

Matthew 21-08-29a

Good morning, this is the 29th day of August 2021, and we're continuing our study of the Gospel of Matthew. This morning we're going to be looking at the rich young ruler. We've seen the progress in recent sections of this portion of the book, where the expectations, the social norms that have been prevailing in the generations of Israel, in particular, in Jesus' day, are being challenged.

Their views on marriage and divorce have been challenged, their views about families and children have been challenged, and now their views on material goods, possessions, are going to be challenged. You can see that there is a link in these subjects. This is the viewpoint that individual people of God hold in these central areas.

As soon as you leave direct confrontation with God and relationship with God, you look to the members of your household, and you look to who you're married to, who you are a child of, and who your children are, and to your possessions, the things that you control and own. This is our context, and we're going to pick up this morning, having seen the family side of things, the marriage side of things, what it means to be a eunuch in the metaphorical sense, and now we turn our attention to material goods. This is going to be in the Gospel of Matthew, but we're not going to start there.

We're going to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and then we're going to start in the book of Micah. We have a few things to look at in Micah that are important for current events, regardless of whether you think about them today or any time in the future that someone recalls this lesson. Current events are whatever is happening currently, and this is pertinent any time we look at it.

It was pertinent when we looked at the book of Micah in our Kings and Prophets study, and it is equally pertinent, even more so, perhaps, today. But let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and conversation, and if you have a thought or a question, please note it down and share it with us on the break or after class. I really look forward to hearing those.

The insight certainly doesn't begin or end with me, but these are very pertinent issues that have a lot of traction with us as we seek to live our lives before the Lord. Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are that in the maelstrom of events, both personal and in the larger context of our national life and the international happenings that shape our daily world and are increasingly delivered to our doorstep through communication, we're grateful that we have as an anchor of the soul our hope, our confidence, our definitional relationship with you through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that through him you have made us your people, your children with opportunities to learn and grow in this life and to exploit that growth with service and reflection of your glory in the ages to come.

We pray that as we look at these portions of your word together this morning, that the

Holy Spirit will energize the presentation and the reception so that we grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name. Amen.

Well, there are always different ways of looking at our world. Sometimes we are somewhat myopic and the issues and the circumstances that occupy our thoughts are immediate. It's in our near periphery.

Someone is sick, something is happening, there's travel, there's change, there is challenge, there are ups and downs, and we tend to parse those circumstances in a very immediate and almost subjective way. Occasionally larger world events intrude when there are anything from terrorist attacks to natural disasters to changes in policy or government or issues with national life, international relations, threats, worries, diseases, famines, pestilences, earthquakes. These get layered on top of our immediate personal challenges and it is a wonderful thing that God has given us stability.

He has given us a spirit not of fear but of power, of love, and of a sound mind. And it is helpful to us because we are people of God to respond to the incursion of new information, new circumstances, new challenges with scriptural viewpoint, with God's overarching plan and purpose. In that light, I want to refer back to something that we saw earlier in the Gospel of Matthew.

As I said in the introductory minutes, we have been looking at Jesus' words in terms of unity in the family, unity in marriage, unity in the body of Christ. If a brother has ought against you, go and seek to be reconciled, try to gain your brother. Unity in the group, solidarity, fellowship, forgiveness when we inevitably wrong one another.

It is just a matter of time. You can't have a pet dog without having some kind of accident. They're either going to chew the leg off your chair, they're going to foul some portion of your interior household area, they're going to swallow something, they're going to incur a vet bill.

It's just inevitable. They don't mean to, they don't have a desire to destroy or to defile. They're famous for their unconditional love for us and yet inevitably in the course of I think all of us have a wide range of experience in this regard that informs our thinking.

It's the same in our interactions with each other. Despite our best intentions, our pledges, we fail. We fall short.

We err and come short again and again. Sometimes it's not just us in the arena with dust and blood and sweat. We inevitably implicate and inveigle others.

