

Introduction: We are travelling with our Lord towards His rejection, condemnation and death sentence in Jerusalem as we open Matthew 19. Rejected in Galilee, Christ is setting His face to go to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51). But Jesus will still, for six more months, teach crowds about the danger of hardness of heart and sin. Though He leaves the place of His upbringing and abandons the public venues where most of His miracles were done in Galilee, He reaps a full harvest “in the region beyond the Jordan” (Matt 19:1), as He returns to the places of John the Baptist’s wilderness ministry – where He was first well known and enthusiastically received.

Monday: read Matthew 8:14-17 and 19:1-2. As Matthew 19 opens, Jesus says goodbye to Galilee, perhaps for the last time. Such goodbyes would be heart-breaking for our Lord. For it was in Galilee Jesus’ boyhood took place, and in Galilee Joseph had his carpenter’s shop. It was as a ‘Galilean’ that Jesus was known, and He made His home in the Galilean town of Nazareth, as Nathaniel mockingly pointed out in John 1:46: “*Can anything good come out of Nazareth*”?

Moreover, when Jesus as a Man began to preach the Kingdom of God, it was in these very Galilean homes, market places, fields, synagogues and seaside locations that Jesus spent Himself in loving, patient, compassionate healing and deliverance of so many. As Matthew 8:17 puts it, it was in Galilee that Jesus first demonstrated His willingness to “take up our infirmities and carry out diseases”. What a beautiful verse this is! The verbs here, taken from Isaiah 53:4, are verbs describing the “hands-on approach” that Jesus takes with sinners!

Meditate and Pray: Sing about our Lord’s ability to, “take hold of us” in the “pit of sin”, and draw us up to sit with Him “in the high places of salvation”! Use hymn # 622:

*I waited for the Lord most high,
And He inclined to hear my cry;
He took me from destruction’s pit
And from the miry clay;
Upon a rock he set my feet,
And steadfast made my way.*

*A new and joyful song of praise
He taught my thankful heart to raise;
And many, seeing me restored,
Shall fear the Lord and trust;
And blest are they that trust the Lord,
The humble and the just.*

Tuesday: read Matthew 8:14-17 and 19:1-2. Just as Jesus must have lovingly lingered in Galilee before turning His footsteps elsewhere, so we linger on what Jesus did among His own people in Matthew 8:14-17. Take the first phrase: “to take hold of our infirmities”. In its intensive form, this verb, “to take hold” means literally to “snatch from danger” or to “take by the hand”. When God the Father redeemed His people out of slavery and out of Egypt, He is said to have, “taken them by the hand” in Hebrews 8:9.

To sum up Jesus’ Galilean ministry: Jesus had whole-heartedly given Himself, heart and hands, to minister the Gospel to the people of Galilee. Sadly, they had rejected Him. Even though most of His miracles were done there, Galilee comes under final condemnation, according to Matthew 11:20-24.

But how persistent our Savior is! With no bitterness, He whole-heartedly moves on to His next field of service, going across the Jordan in Matthew 19:1-2 into the region of Perea. He is now on His way to Jerusalem, (Luke 9:51) and is determined to continue His ministry of “hands-on” healing and saving – even to the very foot of the Cross!

Meditate and Pray: Let us celebrate Jesus' momentum as He brings salvation to earth. No one can slow down His footsteps when He decides to claim a nation or people for purposes of Grace! Sing about this great momentum of the Kingdom of God in hymn # 580:

*Lead on, O King eternal,
The day of march has come;
Henceforth in fields of conquest
Thy tents shall be our home.
Through days of preparation
Thy grace has made us strong;
And now, O King eternal,
We lift our battle song.*

*Lead on, O King eternal,
Till sin's fierce war shall cease,
And holiness shall whisper
The sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords' loud clashing,
Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy
The heavenly kingdom comes.*

*Lead on, O King eternal,
We follow, not with fears,
For gladness breaks like morning
Where'er Thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted over us,
We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest;
Lead on, O God of might.*

Wednesday: read Matthew 19:1-2 and Mark 10:1. Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, and according to the parallel verses in Matthew and Mark, He was both teaching the crowds, (Mark 10:1), and healing "great multitudes" (Matthew 19:2) who came to Him. We can well imagine Jesus' compassion to all ranks of persons in these crowds. We are never to lose our appreciation of Jesus' compassion towards the downtrodden during the time these events occurred. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus is consistently revealed as a Deliverer of the oppressed, who cannot defend themselves, including many women.

