

Receiving the Kingdom

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: 10 February 2013

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0 : 00] Let's pray. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name, amen. You can grab a seat. Well, you've heard the passage, and it's a minefield, right? It's a total minefield.

When I first... I mean, because it's divorce, children, money. So, you know, when I first read this passage on Tuesday morning, and it's not the first time I've ever read it, but, you know, like, to preach for much.

So I'm reading through it, and I'm going, oh, man, I don't know, what am I going to say about that? Oh, this is... somebody's going to run out crying at this point, and I'm going to offend a person here, and, you know, the tithes are going to go down because I'm saying rich people can't go to heaven or something.

And, you know, it's going to be... this is just terrible. And, you know, over the week, as I've kind of sat with this and prayed about it, I've just... I've come to the conclusion that this very difficult passage to hear is just beautiful.

It is beautiful. It is just smothered in grace. It sounds hard-line, doesn't it? But it is just... there's just, like, grace just poured all over it.

[1 : 14] So let's have at it, folks. It's fantastic. You'll love it. Okay. Mark 10. So Jesus is on the road. And he's on a journey. Not just any journey at this point. You know, right?

At this point, he's on his way to Jerusalem. And he's on his way to the cross. And so some Pharisees come up and ask him about divorce.

And you see, it's good. Ask him about divorce. Now, divorce was a controversial subject back then, like it is now. People had different opinions on it. And despite what you think, it actually was more common than you think back in the days.

I mean, men could put a woman away and get a new one if they wanted. So, they asked him about divorce. And then Christ launches into this quite detailed little monologue here.

Let me say at this point here, the incident is... Christ is talking about divorce. Clearly, right? He's talking about divorce. But he's not. The presenting issue is divorce and remarriage.

[2 : 30] But there is something underneath that that Christ is trying to get at. Trying to get us to understand. And it has something to do with discipleship. Which has been the main topic these last couple of weeks, as you know.

So, I'm going to talk for a little while about this first little section here. These three sections. I'm going to talk about this first little section for a little while. And then in like three or four minutes, I'm going to go...

And here's what it has to do with discipleship. All right. Okay. So, the Pharisees asked him a question. And in doing so, they show that they are, in fact, Pharisaical.

Which means their faith, their beliefs are all about what you do. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? That's a question. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Tell me. What can I kind of... What can I get away with here? Like, what's the line in the sand? Tell me the line in the sand so I can go right up to that.

- [3 : 30] And I know I'm okay. As long as I don't cross over, I'm okay. Just let me know where the line in the sand is. And then if I don't do it, I know I'm good. Help me to see, you know, like, you know, where that line is.
- It's essentially, it's self-righteousness. That's what they want. They want a system in order for them to create righteousness for themselves.
- And Christ's response to this is awesome. He says, have you read what Moses said about this stuff? And then he quotes a bit of Deuteronomy 24. And in Deuteronomy 24, at the beginning of those, the first four or five verses, I think, it says that a husband can divorce a wife, but he must give a certificate.
- And it says a few more things there, but he says, he must give a certificate. And then he says to the Pharisees, and you know why Moses, you know, why you have that law, right?
- It's because you have hard hearts. So it's quite a scandalous thing to say. Now, Jesus isn't saying that the Mosaic, when I say Mosaic law, I'm talking about the laws of Moses, right? Jesus isn't saying the Mosaic law is bad.
- [4 : 35] I'll come back to that, okay? So Jesus then, with complete moral clarity, outlines God's intention for marriage.
- And it's beautiful. Let me read to you verses 6, 7, 8, 9. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. Therefore a man shall leave his father and 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. Now, in the BCP, in the wedding service, that's my favorite line.
- That is, whom God has joined, let no man put asunder. Now, I've married a few people in this place, haven't I?
- I've officiated the weddings. And you know that I love that line, because I yell that last word out when I do it. Whose wedding? Did I do that at your wedding? Let no man put asunder.
- [5 : 41] I love it. By the power of greyskull. Is that right? That's a very kind of, you know, it's kind of got the, I love it. I love that word asunder. That's a, sorry, it's an old children's cartoon reference.
- Okay. So it's great. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. It's beautiful. Okay. Okay. So it's referencing Genesis 2. And what Jesus does is he reminds them of God's permanent will for humanity in this area.
- But he also reminds them of the Mosaic law about divorce. Which makes an allowance for divorce, it seems. So, I'll say that again so it's very, very clear.
- Christ talks about God's ideal intent for marriage. But also God's concession. Now, concession is, it's not the right word.
- But it's the best I could come up with. And the concession was actually designed in this passage to protect women. Because men could so easily get rid of women that this law was put in place.
- [6 : 55] And it said, you can't just get rid of, you can't just get rid of your wives. You have to have a reason. It has to be a decent reason. Which is what all the, you know, all the certificate stuff is about.
- Now, this isn't saying that the law of Moses, the law of Moses isn't saying, you know, divorce is God's idea. And it's great. Like, he's into it.
- And I think what's happening in this law is that, is that God is trying to control some of the terrible consequences of a broken situation. Because women would have been left very, very vulnerable back in the days if they were divorced from their husband.