We not only shoulder our own load but we bear each other's burdens. So this is what Jesus has been speaking of and you will recall that He has looked at both sides of this issue. Not only has He encouraged and weighed in on us trying to preserve unity but He has also talked about the inevitable division that comes our way because of failure,

because of decisions, because of different conclusions that are drawn.

We want to take a look at this and what Jesus referred back to. I usually do this and I don't remember that I did when we were back in Matthew chapter 10. So we're heading to Micah but we're there by way of Matthew chapter 10.

So please turn to Matthew chapter 10. This is a direct thread that Jesus is pulling on in chapter 19. You will recall that in Matthew 10, Jesus says in verse 32, Whoever confesses me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven.

This is unity. This is our dedication and our loyal love, if you will, and the reciprocation of it that we express toward the Lord Jesus. We love because He first loved us.

And when we love Him enough to stick by Him, to acknowledge Him, and to confess Him, and to live for Him, Jesus says, If you confess me before men, and this is not just a simple verbal affirmation. This is we are identifiably representatives of the Lord Jesus. We are His body.

This, of course, is somewhat anticipatory since the church does not yet exist. But the principle is the same. To represent, to confess the Lord Jesus before men is to be represented and confessed before the Father.

What we do in terms of our loyalty to the Lord Jesus, He is going to reflect before His Father on our behalf. Whoever denies me, verse 33, before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven. This is for believers.

This is for people of God. How do I know this? Unbelievers never end up in heaven. Jesus does not have to deny them because they have not ever been in a position to confess or deny Him because they were never saved.

There is no list of their names in heaven. They do not have to be denied. These are the overcomers and the underachievers.

Do you ever think about what is the opposite of an overcomer? It is going to be an under something, right? An underwhelmer maybe. Do you want to be an overcomer or an underwhelmer? We are either going to be confessed or denied. Notice there is not a lot of gray area here.

Represent the Lord Jesus. He represents us to His Father. There is no better place to be confessed and represented than there.

There is no worse place to be, as my wife likes to say, disenchanted, to be distanced, to not be acknowledged, confessed, brought forward, named. Now look at the next verse. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth.

Wait a minute. Has not Jesus been arguing for reconciliation and peace in the family,

between brothers? If your brother has something against you, go and be reconciled. If you have got something against them, go and be reconciled.

Try to gain your brother. Recruit a few more people. Give them some chances.

Give them some other viewpoints. Give them a neutral party or someone else to give a different perspective. Only at the point that after these attempts and overtures they are just irreconcilably ticked off, then acknowledge the distance.

Marriage. Do not dissolve a marriage casually, superficially. There needs to be very good biblical breach of covenant grounds on the part of the other person before you start going down that road.

Jesus says, if there is not fornication involved, there is no grounds for cleaving asunder what God has united. Little children. Do not take the children away from what the adults are doing.

The adults have come to see Jesus. They have an interest in their children being introduced to Him. This is what we saw last time.

And Jesus tells His disciples, do not split the family up and tell them they cannot bring the children. Suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not. For of such, He does not say such are the kingdom of heaven.

He says of such, those who are like them in their innocent and uncomplicated willingness to come, they do not understand necessarily everything that is going on. Some of these young children probably did not fully understand who Jesus was or why their parents wanted Jesus to lay His hands on them or take them in His arms. And as an aside, I did not really mention this last time, but that passage in Matthew 19, suffer the little children to come unto Me and forbid them not.

Parents, the example of them bringing their children to Jesus for Him to lay His hands on them and bless them has been the basis for infant baptism and baby dedications as a tradition in the church down through the centuries, certainly in this country over the last hundred years or so. There has been a real strong tradition in some denominations and there are some who believe that there is something that happens in infant baptism, that the parents actually do something for the child, that they are granted some sort of special grace by being brought essentially to the Lord in a formal way in front of the congregation and being baptized. If you ever see these mishap videos, I saw one recently where everybody was dressed up and they were doing a baby dedication.

