

Jesus must be our starting point

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 June 2025

Preacher: Dave Bott

[0 : 00] We're reading Matthew 19 verses 3 to 12 and after I finish this particular passage we'll move on to Matthew 20 verses 20 to 28.

! Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let no man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and send her away?

He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, Whoever divorces you is his wife except for sexual immorality and marries another commits adultery.

The disciples said to him, If this is the case of a man and his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

[1 : 25] For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men. There are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

That the one who is able to receive this, receive it. Matthew 20 verses 20 to 28. Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons and kneeling before him she asked him for something.

And he said to her, What do you want? She said to him, Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.

Jesus answered, You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink? They said to him, We are able. He said to them, You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my father.

And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to him and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them.

[2 : 45] It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Thank you. Well, good morning.

My name is Dave. I'm the pastor here. If you're visiting, a warm welcome to you. Will you pray with me as we come to God's word? Father, as we have just sung, I pray that we would just soak in the joy that you have saved us, that our names are written in the book of life for all who have trusted in Jesus.

And I pray that as we trust you for salvation, that we would trust you in all your words to us. That they're for our good.

So please be with us now. Give us understanding. Help me to be truthful and clear. Teach us all. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I once visited a church where, as Ephesians 5 was being read from the front, about wives submitting to husbands, I could hear this giggling.

[4 : 15] And it wasn't just in one spot. It was just, it kind of spread. And I looked around and husbands and wives were just looking at each other, smiling. And the sermon was preached in that moment.

As if. But if we don't effectively just dismiss the difficult passages that speak about being men and women, there's something else.

I don't know about you, but I find ugly. And I even see it at Christian weddings. On one occasion at a Christian wedding, the sermon was to decry how society is just so wrong and awful. And there was no attractive alternative focusing on Jesus that was offered. On another occasion, the main message was elevating traditional marriage. And it was basically saying the very best human life is in Christian marriage. And I just felt for every single person in the room because the inference was unmistakable.

[5 : 28] You couldn't miss it. You're missing out. On the best life if you're not in a Christian marriage. One was this battle cry. Society evil.

We've got it right. The other is this idolatry. Marriage and children is where life is found. We're starting a five-week series on what the Bible says about men and women. The elders have decided to do this for some time because it obviously impacts so much of our daily life. How we walk with the Lord. How we walk with the Lord. It's too important not to look at. But here's our main goal for the series. We want this to be a compelling picture of manhood and womanhood. The church is called to be a compelling picture to the world. That God's ways are good. We shouldn't be embarrassed about what God has to say.

[6 : 39] Everything he says to us is true and good and for our thriving. So this series, I don't want it to be a battle cry.

We've got it right. I don't want it to be idolatry. I want our hearts won over to the beauty of God's ways, which I've been praying lots. Please be praying for this series because it's going to be hard for this to be a compelling picture. Not because it is a compelling picture, but because of our attitudes that we bring to it. So this series, Emma and I have been married for almost 12 years now. And having chairs on the staff team, working so well together. And I've been to Bible college. I've had a week's study leave looking at this topic. I'm pretty sure I'm close to arriving at the pinnacle of all God has to say on this topic.

[7 : 43] And I just want to share the bounty of my wisdom with you all. I've tested it over many years now. It's profound.

So I'm glad there's finally... It took a while for you to start laughing. Here's what really happened. When I re-looked at this issue, looking at passages I've studied before, I was expecting that I might need to soften my convictions or firm up my convictions. But God's word did something strange. It stretched me in two ways simultaneously. Now, I don't think that's because I'm confused. I think that's what God's word does. When God speaks, he breaks our little boxes we've put things in. And he stretches us in unexpected ways.

[8 : 43] So are you ready to have God's word break your boxes, your ideas, and stretch you in ways you're just not expecting?

As we talk about this over morning tea and a small group, some people's ideas are going to offend you. Fantastic. What a great opportunity to learn from them. To let God speak is not simple. It's not comfortable. It's not theoretical. There's something about this topic. I could even feel the tension in the room. I don't know if I'm the only one. It's so much more quiet in here. It's lovely. But I think it's tension. But there's something about this topic that's personally threatening, isn't it? It addresses something very deep about who we are as a man or a woman.

[9 : 49] But then again, can't we relax and explore with curiosity where we don't quite fit the gender stereotypes?

Like, let's think of masculinity for a second. Height is a marker of masculinity. Don't tell me it's not. I won't believe you. Able to grow a beard. That fathers will get up at 5 a.m. if they're loving their families. Or tall, dark, and handsome. Zero out of three. Like, it's okay. Because my deepest identity is as a child of God. I belong to the Son. It's okay. This series evaluates me as a husband and as a father. I sense my failure.