But, our failure in these areas does not alter God's intention for marriage.

So again, I'll say it again, okay. So, he outlines both. God's allowance, but God's standard, his creation standard. Now, what's this got to do with discipleship?

[7 : 59] Here we go. Okay. So, he is saying, don't aim for the minimum, basically. Like, it really simple. Don't aim for the minimum, okay. Don't be like the Pharisees.

Don't ask, you know, at what point am I being disobedient in my living? What's my moral break-even point? You know, because I'll take it right up to the line. He's saying, don't be like that.

He's saying, kingdom living is asking, how can I please the Father? How can I honor God? What is God's intent for this area of my life? And that's what I'm going to go for.

Now, Christ specifically applies it to a very intimate area of our life. Sex, divorce, marriage here. But, take it wider. Take it wider. Take it to every area. Hmm.

Divorce. It's, it's, it's, it's, I know this is a very sensitive topic. And if this has raised questions for you, please get in touch with me. I would love to talk to you about it further. Because Christ does have more to say on the topic, okay.

[9 : 01] But we're going to move on. To the next little scene in our passage. And this is verses 13 to 16. It's so great. It's such a lovely, lovely little story, right?

You know this story. Some parents bring their babies to Jesus. Which is what, for all the parents, soon to be parents, that's the best thing you can do for your kids, right?

Is bring them to Jesus, right? Bring them to Jesus. So, the disciples aren't into this though. That's because the kids were like on the status ladder back in the days. Like, we love kids in the, this is quite a kid-centric culture.

Back in the days, kids were kind of pretty low on the status ladder. So, the disciples aren't into it. They shoo the kids away. And Jesus gets very angry about this. And verse 14.

Let the children come to me. Do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.

[10 : 00] Do not hinder them. I'll talk about that soon. Because that has something to do with discipleship. Okay. So, Christ gathers up the kids and gives them a big hug. It's a cuddle. Prays for them.

Blesses them. It's great. So, he's saying there is something about these kids that we need to try and emulate.

There's something great about these kids. We need to try and emulate it in order for us to get into the kingdom. Now, we can have this kind of romantic idea about this and we can go, yeah, he must be, you know, talking about kids' babies' innocence or trusting or something like that, right?

But it's not. It's not that. That's not right. I don't know how else to say it. There's no childlike virtue that we should try and emulate here.

What Jesus is pointing to is not something these kids have. It's something they lack, which qualifies them for the kingdom. And what is it they lack? They lack power.

[11 : 06] They lack status. They lack clout. They are overlooked in society. They bring nothing to the table. And they are completely reliant on their parents.

So, to receive the kingdom like kids, we don't bring our merits. What do we bring? We bring our neediness. We bring open hands. We bring empty hands. Kids are great, right?

And they are, as kids here, you'll hear little baby noises. In the congregation tonight, if you listen really carefully. Oh, you're laughing now. I can't hear the baby noises.

I love it. Don't be embarrassed to bring babies to the church. I love hearing babies in the service. And the great thing about really little kids is that they're not self-conscious about having this great need.

They're not evasive or embarrassed about it. When I feed my daughter, my seven-month-old bee, the orange product.

[12 : 16] And, you know, she's not like, oh, this is just, oh, this is so embarrassing.

There's stuff all over my face. I don't know how to eat properly. I can't, I didn't cook. I didn't pay for it. I didn't cook it. I'm doing nothing. I'm just receiving it. This is just my self-esteem.