In churches that do that, they have a font, they have a raised birdbath type of thing with holy water in it and they take the little child, they put him in a little baptismal garment of some kind and the priest or the representative there will take the baby and baptize them in this font of sanctified water. And so somebody was videoing this for posterity and the

guy, whoever he was, was dipping the baby in and saying the holy words in the name of the Father and the Son and the baby squirmed and flopped forward and went face down in the water and everybody reacted in shock. Holy water was splashing everywhere, the baby is slippery, they are trying to get its face out of the water.

I think it may have sort of spoiled the moment, not the least of which is, I mean, he face planted in this stone font and came up unhappy to say the least. He's spluttering and crying. I'm not sure why I brought that up except that it reminded me of baptisms and I didn't mention it in this context, but this passage that we just studied, suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not.

Don't prevent parents from bringing their children to me is what Jesus told his disciples. Well, let's think about the preceding context where there are eunuchs of various kinds and we understand this not so much in the pure physical sense, but in the metaphorical sense that there are those who forgo normal cohabitation, normal marital bliss for various reasons. Sometimes it is of nature, it's just not possible for various reasons.

Sometimes it is at someone's behest, somebody's failure, somebody's cruelty or insensitivity or whatever it might be, somebody stood somebody up and damaged them to the point that they're unwilling to ever go down that road again. And there are others who for the sake of the kingdom and the apostle Paul is an example where they recognize that to maximize the function of their spiritual gift or for other reasons related to relationship with God, maybe looking around at society, Paul said because of the times and we went over to Corinthians and he said looking at these chaotic times, I would suggest that everybody remain as I am. If you're not married, don't look for a marriage.

These times are too chaotic. You think about countries we see in the news where there is governmental overthrow, there are refugees, there are people crossing into other countries and trying to make a new life, there are people who are oppressed, there are people who are in hiding, there are people who are persecuted and being hunted down and jailed or worse. Not a good time to marry, not a good time to covenant with someone and be sure that you're doing so for the right reasons.

You think about the wartime romances that occur in stressful situations. There was a lot of strangeness that went on during World War II. We always look back and say the greatest generation won that, but it put great stress on a lot of marriages.

Displaced people in times of stress taking comfort in each other's arms, so to speak, lacking the spiritual means of comfort, they look to physical means and they look to other people and outside the bounds of marriage, violating covenants, engaging in all kinds of things that have been documented in books and such. So not a good time to assume that you've got the judgment and the foundation and the prospects to covenant with someone for life. So there are times.

Well, in the same way that being a eunuch is put for what kind of intimate relationship are you going to have with the opposite sex, the opposite gender only? I shouldn't have to add. Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not is not let them come up to me and let me take them in my lap and place my hands on them and give them some sort of special blessing that is going to confer a kind of grace on them that they would not otherwise have. What is really saying when he says don't stop parents from bringing their children to me when they recognize that I am a source of blessing? There are people who refuse to let their kids go to a church.

Well, I want to wait till they're old enough to make up their own mind. I don't want them being brainwashed. I don't want them being given a Christian leaning.

Maybe they want to be a Buddhist. Maybe they want to be an agnostic or an atheist. And I don't want to give them any exposure to Christianity because it's like an infection.

They'll get it and it might harm them later. There are others who say, you know, my life didn't turn out too great. I've made a lot of mistakes.

I'm not particularly religious, but I know good people in church. I know wonderful Christians and I would love for my kids to do better than I have done. This, of course, is a fallacious argument.

It is never too late. If you're breathing air, you should be taking your children to church. Notice he didn't say, suffer the parents to send their children on a long journey to come to me and sit in my lap.

Suffer these parents, probably mostly ladies, to come to me with their children and hand me their children when they recognize that I am a source of blessing. Lay hands on them and bless them. This is primarily for the parent's benefit.

You, we understand this, right? The child, you remember as a kid, some of us old enough to be sat on a, on a department store Santa's lap. Did you fully understand? I can remember. I did not like strangers.

And I think my mother probably only tried this once. But I didn't know who this guy is. He's scary looking.

He's got hair all over his face. He's wearing bizarre clothing. And there's a bunch of people around making all of this fuss.

