Genesis 48:16. Just as Jacob blessed the covenant children of Joseph brought to him, so the children brought to Jesus would have been the objects of Jesus' prayer that they be delivered as well! That's why Jesus had come to earth – to deliver those who have no voice, like these children.

Meditate and Pray: Now we see the price Jesus was willing to pay to be *the* Source of blessing for these children: He was willing to take up the mantle of the suffering “Angel of the Lord”, going back to those days of affliction in the Old Testament, in which the Deliverer suffered right along with His wandering people Israel in Isaiah 63:9.

“Lord Jesus, thank you that you and your Father were with your people in all their wanderings in sin and unbelief, and that, in the words of Isaiah, “In all their affliction you were afflicted, and in your love and pity you redeemed them, bearing and carrying them all the days of old.” Thank you Jesus, that you know all the troubles of our children’s lives, and your compassion is savingly effective as you lay your hands on their lives at just the right time and place. Please bless our children by laying your hand on their lives. In Your Name, Amen.”

Wednesday: read Matthew 19:13-15. If we need any further proof that Jesus, as the Angel of the Covenant of the Old Testament, was willing to suffer affliction in order to bless His people, including the children in Matthew 19:13, consider the obstacles which Jesus’ foes, and even His own disciples, prove to be when it came to His determination to bless in Matthew 19:13!

The foes of our Lord seek to argue for easy divorce in Matthew 19:2-12, thus devaluing the children who were there to see Jesus. In the words of one OPC Pastor, Martin Ban:

You can imagine the bewilderment of the children as they heard the Pharisees grill Jesus about divorce. Yet these children did not leave... So when the discussion ended, people “brought little children to Him, that He might bless and pray for them” (Mt. 19:13).

But what about the Twelve? Did they prove more welcoming to the children than these Pharisees? Sadly, no! Ban continues:

Here was an opportunity for the apostles to achieve greatness! They could have been the first ones to usher those children into the presence of Jesus. And while the children were waiting to talk with Him, the apostles could have stooped down and talked with them personally. Sadly, however, we read that the disciples rebuked them.

The disciples not only missed a great opportunity for service in God’s Kingdom, but actually hindered the cause of Christ by trying to keep the children away! Why? How could they have done that? Easily. Jesus had better things to do than talk to kids or so they thought. He had just finished an important discussion of the Law! The disciples, like many today, tended to think that Jesus had better things to do than minister to children. Children and their spiritual needs often take a back seat to adults and their needs.

Meditate and Pray: *“Help us Lord, as a church, to treasure the children in our midst. Help every adult to see it as their calling to offer encouraging words, godly examples and protective prayers for each and every covenant child in our midst. Keep us from being so busy as parents that we lose track of our Psalm 78:4-6 responsibility to teach our children about the mighty deeds of the Lord. Keep us humble so that stooping to the level of children is not so difficult for us. Amen.”*

Thursday: read Matthew 19:16-22 and Acts 16:29-33. Sadly, it is not just the overtly hostile Pharisees or the self-obsessed disciples that prove a hindrance to the covenant children of Jesus' day. There is also the self-righteous rich, young ruler, who comes to Jesus in Matthew 19:16-20, asking "what good thing (or good deed) must I do to get eternal life"? His works-religion has indeed proved to be a real stumbling block to many children, who grow up in communities believing the fallacy that good people go to Heaven when they die, *because they are good.*

But we mustn't immediately criticize this question, as the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30 asked the same thing: "What must I do to be saved?" In fact, this question about what our *response of faith* is to be to the message of the Gospel *is in fact essential to ask.* In Acts 16:31, the Apostle Paul, led by the Spirit of God, answered the jailer's true question of faith with the command of the Gospel to "*believe*" on the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the rich ruler's question was not driven by the true saving faith which seeks Christ alone as Savior from sin. He asked Jesus how *he himself* could earn the right of salvation through the Law. Not surprisingly, Jesus answered this foolish question, (about being saved through good deeds), by driving the young man to the absolute perfection which the Law demands. In this way, our Lord sought to wake the rich man up to his folly in thinking that his own good works could *ever* merit Heaven. But the rich young man would not listen. His security and self-worth, and even his desire for Heaven, were all tied up with what he thought were his *wealth* of good deeds and his *wealth in terms of earthly possessions.* He would not give up either, and went away in Matthew 19:22 "sad" or "grieved" by Jesus' teaching.

