

Matthew 21-09-05a

Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace & Truth Bible Church. This is the fifth day of September, 2021. And we continue our study in the gospel of Matthew.

We're in chapter 19 and we take up this morning the rich young ruler. It is subtitled in my New King James, with God all things are possible beginning at verse 23. Matthew 19, 23 and following.

This is the story of the young man who comes to Jesus asking about eternal life. Let's go to the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study this morning, and we'll get started. Father, we are so grateful for another day, another opportunity to invest the gift of time and opportunity that you've granted to us to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven and to make the most of the training time that is ours to prepare for service and function in the coming kingdoms of your son and your own kingdom, which follows.

We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts, help us to understand it and see its pertinence and its application in our circumstances and our particular set of challenges and potentials. We pray that in all things this morning, the Lord Jesus will be glorified and we will be drawn closer to him and to you through our time of fellowship and study. We ask it in Jesus name, amen.

You will remember that the preceding context here has been about unity, not being divided. And whether that is in marriage, whether it is in the community, whether it is with one's brother and a root of bitterness seems to be springing up and we try to be reconciled. We make a number of efforts to do so.

We endeavor to keep the spirit of unity and the bond of peace. And this extends all the way through the question on divorce, the teaching about eunuchs, which talks about unusual separation from the normal pattern or normal associations, normal fellowship for the sake of the kingdom. And looking ahead to the kingdom is what is in view here.

We look ahead to the kingdom when it comes to marriage. Jesus says to the Sadducees, when they're asking about the woman who was married to several brothers, who will she be married to in the resurrection? And he says, you err not knowing the scriptures or the power of God. And the power of God is commingled with this idea of not dividing, not being broken apart, not allowing breaches and separations to occur to the extent that it is up to us.

If others decide to depart, that's on them. And Paul made the same argument over in Corinthians, where if a faithless person wants to depart, let them go. But if you're able to maintain peace and harmony with them, then do so in the context of a marriage.

We are not to be unequally yoked, but if we are able to make progress and not be hindered by such a relationship, then it's our judgment, our call, so to speak. Then Jesus blessed the little children in our immediately preceding context here, verses 13 through 15. Little children were brought to him that he might put his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.

As you know, from our recent investigations on this, it's, I've been wrestling a little bit with the notion of the children because I know children. I was a child and I know what rascals and misbehaving little uncontrollable fiends they can be. And so when Jesus says, you've got to become as a little child, when it comes to the kingdom, I, the common thing to say is, well, it's their innocence.

It's their childlike acceptance. They don't have a lot of objections. And I think those things pertain, but as sometimes it's not just the past context that helps us understand scripture, but also what follows.

And in working for the last few weeks on the Rich Young Ruler, I feel like I've come to a better understanding of what Jesus meant when he talked about these children. So when Jesus says, let the little children come to me and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven. What aspect of children is in view? Well, it's not in my view now, it's not their lack of hubris or their sort of willingness to accept anything you tell them.

There is a man in the moon or there's a little old woman who lives in a shoe or whatever. They'll just swallow anything you tell them. That's not Jesus recommendation to us in terms of faith and acceptance of divine truth.

So what is it about little children that he has now referred to twice, both here and earlier when he was talking about in chapter 18, whoever humbles himself as this little child, 18 four, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Then whoever receives a little child like this in my name receives me. So what does the child represent in spiritual terms? I'm going to suggest to you this morning that the aspect of child and children that Jesus is emphasizing here is related to what he said to the Sadducees about their error in trying to frame a question that would confound him about marriage and the Levirate Law.

When they said this woman was married to each of these brothers in turn, and as they died, she married the next one. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be? And Jesus' reply covers many such questions and many such objections and many such instances of lack of understanding, lack of grasp of how God's plan works and what constitutes qualification for God's kingdom. He said, you err, A, not knowing the scriptures, B, not knowing the power of God.

The aspect of the child that I think is in view here isn't innocence or lack of pride. Kids give me rascals pretty much right out of the box when it comes to seeming lack of conscience. You see them writing on walls with crayons and being innocent of the rules

doesn't mean that it endears you to your parents when you break into your mother's makeup kit and scatter powder and lipstick all over the area, et cetera.