I didn't know, you know, the, the lore of Santa or I knew that whoever this guy was, he, he wasn't, I didn't believe he was going to come down the chimney and give me things. I didn't want to ask him for something. I just, I was pretty much terrified by the whole experience.

The children placed in new or unusual circumstances, especially when their parents seem to be very interested in the outcome. Unless you're a little bit older, it's kind of like, um, this confuses me. You, you, your mother tries to put you in somebody else's lap.

How many times have you seen a child turn around and try to grab their mother's neck? I don't really want to leave you. So who is this for? When Jesus takes these children up in his arms and blesses them, why is he doing it? Is, can we agree that conferring a special grace, all of these children that Jesus touches are going to somehow be holy. Uh, they're going to become saints or apostles or elders or something special.

Each of these that Jesus touched, there's a book of the third Testament of the Bible about them. And, and the, when Jesus touched them, they became clean. It's just like when he touched a dead body, it came to life.

When he touched these children, they got spiritual life. The Bible is utterly against any such notion. So Jesus touching them and Jesus himself knows this, this is not doing anything for the child that wouldn't be done anyway.

Right? So who is this for? It's for the bringing parent. And this is why I have no problem with baby dedications or, uh, Dr. Criswell called it a first step toward God, where people would bring their little child up to the front. And Dr. Criswell understood that they don't fully comprehend sin, righteousness, and judgment.

They're not old enough to make a responsible decision about faith in Christ and dedicating their life to God and so on. But he also recognized as the Lord Jesus does here, that it is an affirmation of the parent's desire to raise this child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord that we're with you in that we're united in that. Do you see the unity theme coming out? Jesus is one with these mothers and others who are bringing these children.

And Jesus told the disciples, don't stop them from bringing the children, suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not for of such is the kingdom. People recognizing when they're bringing their children, that it's a wonderful time to expose them to the Lord Jesus when there is an innocence and a lack of resistance, a lack of animus, a lack of argumentation, a lack of brainwash from the other side, where the simplicity of the gospel can be manifest, where it is a wonderful memory for the parent. You can imagine in later years after Jesus was crucified and ascended and went to glory, these parents could tell their children, I saw Jesus, you sat in his lap, you were there.

My parents have told me that they took me to Disneyland. I have no memory of it whatsoever, but it's kind of cool. Back in those days, the Disney thing was much more innocent and in its early days when it was run by Mr. Disney himself, it didn't become the multi-headed behemoth Medusa Pandora atrocity that it has become.

But evidently I saw Mickey Mouse, evidently I rode the swinging teacup ride, and it's nice to know that that happened. I do remember going to Knott's Berry Farm, that was cool, I was a kid. To be brought to the Lord Jesus and to perhaps have a childhood memory of something special happening on that day is a wonderful thing.

I remember when I got water baptized, I was about seven, I've got a little handwritten, you know how they do that old-fashioned gothic script, and I've got a little certificate. I can't take that to the pearly gates, I can't wave it at the judgment seat of Christ. Well, but Lord, see this paper, Pastor Lemmicks dumped me, look here's the date.

But it is a reminder to me of the effort that my parents put into finding good churches and setting aside things and taking us to church and exposing us to Sunday school and learning to sit and try to make out the deeper truths that came in the sermon on Sunday morning. I appreciate that. And it is unifying, it ties the generations together.

My parents thought enough of me as a child to take me to the Lord. It makes sense, doesn't it? It's a part of this theme of unity. So having said that and used up most of my first session in my introduction, now look at Matthew 10, verse 35.

This fascinates me. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies will be those of his own household. I used to think, I wonder why it doesn't say set a son against his father and a father against his son.

Well, it's covered in the next phrase. A man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.

Verse 37. He who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.

Those who took up a cross and carried it through the streets of Jerusalem to Golgotha or any other place of crucifixion had already been judged, had been sentenced to death, and had forfeited all of their earthly goods and all of their earthly associations and relations. They are on their way to the terminus adqueam of their life. It's over.