[10 : 50] And probably the older you are, you'll sense your failure even more. I'm guessing that's just going to increase for me. It's terrifying to look. But then again, nothing that is revealed.

Jesus has already died for all that. If he reveals it, it's to forgive. It's to heal. It's to mature. We don't have to be scared of looking.

This series requires an honest, curious evaluation of the models of being men and women that we've inherited from society, from our parents, from church.

But then we shouldn't be threatened about that either, I don't think. Like, we're all in God's image and we're all broken.

Of course, everything in society and church and parents, there's things to affirm and there's things to reject. We are entering a heated political, social topic.

[11 : 59] But then again, we've just been in Hebrews. We've just been called last week, come outside the camp. Isn't our citizenship in heaven? Aren't we called to be salt and light?

You've got to stand out if you're salt and light. This series is threatening because there's actually a lot of complexity to the debates that rage around this topic among Christians.

But I think there, too, we can relax because among those we disagree with, we have an ocean more in common with our brothers and sisters in Christ than the little trickle on this topic.

Like, even if that person sides with whoever you find repulsive. No, I'm glad you laughed.

That's good. That's it. Don't you have much, much, much more in common, even with someone on the very opposite end of this debate? But this topic will also be really threatening for those who have been, there's some deep personal trauma for some.

[13 : 20] I just want to acknowledge that. But then where else are you going to find but in God's word, healing, balm? Where are you going to find a good father in God?

Where are you going to find a husband in Jesus? Who is totally trustworthy. There's healing in God's word. There's liberation from the past. There's words to give you lament.

So instead of all these threats, there's so many threats to this topic. They're not reasons not to go into it. They're reasons we really should go into it. We need God's word to bring truth and guidance and healing and hope.

So I hope you're looking forward to the series. Here's where we're headed. Next week we're going to look at Genesis 1 to 3. Obviously there's so many passages we could go to.

We had to pick what we thought were some key ones to give us our bearings. So we've got Genesis 1 to 3, God's good design. Then the next week we're going to look at how this applies to marriage in Ephesians 5 and 1 Peter 3.

[14 : 33] And then the next week we're going to look at how it applies in ministry in the local church. So that's Galatians 3, 1 Timothy 2, 1 Corinthians 11. That's going to be a big week to get through all that.

And then the final week we're going to look at there's gender specific instructions in Titus 2 that are more general than either marriage or local church.

So we're going there. But just a word to parents in this series. I'm going to be conscious that some of the kids are in the room. It's not going to be a PDHP lesson.

So I'll try and be conscious of that. So what's today about then? Today is about addressing some unseen foundations as we approach this topic.

Presuppositions we bring in. Before we even read God's word, we can bring presuppositions in that can already decide where we're going.

[15 : 38] Think of it like the current in a flooding river. You've got these things that you're clinging. We all do. We have these presuppositions we cling to.

It's already deciding the direction you're flowing in. So we need to address four things I think in particular. There's probably more than this.

I want to lay, I'm mixing metaphors here, I know. I want to lay four foundations because it will give us stability, give us guidance when we come to look at the other passages.

So how we do theology. Is God's word really the authority? Secondly, understanding the times we're living in. Third, we're going to look at Jesus' model for authority.

And fourth, Jesus' model of submission. So that's where we're headed today. In all these, Jesus must be our starting point.

[16 : 45] Okay, so first, who's the authority? How do we do theology? Who's just looked at their phone because you think this is irrelevant? Don't do that.

This is not theoretical. This is an extremely practical question. Let me give you a few quick examples of things we can look to for authority that isn't God's word.

Experience. Experience. Michael Bird in his little book, he's a great teacher in Melbourne. In his little booklet, he describes this evangelical conference for pastors in America.

And the conference got so full, like the women's renew yesterday, it got so full, but in their case, they had to ask some people not to come.

It was up to them in the end, but can you please give up your place for other pastors to come? And what they did was they asked the women to give up their seats. Now, he critiques that, and I agree wholeheartedly with him.

[17 : 56] They didn't draw the line down if women were in pastoral ministry, they should have a spot. That's his critique, and I agree with it.

He went a step further, and he admits in his book this was a point where he started questioning the doctrines of scripture on this topic. It's a classic example of throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

It was this, instead of calling evangelicals, be consistent with what you teach, that disgust made him re-evaluate the doctrines themselves.

We can also evaluate our own reason as the authority. So it may not be experience, but our own reason and logic.