Setting the house on fire, most of us at one time or another set something on fire, at least in my day we did. So the aspect here is related to power and it ties into what God said in the Old Testament to his Old Testament people about his sensitivity to the plight of widows and orphans. And it is their powerlessness.

It is their lack of status, their lack of influence, their lack of control over circumstances. A child doesn't think he's in charge of anything. He doesn't come feeling qualified, feeling like he's earned or deserved anything.

Children essentially are, and especially in Jesus' day, are without status, without standing. In the Greco-Roman world, children were very little considered. Your mother is always going to love you and so on.

But the same word is used for little children that is used for house servants and slaves. They were kind of lumped together as a detail to be managed. And in many cases, they didn't make any sort of useful contribution to the household.

There was infanticide in the Greek and Roman cultures. If a child was inconvenient, they would just get rid of it. If not, kill it, send it away, send it into servitude, sell it.

And the same notion of inconvenience that it attaches to abortion, and this has been much in the news lately with the Supreme Court refusing to come down on Texas for tightening up on when and how such things can be done. It's just sparked all kinds of commentary and angst amongst the folks who think that personal inconvenience is justification to take a human life. And to me, it is very simple.

I think the foundation for the Texas law is a good one. If you are stopping a human heart, you are ending a human life. That's pretty easy.

You talk about, well, when does it take its breath? Does it become a living soul when it breathes? So it comes out the womb. To me, if you've got an individual with its own DNA and it's got a heart that is beating and you stop that heart, you have ended a human life. It's just pretty simple.

So that's what the Texas law is founded on. And if you stop a heartbeat in the womb, you have ended a life and they're coming out against that. And I think that's a sound point of view.

That's my opinion. But it gets at the helplessness of an infant, the helplessness of a child to defend itself, to speak up for itself, to say, hey, wait a minute, I would prefer that you not end my life. I would prefer that you not sell me into slavery, that you not in some way separate me from the household and eliminate me from future consideration

because I am an inconvenience or I'm a burden or I am altering the course of your life in a way that you don't care for.

That's that idea of the child not being in control, not having power or leverage to bring to bear in the circumstances of life. So think about this now, if you go back to chapter 18, when Jesus said to the disciples who came to him saying, who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Who's great? What is greatness? Greatness is generally viewed as influence. If someone is a great philosopher or a great author or a great producer of creative works, it changes people's lives.

It influences them. It gives them something new to think about. It gives them something new by way of opportunity or a great doctor can fix things that are wrong with the human body.

A great engineer can produce better products and better appliances. Someone who is great in the realm of science can solve puzzles and give us answers to deep questions and so on. If God is great, what does that mean? Well, he is a source of benefit and blessing and deliverance and opportunity and so on.

So greatness generally attaches to influence and to power. You have ability to make things happen, to influence and to shape and to create and to preserve things, greatness. So to be great in the kingdom of heaven, what does that suggest? Would someone just look at someone sitting on a puffy cloud and say, well, there's a great person.

They're great in God's kingdom. Great would mean influential, making things happen. If there is a great and mighty angel, you see these in revelation, holding back the winds and performing the actions of God, blowing horns and things are happening on the earth.

These are great angels. They're not run of the mill, mediocre house slave angels. They are cherubim and seraphim and up in the principalities and powers and rulers class.

And on the opposite side, in the realms of darkness, those principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age are influential. They make things happen. So in summary, I would suggest that when the disciples are asking about greatness in the kingdom, Jesus calls a little child and he says, greatness in the kingdom doesn't depend on greatness in this life.

It was common in Jewish thinking. It was common in Greco Roman thinking to believe that if you're great in this life, you'll be great in the next. Influential people, rich people, powerful people, ranking people, mucky mucks, elders, chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, rulers of the people would transfer and translate that same power into God's kingdom.

And in typical antithetical style, in typical unexpected style, in what is common, Jesus often said, well, the last will be first and the first will be last. So greatness in the

kingdom, power and influence, opportunity and service in the kingdom is going to be performed by those who in this life seem powerless and influence less, rank less, status less. Paul says, God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and the weak things to confound the strong.

