



MATTHEW 19–20; MARK 10; LUKE 18

JESUS TEACHES A NEW SOCIAL HIERARCHY WITH SERVITUDE

Jesus offered a new look at servitude by turning social hierarchy upside down. In His Kingdom, the first are last and servants are “the greatest.” Jesus did not denounce servitude; He denounced the aristocracy that did not serve. He tried to teach masters how to serve. Through His example and words, He encouraged us to serve each other with love. In the first century, one-third of the Roman Empire was in the class of slaves and servants (but it was more similar to what we think of as the feudal system).¹

The Law of Moses allowed the poor, who needed room and board, to sell themselves to another Jew: “If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing” (Exodus 21:2). When Jesus came, instead of getting rid of slavery and servitude, Jesus worked to rid the culture of harsh masters, hatred, prejudice, and class systems. Anyone who sought a position of domination over another, with power-hungry or money-thirsty motives, was not welcome in His Kingdom. Everyone in His Kingdom serves one another and The Father in humility and love.

JESUS LEAVES GALILEE

Matthew 19:1; Mark 10:1 “when Jesus had finished these sayings” The Gospel of Matthew uses this phrase repeatedly to identify a change in location and topic (also see Matthew 7:28, 13:53; 26:1). Jesus and His disciples now went to the east side of the Jordan River and began to head south to Jerusalem. This is similar to Luke 9:51 (except The Gospel of Luke does mention crossing the Jordan River) and John 10:40 (which has Jesus near Bethabara for His last six months).

“**coasts/horia**” The KJV word is often translated “region,” and means “the boundaries of a place, hence: districts, territory.”²

Matthew 19:2; Mark 10:2 “Great multitudes followed him; and he healed them” The Matthew JST precedes the healing with an important observation: “*and many believed on him*” (Matthew 19:2). Healings make up the vast majority (75%) of Jesus’ miracles recorded in the NT. Of all the miracles that God could have used as a sign of the coming Messiah, the OT prophesies primarily identify the Messiah as one who will heal—the blind, lame, possessed and dead—inside and out. The NT miracles reflect Jesus’ compassion and love, and they teach that His healing is more than physical; He is the One who makes us whole. Mark’s parallel account is similar, but rather than describing healing, Mark focuses on Jesus’ teaching.

Marriage and Divorce

Matthew 19:3–4; Mark 10:2 “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” (NIV). A group of Pharisees in the crowd want to continue to test Jesus’ teachings.³ They have been mad that Jesus shamelessly does not live by the 10,000 oral laws that they added since the Babylonian exile. This time they question Him on the hot topic of marriage and divorce. People held very strong and differing opinions about this topic across the Jewish and Roman world. A few examples were covered in Matthew 5:31, but I will add a little here.

The average Roman had four to five divorces.⁴ It appears that number was lower in Jewish families living in the late second Temple period (AD 20–70). Yet Jewish husbands could obtain a divorce merely by writing a “bill of divorcement” that included a date, signature, and witnesses.⁵ Arranged marriages were rarely based on love. The ideal situation was to arrange your daughter’s marriages before she turned twelve and a half.⁶ The father’s task of arranging marriages was complicated by familial, financial and political motivations. Given their young age at the time of marriage, their culture of gender segregation, and the social hierarchy that put women and children on the same level as slaves, it is unsurprising many marriages did not last.⁷

The unilateral right to divorce was entirely the husband's. A popular Jewish writer who was widely admired by the time of the NT wrote: "the wife who does not make her husband happy [is evil]."⁸ And, "an evil wife is a plague to her husband. What is the remedy? Let him drive her from his house [i.e., divorce her], and he shall be healed from the plague of her."⁹ He continued by defining a "wicked woman" as one who socializes outside of her home, or contradicts her husband. Elsewhere, he continues, "I would rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than dwell with an evil wife."¹⁰ If a woman "speaks inside her house so that her neighbors hear her voice," she was labeled a "scolding woman," which was cause for divorce.¹¹ The constant cultural threat of divorce suffocated many marriages.



