

## ***Marriage, divorce, riches and discipleship...***

### **Matthew 19**

Jesus' Galilean ministry had come to an end, and he was about to begin his final Judean ministry – which came to a climax in the final week of his earthly life (from Matthew 21 on). Throughout this period the attacks of the enemy would grow more intense, culminating in his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

The religious leaders had already tried to ensnare him with questions about the Sabbath and about signs, but they had failed. In this chapter they try again, this time with a most controversial issue – divorce.

#### ***Teaching about divorce and marriage (Matthew 19 v 1 to 12)***

- The Pharisees were referring to Deuteronomy 24 v 1 to 4, and wanted to know which Rabbinic school of thought Jesus followed on the divorce question – the school of Rabbi Shammai (adultery only, strict but unpopular), or the school of Rabbi Hillel (any reason, lax but popular). Where did Jesus direct his questioners to, in the first instance (v 4 to 6)? See Genesis 2 v 24.

The characteristics of true marriage:

- (a) *it is a divinely appointed union* (no court of law can change what God has established);
- (b) *it is a physical union* (the man and the woman become 'one flesh');
- (c) *it is a permanent union* (husband and wife enter marriage without reservations – God's law knows nothing about 'trial marriages'); and
- (d) *it is a union between one man and one woman* (any variations are contrary to God's will, despite what psychologists or lawyers may say)...

The Pharisees misquote the Deuteronomy 24 passage in v 7. Moses did not command divorce, but he *allowed* it under the circumstances of marital unfaithfulness. The divorce permitted by Moses actually severed the original marriage relationship; the woman was allowed to marry again, and her second marriage was not considered 'adulterous' – the second man she married was called a 'husband' and not an 'adulterer'. This explains how the Samaritan woman in John 4 v 16 to 18 could have had five *wives*, and yet be living with a man not her husband.

- What does Jesus say about singleness (v 11, 12)? Jesus recognised that to be unmarried was good for some, for those who could accept it, such as the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 7 v 7, 8).

#### ***Let the children come to me (Matthew 19 v 13 to 15)***

In the middle of Jesus' teaching on marriage, parents bring their children to be blessed. Jesus wants to bless children and welcome into the kingdom of heaven. This incident tells us something about Jesus' character – he was the kind of man that children like, and children are often astute judges of character.

***[MORE OVER...]***

### ***The rich young man (Matthew 19 v 16 to 30)***

- The rich young man had some things right, and some things wrong – what were they in each case? What were the factors that made him turn away from Jesus?
- In verses 18 and 19 Jesus lists the ‘second table of the law’ (the commandments that deal with man’s relationship with others). Do you think the rich young man *really* kept those commandments, in the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ sense? See for example Matthew 5 v 21, 22. Which of the ten commandments did he leave out? And what was the rich man’s real problem?
- What does Jesus mean by the ‘camel’ and ‘needle’ saying (v 24)? The Greek word used for ‘needle’ is ραφίς (*rhapsis*), which is the normal word used for sewing with a needle – here Jesus is using *hyperbole*, exaggeration to make a point. What point is he making? Can rich people be saved (v 26)?
- Peter then asks a blunt question: “We have left everything and followed you” (v 27) – ‘what’s in it for us?’ What specific promise does Jesus give to the twelve apostles? What general promise does he make to anyone who has left family or possessions for Jesus and the gospel? How can this encourage us? What do you think Jesus means by “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (v 30)?