So this child example is not so much innocence or receptivity in my view, as it is, these who are thought to be least important are going to be most important. And it ought to be an encouragement to us as believers who aren't not necessarily a part of a great ministry. We're not missionaries or evangelists or people with a large book sales in the Christian bookstore.

And we're not necessarily out there shaking the world and being heard on the radio and seen on television and present on the web and sending out resources and so on. Jesus says, greatness in the future kingdom of God is going to attach to those who are not depending on any kind of earthly temporal power, status, accomplishment, talent, ability. Makes sense, doesn't it? So when you come over to chapter 19 and the part that we just saw, little children were brought to him that he might put his hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them.

The disciples are saying, you're bringing, you're pestering the Lord with these children who are of no account, no status. They're not important. They can't understand the parables.

Heck, their parents can't understand the parables. So why bring these children and don't disturb the master with these unimportant, powerless. They're not going to do Jesus any good by coming.

They're just a drain on resources. And Jesus says, allow them to come to me and do not forbid them. What you're failing to recognize is their potential in the kingdom.

Don't judge them. Don't gauge them. Don't evaluate them based on their seeming lack of power and ability and influence and contribution in this life.

These are the ones who are going to enter the kingdom and be in the kingdom. Of such is the kingdom. Those who don't rely on, who don't represent human strength, human ability, human achievement, human status, human greatness.

And that's what they represent. Now, with that as background, look at how much sense this next episode makes. Because on the same day, probably having heard what Jesus said about these children, comes this young man.

The Greek word that describes him means an individual between 24 and 40 years of age. So he's in his prime. Why is that important? Who's running the world? People 24 to 40, they're the captains of industry.

They're the leaders in businesses. They're the ones getting things done. They're in their apex of their abilities, right? People younger than that typically are trying to work their way up the ladder.

People older than that are typically slowly slipping down the ladder. But 24 to 40, these are your shakers and movers, right? They're the ones taking over and running things. And he is of that class.

We find that out from the parallels in Mark and Luke. Matthew just says, behold, one came and said to him. Matthew says, behold, which draws our attention to this.

Idou is the word, I-D-O-U. And he says, hey, look, at this point, one came and said to him, to Jesus, good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life? Jesus has just got through saying, of such, these little children is the kingdom. I could take you to passages.

I think we've established this in the past and I'm not gonna invest the time this morning reviewing the fact that in the mind of the Jewish people in Jesus' day, in the mind of Old Testament Israel, the kingdom of God and eternal life are equal. Eternal life, inheriting eternal life is to enter God's kingdom. They didn't really have any serious doubt that they were going to be in the resurrection.

Eternal life to them did not mean duration of life or coming back from the dead. Their idea of life eternal was life that partook of the qualities of eternity, God's kingdom, blessing, opportunity. Abraham waited for a city whose founder and builder is God, that there was substance and there was a reward and blessing that they did not find in long-term possession in the land of Canaan or even in the days of David and Solomon.

It was transient, it was ephemeral. It came and it went. It wasn't any longer than human life at its best, but to eternal life in the Jewish mind meant life in terms of quality.

So this young man is not concerned with what must I do to live again after I die. He wants to have the same kind of privileges and power and possessions in the next life that he has in this. And so he's convinced that he can do it.

He says, he doesn't say what good thing must I do? What is required of me? What does the law say I must do? You know, you get later in the New Testament and it says, there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved. Must is obedience to a command. There's some sort of an imperative there.

Here he says, what shall I do? And this, it's the Greek word poio. And he's sure that he can do it. It's not a matter of ability.

He just needs to know which thing to do. Tell me a good thing that I shall do. And that secures eternal life.

In the other gospels, Mark and Luke, it says, inherit eternal life. But Matthew interprets that as having, possessing. Inheritance has the idea that you are given something that you don't deserve or whatever.

But many times, kleronomia in Greek, that's translated inherit, or kleronomeo actually is the verb. Kleronomia, kleronomos is the inheritance itself. But he just means to acquire it in the future.

It's not in terms of a will or a bequest. So in the future, I want the same kind of life I have here. I'm young, I'm good, I've got what I possess.

I enjoy it, I've got status. We learn from the other gospels that he is a ruler. So he wants to rule then like he rules now.