There are a lot of, what do you call it, fine-sounding, that wasn't very fine-sounding, fine-sounding ideas circulating in this debate. Like, stuff written on this topic is huge.

[19 : 10] I want to give one example. I was surprised to find that the meaning of head in Ephesians 5, husband's head of the wife, as Christ's head of the church.

Have you ever heard the interpretation that doesn't mean authority, it means source? I don't know if anyone's come across that. Yeah, source. Now, you will come across it every now and then, but I was surprised to find that there is very thin ground to stand on there.

Like, it's these two extra-biblical Greek literature kind of vague uses of the word, and the Greek dictionary that everyone trusts for Greek translation says does not mean source.

And yet, I don't know, people just put it out there as an alternative option, trying to avoid the uncomfortableness of Scripture.

I think that's an example of putting your own reason above Scripture. You just reinterpret words. So we can elevate our experience and the disgust we feel and maybe the pain.

[20 : 32] I know there's people in this room with great pain in this area, but even there, it's God's word that needs to speak into that pain. So experience for our own reason and logic.

Another one is tradition. We can elevate tradition. Now, I'm not saying all these sources don't supplement our understanding.

Of course they do. The problem is when it trumps Scripture. So, for instance, tradition.

In pre-marriage counselling, I opened the first booklet, and it's got advice for a Christian home from the 1940s or something. And the advice, it was wonderful.

Before a man comes home from a gruelling day of work, the wife should get the kids dressed, and they shouldn't be fighting. It should be a calm environment, and the house tidied up.

[21 : 36] She should refresh her make-up so that there's this peaceful environment for him to enter. So I'll give you a recommendation if you look after pre-marriage counselling.

I can tell you where to go. I was disappointed to find out the counselling didn't stay on that track.

Now, the point is, that was a legit advice in Australian Christian culture only a few generations ago.

You can't just accept tradition uncritically. Unfortunately, I haven't found a scriptural basis for that advice. I'm trying to make a joke.

No one else finds it funny. Now, all these things, experience, our own reason, tradition, whatever that tradition is, there's something much, much, much more at stake than even men and women on this.

It's the authority of Scripture. Not just paying lip service to it. Can God's voice really pierce your heart and speak into the details of your life?

[23 : 00] I'm guessing AI relationships, when they become more common, an AI thing relating to you is just going to affirm your ideas and affirm your desires.

That's not a real person. You know what a real friend does. They cross your will. They disagree with you.

Do you have a real God who can disagree with you and cross your will? Because a real God can love you.

Now, I'm not claiming that the church's position is the only ones who take God's word as the authority.

There's many believers who come to different convictions over this, who really try to make God's word the authority. So that's the first foundation.

[24 : 05] Are we really treating God's word as the authority in this? The second one we need to address and put in place is, do we understand the times we're living in? This one has helped me make sense of the complexity in the debate.

But it's also because in Scripture, there's seemingly contradictory statements that just sit side by side. And I think understanding the times we live in makes sense of that.

To know where God's history is headed and where we're located in God's plan. We aren't only. It's obviously, we're obviously in God's creation.

We're creatures. We're on earth. We're in God's original creation. But the eternal age of heaven has already broken in.

We're in it now. We're living in this overlap of the first creation and the new creation.

[25 : 15] And so, of course, there's going to be these seemingly contradictory statements side by side. I think this critiques our evangelical church culture.

Most of us speak of marriage assuming it's a positive thing. Don't we talk about marriage? It's positive. You've just got to work out how to do it. And we talk about singleness as if it's negative. You've got to redeem something good from it. At least you've got more money and time. In Matthew 19, Jesus critiques us here.

If you want to open up to Matthew 19. Jesus does paint an extremely high, good view of marriage. Marriage is meant to be a giving of oneself to your spouse. A union of body and soul. In the eyes of God, and he doesn't play pretend.

[26 : 21] He sees things as they are. He sees a married couple as one flesh. Two individuals in one body. One entity somehow.

Now, this isn't a series on marriage per se. So I'm not going to go into the details about divorce here. But it's clear that what Jesus says is case for divorce is very, very restricted.

That's why the Pharisees and the disciples react. There's no exit ramps. And the disciples think, better not to marry.

Like, marriage is only attractive if you can get out. Better not to marry. So Jesus has such a high view of marriage that he makes his own disciples very uncomfortable.

But then Jesus agrees with his disciples. But not for the reasons they're thinking. It is better not to marry.

[27 : 33] Not everyone can accept what you... I think when he says not everyone can accept this saying, it's their saying. It is better not to marry.