Matthew 19:4 "Have you not read that from the beginning the Creator . . ." (BSB) Jesus addresses their cultural baggage by going back to the scriptures. The Lord denounced the stifling practices of temporary marriage and explained the higher law of marriage given in Eden.

Matthew 19:5–6; Mark 10:6 "from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female" The eternal significance of maleness, femaleness, and marriage has become a priority again with living prophets (as well as in the Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:7–35).

"what God has joined together, let man not separate" (BSB) The desire to become unified as a couple is a life-long goal for married couples. At the time of Christ, very few, if any, understood the principle of marriage lasting for time let alone eternity.

Matthew 19:7–9; Mark 10:5–11; Luke 16:18 "Why did Moses then command . . . divorcement, and to put her away?" The Law of Moses encouraged marriage and discouraged divorce (Malachi 2:16). Nevertheless, divorce was an option if one broke the law of chastity (i.e. Deut 22:13–29; 24:1–4). But Moses' Law became shackled over time with hundreds of oral laws based on Satan's lies. The culture at the time of Jesus included arranged marriages and a segregated lifestyle. Generally speaking, the lack of communication and mutual respect destroyed mutuality in marriage.¹² Jesus' audience needed a dramatic paradigm shift in understanding the value of marital relationships.

In the higher law of marriage, Jesus calls disciples to stop divorces, unless immorality was involved (and later Paul adds one more justification for divorce in marriages with unbelievers, 1 Corinthians 7:10–17). Jesus restored the commandment given in the Garden of Eden (“. . . shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” Genesis 2:24). Throughout His mission, Jesus called for more love, reconciliation, patience, communication, understanding, and forgiveness. He demonstrates how to honor and respect one other. If His example were lived in marriages, we would not need the lower law to divorce.

Matthew 19:10–12 “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry” (NIV) These verses only appear in the Gospel of Matthew. They receive a lot of discussion because they can be interpreted very differently. The verses can be read to support celibacy in certain situations (i.e. for “eunuchs”). Celibacy was practiced in the ancient world by some, including certain Essenes. They saw it as a higher law of purity. These two verses may reflect those thoughts. Some disregard them as a later editorial addition. On the other extreme, some interpret them as encouraging castration for the kingdom of God. This later view seems to contradict what Jesus has just said in Matthew 19:4 about the importance of man and woman becoming one flesh and God creating them in the beginning as such.

Fortunately, the Prophet Joseph Smith restored the importance of marriage in God’s Plan of Happiness. D&C 49:15 addresses this very issue: “whoso forbiddeth to marry is not ordained of God, for marriage is ordained of God unto man” (also see D&C 131:2; and heading to D&C 70). Other prophets have taught in *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, and elsewhere, that God created the earth for the spirit children of Heavenly Parents to receive bodies.¹³

Jesus Blesses the Children

Matthew 19:13–15; Mark 10:13–16; Luke 18:15–17

Matthew 19:13; Mark 10:13–14; Luke 18:15 “. . . unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them” The Lord’s disciples were initially so entrenched in their culture that they were not accustomed to having infants around. In Luke 18:15, the word, “children” is “babies” (NASB). Their culture rarely welcomed children in public, and they were to be kept out of sound and out of sight. Even in wealthy homes, children were often segregated to be away from adults and public life.

Jesus did not live by these segregating restrictions for children (or anyone). He refused to isolate them and treated them as valued individuals. Earlier He allowed children to join the group of five thousand and later the group of four thousand who gathered to hear Him teach in Galilee (Matthew 14:21; 15:38).

Matthew 19:14–15; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16–17 “. . . forbid them not: for such is the kingdom of God” Jesus’ response turned their social hierarchy upside-down. He inverted the hierarchy by honoring children—who were

often categorized with servants and called, “young slaves” (*paidon/pais*¹⁴). In their culture, children waited on their fathers like servants (washed their faces and feet, helped them dress, eat, etc.). But Jesus acknowledged them as citizens in the Celestial realms. Shortly before this scene in Mark’s Gospel, Jesus gently embraced a child, “when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me” (Mark 9:36–37; similar to Luke 9:48). His message and tenderness become our example to follow.

