

Day 19, Matthew 19

by David Servant

David Servant explores Jesus' teaching on divorce and remarriage, and the relationship between wealth and entering heaven.

Scripture: Malachi 2:16

Topics: "Marriage And Divorce", "Wealth And Generosity"

Description

David Servant delves into the topic of divorce and remarriage, emphasizing Jesus' teachings on the sanctity of marriage and the consequences of divorce, while also highlighting God's grace and forgiveness for those who have gone through divorce. He challenges the common misconceptions around divorce and remarriage, urging a deeper understanding of biblical principles. Additionally, he explores Jesus' encounter with the rich, young ruler, shedding light on the importance of generosity and the challenges faced by the wealthy in following God wholeheartedly.

Transcript

In Jesus' time, many Pharisees believed that it was lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just about any reason, all based on a very liberal interpretation of what was meant by the word "indecency" found in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Among other things, finding a woman who was more attractive than your own wife could make her "indecent," and so as you might imagine, sudden divorce followed by quick remarriage was commonplace. But that, of course, is really no different than adultery, as Jesus pointed out. What He said has no application, however, to a person who divorces prior to coming to Christ, and who remarries years later as a believer. Such a person is not "committing adultery" and is not "still married to their former spouse in God's eyes," in spite of what some would like us to believe.

Of course, God never intended for any marriage to end in divorce, thus He never intended that anyone would ever remarry. God hates divorce (see Mal 2:16). Divorce always involves sin. But God has not been surprised about any sins, including millions of divorces, and He made grace available under the Law of Moses as well as under the Law of Christ (see 1 Cor. 7:27-28) for those who divorce, just as He has made grace available for just about every other kind of sin. For example, under the Old Covenant, it was only unlawful for priests to marry divorced women. For all other men, marrying a divorced woman was lawful, an obvious concession of grace.

To ignore historical context, as well as everything else that God said in Scripture about divorce and remarriage, and to treat Matthew 19:3-9 as if it is all that God has said, results in a flawed understanding.

This subject deserves more attention than I have space for in this daily devotional. I have, however, written much more extensively on it here if you care to read more.

Jesus' encounter with the rich, young ruler certainly raises evangelical eyebrows, as it seems as if Jesus said that one must keep the commandments to enter heaven, and if one is rich, he must give liberally to the poor, ideas which are contrary to the false grace that is promoted by most evangelicals. Nevertheless, Jesus said what He said, and we simply need to face up to it. Many try to wiggle out of the obvious truth by telling us that Jesus only ever told one rich man to sell his possessions. The truth, however, is that Jesus told all His followers to sell their possessions and give to charity (see Luke 12:33). And what Jesus said in this particular passage has obvious application to all wealthy people, as He spoke twice of the challenges facing "a rich man," not "that rich man" (19:23-24).

The reason, of course, that it is difficult for rich people to enter heaven is because God requires that they love their neighbor as themselves, which requires that they share with the poor. They, however, like the rich man in this story, don't want to give up any of their possessions. They thus prove that they love money rather than God. And let us not fool ourselves that God only requires that we "relinquish our possessions in our hearts" but not in actuality, or that it is only our attitudes about our possessions that God is concerned about, and not our ownership of them. Actions reveal attitudes. Jesus plainly said, "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). If all that God required was an alleged "relinquishment in our hearts" and not any actual relinquishment, it would not be difficult for any rich person to enter heaven. Rich people who truly want to please God will find that He helps them do what would be impossible for them to do otherwise (19:26).

I can't resist mentioning one thing more: Jesus' words about all things being possible with God---which are often quoted by unscrupulous "ministers" to encourage people to trust God for more wealth---were actually spoken to encourage wealthy people to trust God to help them unload their possessions!

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