And then he talks about eunuchs in ancient times. Eunuch was in a royal court and they're altered so that they don't ruin the royal bloodline.

To use Cheser's country metaphor, a bull becoming a steer. Thanks for that illustration. Verse 12. The alternative to this high calling in marriage is living a life of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Another high calling. You are devoted, body and soul, to Jesus. Serving in his kingdom.

Advancing his goals. Marriage is good. It is good. It is God's idea. High calling. Great gift.

Singleness for the sake of the kingdom is good.

[28 : 49] Better. I almost didn't go far enough, did I? Jesus says better. Our secular age can't imagine what we have in Christ.

It's as if sexual expression and romantic hope is not optional. It's essential to a fulfilled life. But Jesus lived the most fulfilled life as a single man.

Consider the spiritual family of the Apostle Paul. His family is huge. His family is huge. It is huge.

There will be people in heaven with a bigger family, in a sense, because of how much they've devoted, invested in the lives of people, in teaching and mercy.

And even a family just all around the Christmas tree. If we look at things through the lens of Christ, singleness is better.

And singleness is where we're headed. The question is, how can Jesus change or add to Genesis?

[30 : 13] Because in Genesis, God says, be fruitful and multiply. The pinnacle in Genesis, which we'll see next week, is marriage and children. But then listen to what he says in Luke chapter 20.

You might remember the story. Some Sadducees are coming to question him. A wife's husband dies. She marries multiple husbands. Whose husband will she be in the resurrection?

And this is Jesus' reply in Luke 20. The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage.

But those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. For they cannot die anymore because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

Revelation 21, we are looking forward to Christ and the church. The church is the bride prepared for her husband.

[31 : 22] The intimacy we will have, and not sexual, the intimacy we will have with Christ and one another will make marriage obsolete.

I struggle to imagine what that is like. But that must be pretty good. If that connection that I think is built into us from creation, it's going to be obsolete because we've got something better.

That's where we're headed. And we've got a taste of it now by his spirit and in the church. Now, it's just a taste, but my main point isn't actually about marriage and singleness.

My main point is understanding the times we're living in. We're in the overlap of the ages. We are in the first creation. But the eternal kingdom is broken in. Marriage is good.

Singleness is even better. So that's the second foundation. We're in the overlap of the ages.

[32 : 31] All right, third foundation. Jesus must be our starting point when it comes to our ideas, our pictures about authority, leadership. Something I'm coming across as I listen to arguments for and against any distinction in men and women and the roles of men and women is treating authority as if the essential characteristic of authority is power.

Power to make decisions. Sometimes all that people have to say about what it means for husband to be head is that if there's a stalemate in a decision, and it's a really important decision, then the man has to have the final call.

That's basically all some people can say. I think we can say more than that. Let me just say now.

We'll come to that in a couple of weeks. At one extreme of the debate, we've got someone like Douglas Wilson who talks of a godly family and uses the language of father rule, uses military metaphor.

The wife is lieutenant general, extremely high rank in authority, but the husband is the general, just above, the highest rank. Now, the language focuses on rank, power, rule.

Now, before we think that's just that end of the debate's problem, I reckon I'm seeing it in the opposite end of the debate as well. Michael Byrds, I've already talked about him, speaking on wives and husbands, asked the question, should husbands ever submit to their wives?

[34 : 23] He says, I think male headship is in a sense normative, but headship will mean bowing that head to the wife in many matters pertaining to marriage.

I think what he's getting at there is this same assumption that it's about decision-making. The husband will bow the hand over the decision-making.

There seems to be the same emphasis that authority is about, rank and power to make a decision. Now, authority obviously includes decision-making. I'm not... Of course it includes that, but is it the essential characteristic of it?

Is that what we are to focus on? I think Jesus blows that way of thinking out of the water. In Matthew chapter 20, if you want to flick over to 20 verse 20.

[35 : 30] The 12 disciples believe Jesus is the Messiah. He is about to be crowned. He's going to rule everything. And they know they're the inner circle.

They're about to be the cabinet. They're going to have the highest position. And then James and John, through their mother, request to be the closest to Jesus, left and right, the highest rank, the highest honour, the highest authority.

And the other disciples aren't shocked at their pride, seeking power for themselves. They're jealous. Even what sounds more noble... Hang on. Keep this flat. We're equals here. That can come from the same heart that wants power and rank and authority.

It's just, if I can't have it, we've got to share it. It can come from the exact same heart. Seeking it and being jealous of it.

[36 : 47] And Jesus speaks into this in verse 25. You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. And their great ones exercise authority over them.

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be your slave.

Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

That way of thinking about rank and power, Jesus says, you've got to get rid of that. That is worldly. The verb lord it over.

He is not speaking into the misuse of power. James and John, it's not the context. James and John, they're willing to suffer. It's not the context.

[37 : 49] The verb doesn't mean it. He's not talking about the misuse of power. Jesus is talking about the world exercises lordship. I'm above. I'm in authority.

That way of thinking. Isn't that in your workplaces? It's everywhere, isn't it? Politics, society, sports team.

I'm in charge. It's got no place in Jesus' kingdom. It's not dismantling all authority.

They are apostles. They have the highest rank in the church. But don't focus on being over.

Don't focus on having power. You want to know what kingdom authority is? You think servant. And in case we miss the point, slave.

[38 : 49] It's so hard to get your head around, isn't it? We just struggle to think that way. Whoever ends up being on Jesus' left and right, I'm assuming it's because they are closest to being the slave of all.

Because Jesus himself, he gives himself, I am the supreme example. Isn't that why we worship him?

Even as the son of man, you can't get a higher authority. Son of man came not to be served but to serve God.

And to give his life as a ransom for many. James and John are thinking power and Jesus is thinking Jerusalem. Death.

I'm going to be your slave. That's authority in Jesus' kingdom. Isn't that why we worship him?

[40 : 12] Isn't that why he's great? Authority. I'm a slave.

It's revolutionary stuff. If we got this point, I think it would take so much heat out of this whole debate. So I want to ask some piercing questions.

If you insist on gender roles, how much is that an attempt to solidify your own control? To get the respect you deserve.

If you defend equality, how much is that? Just like the other ten disciples, it's from a heart of jealousy.

The fear of losing control. Or, and there is an awe. How much is it because you see the greatness of being a slave?

[41 : 28] The cross changes, it should change our thinking about authority. This sentence is not just speaking to authority.

It is the heart of Matthew's gospel, arguably. Isn't it the heart of the gospel? So there's the third foundation we've got to have in place.

Authority, slave. And it's beautiful. It's wonderful. And the fourth, and this will be the most brief, Jesus must be our starting point when it comes to the word submission.

Am I allowed to say the word, the S word? Do we hear submission and think inferior in worth and dignity?

Do I have more personal worth and dignity over many of you in this room because I'm a pastor? I just want to linger for a bit there.

[42 : 42] I'm hoping your answer is no, in case you're wondering. And yet, our intuitive gut reaction when we talk about this, about gender, is that it attacks personal worth and dignity.

It doesn't. Look at the cross. The cross of Jesus is not about being inferior in worth.

Submission isn't even something we're meant to put up with and resenting it secretly in our heart. At the cross, submission is beautiful. It's meant to be praiseworthy.

Did you notice the small intriguing detail in the passage? It's not Jesus' choice who sits on his left and right. He's the son of man and he doesn't decide those places of honour.

That's the father's choice. You can't read the gospels without seeing that the son submits to the father. His submission to the father is one of the most fundamental reasons he died for you and me.

[44 : 00] The father sent him into the world and the son submits and came willingly, knowing he was headed for the cross.

The father gives him words and deeds to do in his ministry. And John's gospel talks about it's his delight to obey. He does nothing on his own authority. He says it satisfies him like food to obey his father. Father's will was for his son to go to the cross. Not my will but yours be done.

There's no inferiority in the Godhead, in our triune God. Father, son and spirit are in complete partnership, equal in divine glory and power and essence.

There's no inferiority. Philippians 2. It's because Jesus humbled himself, submitting to the father that he says, He went to the cross out of submission to his father.

[45 : 19] We are called to submission in so many different contexts in life. We're all under submission somewhere. We have the opportunity to display the glory of the son when we do that voluntarily to please God.

If our assumption is that submission is inferior in worth, the problem isn't in God's word. Look at the cross.

The whole universe will be praising the son because he's submitted to the father. It's praiseworthy. It's beautiful in God's sight.

Well, that's a lot to take in. Sorry for why I'm apologising.

I think they're important things. I hope you're looking forward to the series. I just want to finish with one question. In terms of the authority, the real authority we're bringing to God's word, in terms of understanding the times we live in, in terms of what we think of when we think of authority and submission, it's so important.

[46 : 38] Is Jesus and his cross your starting point? Is that the foundation we're going to start from?

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Father, convince our hearts that your son's authority and submission is wonderful because we're still so caught up in worldly ways of thinking.

So please conquer our hearts. So that we might praise you as we ought and so that we might live out true authority and true glad-hearted submission.

Father, be with us in this series. Make us a church who love to wrestle with your word. I pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.