And Jesus said, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. Now he didn't say I've not come to bring thread, but a pair of scissors. I have not come to rend, but to mend.

Peace is associated with life, life and peace. A sword isn't what you, and this is always, I'm sorry, I'm sure many have done this if I'd been on active duty when Patty and I got married, I probably would have done this. But I've never understood cutting the wedding cake with a sword.

It's tradition. Everybody does it. Those of you that have done, I was there.

Some of you remember me being there when the cake was cut with a sword. Nothing wrong there, but there's a part of my mind that says, you know what a sword is for, right? It's not for cutting cake. I remember when I was a midshipman, I've told you this story before, but you've got these ceremonial swords that you carry.

And when you're on watch, what they call the bow wow, the battalion officer of the watch, he's got his sword. When you're marching parades, if you're not carrying a rifle, you're carrying a sword. And so the battalion officer of the watch would go around, he would have this sword.

Well, there were some there were some plebes in a room, some first-year midshipmen who this particular first-class midshipman wanted to intimidate. And when he came in, they were doing something they were supposed to do. They had a snack and there was an orange on their desk.

And we had these big, thick, heavy formica top desks with a probably steel perimeter on them. And this orange is sitting there. And so to make his point and to do some sort of intimidation, this battalion officer of the watch draws his sword indoors, which you're not supposed to do unless you're in a space where you're doing some ceremonial thing.

But normally you don't draw your sword indoors. It's like opening an umbrella indoors. And then he swung it down and he thought he would chop that orange in half.

Well, it's a pot metal ceremonial sword. It doesn't even have an edge on it. And he it just slid off the orange.

The orange scooted out of the way and his sword shattered into four or five pieces, which went flying around the room and pretty much had the opposite effect from attempting to intimidate these these plebes. He just ended up embarrassing himself because that's not what a sword is for. You don't cut oranges with a sword.

You don't intimidate plebes with a sword. It was, you know, bad judgment. Swords are not for cutting cakes.

What are swords for? The sword shall not depart. Remember the the curse in the Old Testament, the sword shall not depart from this house. Let alone there is going to be violent death.

Swords are for violent death. When Jesus says, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword, this is the violent death of relationships between parents and children, between members of a household. I used to really struggle trying to imagine how this could happen, say, in our country.

How, you know, blood is thicker than water. You look at any mafia story and, you know, Cosa Nostra and the loyalty in La Familia and the, you know, people sticking together. I mean, there's feuds.

The Hatfields and McCoys, some third cousin will go kill somebody else's fifth cousin because there's a feud. It's a family thing. It's family honor.

We've got a code. How many, you know, out for vengeance movies and books have been produced where the story is, you've wronged someone who's related to me. I'm coming after you, whether for good or for ill.

I've not come to bring peace, but a sword and it will divide. What is the context for this? Well, if you look at your New King James footnote for those words in italics, set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother. This comes from Micah chapter seven.

We need to go to Micah to understand this, but what is Jesus point? He doesn't say, don't love your father and mother. Don't love your kids. What is his point? If a man loves father and mother more than me, he who loves son or daughter more than me, verse 37.

Yes. There is a call to unity. Yes.

There is a call to peace. Yes. To the extent that it is up to you live peaceably with everybody.

Paul says, as far as you are able, Jesus said, if you can reconcile the brother, go to extraordinary lengths to do so, but not at the expense of love for the Lord Jesus. If you love in the lateral direction more than you love in the vertical direction, something is wrong. And that relationship is going to get the sword.

That's what we're going to see when we come back in Micah. That's what we're going to see relative to our current circumstances. As we look around culturally, nationally, politically, this has repercussions and it's going to be tied together.

Those family and national repercussions are tied together back in Micah. And we need to understand this as we go forward, looking at the rich young ruler. There is a reason why these concepts are knitted together in Matthew's gospel.

So we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the practical side, the applicational side of these things that Jesus has been presenting and illustrating for the last two chapters, but we'll pause here and take our break.