For example, we have the woman caught in adultery, whom Jesus delivers from those who would stone her. There is the woman with an issue of blood who touched Jesus by faith, and was healed from that very moment. There is the woman who was a sinner, whom Jesus publically defends in the house of Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7. All through the Bible, God rejects the proud religious leaders in order to help those who suffer under the very burdens which such leaders seek to impose. This is especially true in the matter of the oppression of ungodly marriage and divorce, which we will study this week in Matthew 19.

Meditate and Pray: The church is full of 'no-names'. Their needs cry out to Jesus, and are answered, as Jesus publically claims them. To such the good news of the Kingdom is proclaimed, so that Jesus alone is magnified. How wonderful, in particular, that Jesus exalts womanhood again to the place of purity and exaltedness lost in the Garden of Eden! What a Protector Jesus is in Matthew 19!

Let us pray as follows: "*Lord, thank you for the godly women and widows who quietly serve you in our church family. Help us as the male leaders of our church family, to be increasingly sensitive and supportive of the unique problems which confront women in our culture, even as they confronted women in Jesus' day. Forgive us that we can proudly wield the reigns of leadership without considering the spiritual needs and wisdom of godly women. Give us grace to appreciate your work through the women of our church, so that, as 1 Peter 3:7 promises, our prayers will not be hindered. Amen.*"

Thursday: read Matthew 19:1-8 and Mark 10:2-9. Driven by hatred of Jesus, and lording it over the poor and lowly of their day, including the women who suffered from unjust divorces, the Pharisees' goal in raising their thorny question about divorce was to tempt Him to respond in a way that would offend one or the other side of the Jewish population. If Jesus answered the question of verse 3 with, "Yes – a man can divorce his wife for any reason", then they could say to conservatives that their criticism of Jesus because He "ate with sinners" was valid in that Jesus was "loose" towards God's Law in areas like marriage. If He answered with, "No – a man cannot divorce his wife for any reason", then, in their thinking, Jesus would offend the many people of that day who taught and believed that men could divorce their wives for the flimsiest of reasons, including, it was said, if they merely burned supper!

Meditate and Pray: Please note how the question of Jesus' foes indicates their hardness of hearts towards the Savior. They were not interested in being corrected. Their minds were made up. For them, when it came to the question of marriage, it was simply a matter of debating what was "legal", not what was just. I remember hearing a Christian attorney some years ago in a public speech, saying that in our country, we should no longer speak of our "Justice system", since it had degenerated into a mere "Legal system". Worth pondering, isn't it?

Friday: read Matthew 19:1-8 and Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The Pharisees seek to trap Jesus with questions about the thorny problem of divorce and remarriage, using a question based on Deuteronomy 24:1-4, where Moses permitted divorce and enshrined such permission in the very Law of God.

Jesus' answer to their misuse of Mosaic Law is to point out that Deuteronomy's permission of divorce was a mere *concession* to the hard-hearted condition of Israelites in that day. It had not always been so. *For example*, Jesus countered, *Have you not read that He who made them at 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"?*

Thus God created marriage between man and woman as a good thing, and did not create divorce. Only after the Fall did the need to protect women from serial divorce require further legislation in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. This passage envisions a man who gets rid of his wife, then marries and divorces someone else as well. Moses says that such a man cannot then return to wife number one. Women are not property to be passed off and then picked up again, based on the unfaithful husband's personal whims. Thus Jesus clearly defines the issues surrounding divorce and finally concludes in Matthew 19:9 that the only *biblical* ground for divorce is in the case of adultery.

We will have more to say on this important topic in next week's notes. For now, let us end with this important prayer for the Institution of marriage in our country and in the Church:

Prayer: *"Lord, please protect the marriages of our church family, and protect us from the scourge of adultery. Cause us as husbands to be willing to, "lay down our lives for wives", protecting them by being willing to die in their place. Help our children to see and be changed by such self-sacrifice in our marriages, so that the next generation can find the blessings of such marriages as well." Amen.*