And he's saying, I wanna leverage this. So what good thing shall I do? Just tell me what it is. I know I can do it.

Look at me, I'm as good as it gets in this generation. Jesus says, why do you call me good? It's been all kinds of angst and contention about, well, did Jesus, is he disclaiming deity here because he says, well, you shouldn't call me good. You should call God good.

Only God is good. Is there a tacit question here? Are you recognizing me as the son of God and as equal to God when you call me good since only God is good? I don't think any of that is Jesus intention. And I don't think it's the intention of the passage to call into question the nature of Jesus personal goodness.

The question, good teacher, what good thing must I do is all about what good will qualify me to inherit eternal life, to have eternal life in the future. There's something that I should do. So then we say, well, is this a question of works-based salvation? Again, this is not, am I saved or am I lost? Will I live again or will I go to the lake of fire? This is inheriting eternal life in the sense of having in the future what he has now.

That's his only question. What good shall I do that will give me the same status in the future I have now? He has just heard Jesus say, these powerless possessionless children are the ones of such who will inherit eternal life and enter the kingdom. So he's confused.

And he says, well, I thought I was gonna inherit the kingdom because I'm the opposite of these children. I'm influential, I'm grown up. I have power and I have possessions.

You say these children are the ones who are gonna go in. I don't get it. So why didn't you say, look at this young man over here of such as the kingdom.

So now he's confused because his expectations have been shaken by Jesus' previous words. So Jesus gets right to the point in verse 17. He says, why do you call me good? No

one is good, but one that is God.

And what Jesus I think is getting at here is you already know about good. He has shown you, oh man, what is good. Do justice, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

He has shown you, oh man, what is good. It's in the old Testament. You've got the law.

Do this and live. In terms of inheritance, turn back to Deuteronomy chapter six. Keep your finger in Matthew.

We won't be here long. Deuteronomy chapter six. This is the commandment.

These are the statutes and judgments which the Lord your God has commanded to teach you that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess, that you may fear the Lord your God to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, that your days may be prolonged. Therefore hear, oh Israel, and be careful to observe it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly as the Lord God of your fathers has promised you, a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, oh Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

The great Shema. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

Teach them diligently to your children. Talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. Find them as a sign on your hand.

They shall be as frontlets between your eyes. Write them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates. So it shall be when the Lord your God brings you into the land of which he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give you large and beautiful cities, which you did not build.

Houses full of all good things, which you did not fill. Hewn out wells, which you did not dig. Vineyards and olive trees, which you did not plant.

When you have eaten and are full. Notice that this becomes their possession by God's power and not their own. They didn't build it.

They didn't plant it. They didn't create it. It is theirs as a gift from God.

Beware lest you forget, verse 12, the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt from the house of bondage. Fear the Lord your God and serve him and take oaths in his name. You shall not go out after other gods, the gods of the peoples all around you.

For the Lord your God is a jealous God among you. Lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth. You shall not tempt the Lord your God as you tempted him in Massa.

You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies and his statutes, which he has commanded you. And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with you and that you may go in and possess the good land of which the Lord swore to your fathers to cast all your enemies from before you as the Lord has spoken. When your son asks you in time to come saying, what is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes and the judgments which the Lord our God has commanded you, you shall say to your son, notice the children, the sons and the grandsons are mentioned over and over here that this is to be a heritage to be received, to be recognized by those who initially have no standing, who start out the way the Israelites did in weakness and independence and in receiving these good things from God by promise.

We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt. Verse 21, we were powerless. We were possession less.

We were status less. We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The Lord showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe against Egypt, Pharaoh and all his household.

Then he brought us out from there that he might bring us in. He gave us the land of which he swore to our fathers. The Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God for our good always, that he might preserve us alive as it is this day.

Then it will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord, our God, as he has commanded us. And that's a theme. It's throughout those early chapters of Deuteronomy.

This is what Jesus refers the rich young ruler back to. There is one good God. All goodness is sourced in him, derives from him, is given by him.

You saw that last verse. This is our righteousness. It comes from God.

Our goodness comes from the God who delivered us out of bondage and who gave us things that we did not create, did not plant, did not build. It's all sourced in God. We look to God, not to ourselves.