She experiences no cognitive dissonance, right? She just receives. Here's the thing, man. Kids have a wonderful clarity about the whole parent-kid thing and how that works.

And Christ is calling us to have very clear thoughts about how the God-humanity things work. You know, we come with empty hands, completely reliant on Christ.

Folks, it says in verse 15, if you want further evidence here, the kingdom is something you receive. It says receive the kingdom. It's not something you earn. You receive it.

[13 : 23] Okay, cue the rich young man. Okay, hang on. Before we cue the rich young man, okay, discipleship, brief summary. Yeah, okay, we're good. Brief summary. Okay, what have we learned?

Kingdom living, taking seriously the call of Christ to, you know, take up your cross and follow him means this. Don't ask, what can I get away with? Ask what pleases the Father. And two, it means not hindering those who come to the Father empty-handed because that's how you should come as well.

Okay, cue now the rich young ruler, rich young man. This is verse 17. So a wealthy young guy comes to Jesus with a question.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? So straight away, he wants a thing to do, right? And so Christ gives him a checklist. Did you commit murder, adultery? Did you steal? Did you covet?

Did you treat your parents well? He says no. And then Christ says, okay, there's one more thing you need to do. Sell your stuff and give the money to the poor. Now, is Christ setting up one more little merit badge just to tip him over the edge so he can get into heaven?

[14 : 31] No, of course not. You know, I think perhaps what's happening here is Christ is asking the rich young ruler to do something Christ knows the guy can't do at this point in his journey.

And the guy is very impressive, right? He brings to Jesus a fistful of money and status and power and privilege and moral achievements. And Christ has just made it very clear that we need to come to him like a child without any of that stuff.

Totally reliant. Totally reliant on grace. And so Jesus fingers the one thing in this guy's life that's got a real hold on him. It's his money. It's his idol, right? And like I said, perhaps Jesus knew that he actually couldn't do it.

He couldn't give it away. And in asking this question, I don't think Jesus was being particularly morally pedantic with this guy or particularly hard on this guy.

It says that he wasn't annoyed like, oh, you Mr. Fancy Pants rich guy coming to me. I'll show you. You know, no, it's like I think the guy says that Christ loved the guy, right?

[15 : 42] He looked at him with love. So what does a loving Savior do? A loving Savior exposes sin so people will repent. So the goal of Christ in asking this question that the guy fails at is not judgment.

The goal is the kingdom. The goal is life. Because as I've said a number of times in this service, Christianity is not clean yourself up and then you can enter the kingdom.

Clean yourself up and come to Jesus. No, it's... See, that's every other major faith. Christianity is come to Jesus with the knowledge you bring nothing to the table like a child and receive it all.

Now, the upshot of all this is that the guy walks away. It's a tragedy. I hate the story in this sense. The guy leaves.

He walks away. But you notice he walks away still thinking about his money. See, the right response, I think, was, I can't.

[16 : 42] Forgive me. Help me. I'm lost. You see, Christ's call to this guy wasn't poverty. I think Christ wanted him to be poor.

Christ's call to this guy was to follow him. But he didn't. He walked away. Walked in the opposite direction. And then Christ talks some more about money in 23 to 27.

And he says, you know, it's actually really hard for a wealthy person to get into the kingdom. In fact, it's impossible. But he quickly follows it up by saying, yes, it is impossible for a wealthy person to organize themselves into the kingdom, but it's not impossible for God to orchestrate that.

Now, wouldn't it be great if a guy just stuck around to hear that? And wouldn't it be great if a guy stuck around and heard more about God's plan for salvation and how God did what this guy couldn't do, which was give up immeasurable riches for the sake of the poor?

Christ did for this guy what this guy couldn't do. Okay, I'm just going to wrap up here with some final thoughts. Okay, so the way of the cross, discipleship, the way of the cross, means asking what pleases the Father.

[18 : 02] What's God's intent for every area of my life? Instead of the pharisaical, what's my moral break even? What's the bare minimum? Or what's the maximum I can sin?

The way of the cross is coming to the Father empty-handed, not being too proud to receive the kingdom, instead of worrying about how we earn our way onwards and upwards, or hindering those who are also on the journey.

And the way of the cross is knowing that Christ has done what we can't, and humbly believing that, even though it stings our egos, right? Folks, can I get an amen?

Amen. Amen.