Meditate and Pray: "*Lord, I lift up our whole congregation to you now, young and old, new Christian, mature believer or perplexed seeker – do not let us be deceived by worldly blessings or moral goodness to think that we can walk away from Jesus. Oh Lord, we don't know what happened to this rich young man. It horrifies us to think that this may have been his last encounter with God's saving grace in Jesus Christ. May it not be so with us! Do not allow us to wander in our own ways of self-righteousness! Look upon us as you did this young man and love us, (Mark 10:21), and have mercy upon us. Pursue with your Spirit so that our initial rejections of you may not prove as fatal as we deserve. We plead all this only for the sake of your great Name as the God who abounds in mercy and compassion, forgiving thousands who love you and keep your commands – beginning with the command of faith: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved". Amen.*"

Friday: Matthew 19:16-22 Isaiah 53:2. Perhaps the most grievous aspect of the rich young man's words to Jesus is his claim in Matthew 19:20 to have kept "all God's law since he was young". Such self-deception is breath-taking. He has neither any true concept of his own sin, nor any concept of the exalted perfection of the Law of God. Jesus gently but firmly cuts through his self-deception with one stroke of the piercing 10th commandment, "Thou shalt not covet anything".

Meditate and Pray: "*Oh Lord, our spiritual self-deception is so deep and we simply deny reality in so many parts of our lives. Thank you that your Son, the Lord Jesus, has sent His Spirit to convict us of "sin, righteousness and judgment", (John 16:8-11). Do not let us succeed in delusions. Use your Law surgically to penetrate into our innermost heart recesses, so that we might be drawn anew to our Savior, instead of going away like the rich young ruler. Amen.*"

Sat/Sun: read Matthew 19:16-20; Philippians 2:7 and Isaiah 53:2. We end this week's notes on the rich young ruler by contrasting his pride in Matthew 19:20, where he proudly asserts his obedience to the whole Law of God with the words, "All these things I have done", with Jesus' humility in Matthew 19:16-17 – where He points out that God alone is good. Mark 10:18 fills in Jesus' retort to the young man – He clearly questions him as to why he calls Him "good", since God alone is good.

Jesus' words don't mean that He is confessing sin here – only that He refuses to magnify Himself in the eyes of men. He will not boast of His good works, though He does all things well. In contrast, this young man wants everyone to know his good deeds, and wants them to earn him eternal life!

Meditate and Pray: Let us thank our Savior that He, “made Himself nothing”, that is, took on Himself the appearance of the lowest of the low, in order to suffer for our sins. No one remarked about Jesus, in terms of pride on His part, because He simply refused to be lifted up as a man in order to be worshipped as an idol to self-righteousness and human accomplishment.

Jesus kept the second commandment! He would not be worshipped as a man, but came to earth to “bring glory to His Father, by finishing the work His Father gave Him to do! Hallelujah for a Savior, willing to be a rejected man of sorrows in order to finish the work of our salvation! Let us sing these words from hymn # 246:

*Man of sorrows! What a name
for the Son of God, who came
ruined sinners to reclaim!
Alleluia! What a Savior!*

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood;
sealed my pardon with his blood:
Alleluia! What a Savior!*

*Guilty, helpless, lost were we;
spotless Lamb of God was he:
full atonement-can it be?
Alleluia! What a Savior!*

*Lifted up was he to die;
'It is finished!' was his cry;
now in heaven exalted high:
Alleluia! What a Savior!*

*When he comes, our glorious King,
all his ransomed home to bring,
then anew this song we'll sing:
Alleluia! What a Savior!*