Cursed is the man who puts his trust in man, who makes flesh his arm, whose heart departs from the Lord. What's he like? He's like a shrub in the desert. He's a tumbleweed.

And he does not see good when it comes. Cursed is the man who trusts in his own strength. So there is only one that is good, and that is God.

If you are wanting to talk about what good thing you should do, and you want to get it from a good source, you call me good teacher, but the source of goodness is God. Why are you asking me something you already know? Now this has application in terms of our prayers. We go to God and we say, oh Lord, grant this good thing.

Answer this good request. Are we asking for things that God has already told us how to obtain? Jesus is directing this young man back to the source of good. If you want to know where good comes from, if you want to inherit good, go to the source of good, and that's God.

Why are you coming to me? And Jesus is not here claiming, oh, I'm so glad you came because I am really God on the earth. He's saying, you shouldn't even need to ask this question. And when it says young ruler, this archegos idea, he may actually have been a synagogue leader.

He may have been a young ruler. Ruler of what? In Israel, rulers were typically rulers of the synagogue. It doesn't indicate that he was a governor or those governorships belong to Roman functionaries, but he's a ruler in Israel, meaning he is probably prominent in the local synagogue in religious life, a religious ruler.

There's one good that is God. If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments. Guard the statutes.

What we just read in Deuteronomy chapter six, you know this already. Why are you asking me? You're calling me good as though I know something about good that you don't already know. You know the commandments, keep them.

He says, which ones? Jesus says, you know, somewhat redundantly. And these are from the table of the law. And Jesus gives them more or less in order from number five through number eight.

Now you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness. Then he goes back to number four, honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself, which is a summary. You notice the one that he leaves out.

The first and greatest commandment is what? Love the Lord your God. And interestingly, Jesus does not quote that one. He quotes the second, which is like unto it, love your neighbor as yourself, why? Which one is easier to demonstrate? You can say you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength all day long.

But if you love your neighbor as yourself, that's going to have some visible horizontal

evidence, isn't it? And this of course is what the story turns on. This is where the lack is going to become visible. So as we conclude our first session this morning, the issue here isn't strictly possessions.

The issue is what power are we relying on? Where are we looking for our deliverance, both eternal and temporal? Where are we looking for our provision? Where are we looking for the answers to the questions we have, the uncertainties that we face? Are we looking in the realm of human strength and human power? Are we looking to our own resources? What can I do? What good thing shall I do to answer this question and solve this problem and secure this future condition? We so easily slip into the very first sin. When Eve decided that she had a problem of not knowing enough and she wanted to be more wise. And so she looked at the fruit, at the suggestion of the serpent and saw that it was pretty and desirable.

Well, I'll do that. She stretched out her hand. She plucked the fruit off the tree.

She put it in her mouth and bit into it and ate it. She did all of this herself. What good thing can I do to make my life better now and in the future? How can I secure a better future? What good thing shall I do? Jesus said, good comes from God.

Look at what God says about good. Remember the commandments? What are the commandments for? What does Paul say about the law? By the law came grace and truth. Is that what it says? John 1 14, John 1 17.

The law came by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. What comes by the law? By the law comes the knowledge of, say it with me, sin.

By the law comes the knowledge of sin. This young man knows the law. He's saying the commandments right along with Jesus.

What did his knowledge of the law not create within him? What did the law fail to do in the mind and the heart of the rich young ruler? Consciousness of sin. He says, hey, I've kept the law. All I need to do is one more good thing.

You tell me what it is. And I've got the kingdom locked up. Well, we don't want to be looking to ourselves.

We don't want to be establishing our own righteousness. Think about Romans and what Paul says about Israel, not understanding the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own righteousness. By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

The law has a different purpose. It doesn't secure the future. It secures that knowledge that we have to be like little children, powerless in our own eyes, looking to the power and the provision of God.

So it's fruitful to think about in these days and in these times when we're surrounded by challenges and decisions that need to be made, priorities that need to be set, goals that need to be pursued. Are we resting in the power of God or are we trying to acquire and exert power of our own? That's the real question. And Jesus is going to talk about that with this young ruler and then afterward with his disciples.

And we'll see that when we come back from our break.