“**whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it**” (RSV) How do little children receive the Kingdom of God? Especially because Luke refers to babies, I think this includes their innocence from being covered by Jesus’ atonement. Children also have great faith, meekness, and love.



“What Lack I Yet?” by J. H. Hartley, 1929.

Jesus Teaches a Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:16–22; Mark 10:17–27; Luke 18:18–27

Matthew 19:16; Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18 “**Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**” This is the second time this question is asked in Luke’s Gospel (10:25–37 and 18:18–17), but the answers are customized to the needs of the individual. (It reminds me of the similar council given to similar questions asked by new members of the church in the D&C 4, 6, 11, 12, 14, etc.)

Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:18; Luke 18:19 “. . . **there is none good but one**” Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he tears down the rank and pride of the upper class. In a world where masters were highly respected, He wanted everyone to be respected without expensive dress, special seats, fancy foods, and social status (see Matthew 18:1–4; 23:2; Luke 11:43; etc.). Jesus never sought acclaim and even denounced the title “good” used for Him!

Matthew 19:18–19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20 “**You know the commandments . . .**” (RSV) In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus quotes the 5th through 9th commandments from the Decalogue (each Synoptic Gospel quotes a slightly different list). Even in the OT, the list of the Ten Commandments is written differently in different places (compare Exodus 21:10; Deuteronomy 24:14; Ecclesiastes 4:1).

Matthew 19:20; Mark 10:20; Luke 19:21 “what lack I yet?” The rich young man is also obedient and reports his efforts to live the Law of Moses his whole life. He is still open to learning more. He acts as if he is willing to sacrifice more and thus, the second question—is there more I need to do to gain eternal life?

Mark 10:21a “Then Jesus beholding him loved him” Mark alone adds this touching addition—allowing us to image what it would have looked like to watch the Lord’s eyes fill with admiration and love as He examined the young man’s heart.

Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21b, Luke 18:22 “If thou wilt be perfect . . .” The idea of becoming perfect in Greek is only an extension of the word “*teleios: having reached its end, i.e. complete, by ext. perfect*”¹⁵ He lacks a generous heart and an understanding of which riches matter in heaven. Jesus asks the young man to consecrate his goods. This is an example of how we can live the law of consecration without a church-wide mandate. Interestingly, in the Sermon on the Mount, the last things Jesus taught before His charge to be perfect / complete. was to live the law of consecration.

Matthew 19:22; Mark 10:23; Luke 18:23 “Sorrowful,” or “grieved,” or “his countenance fell,” or “being struck sad,” or “shocked” (RSV, DRB, ISV).¹⁶ Our choice is between caring for wealth or caring for things of God. We may not recognize wealth as a problem now, but if it is used for selfish purposes we may be in the same situation as the rich young ruler. President Harold B. Lee recounted the atrocities and trials that the early saints underwent (i.e. starvation, murder, etc.), and then added: “We are the inheritors of what they gave us. But what are we doing with it? Today we are basking in the lap of luxury . . . as never before...It would seem that probably this is the most severe test of any we’ve ever had in the history of this church.”¹⁷ He made this statement in the early 1970s! The fear is that our generation tends to live the law of consumption more than the law of consecration.

Jesus Teaches on Riches and Discipleship

Matthew 19:23–30; Mark 10:23–31; Luke 18:24–30

Matthew 19:23; Mark 10:23–24; Luke 18:24 “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (BSB) Jesus has already taught why this is the case when he holds up children as examples of those who will enter the kingdom of God. Wealth often breeds pride, a false sense of self-sufficiency, and an attitude of domineering power. Each of these are the antithesis of how Jesus led. He meekly submitted to the will of His Father, regularly going out to the wilderness to pray alone, and serving those in need all day long.

Matthew 19:24; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25 “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle . . .” Jesus’ hyperbole was to startle the audience. The Greek text could be literally translated “through the aperture of a sewing needle.” Camels were often associated with merchants in the ancient world.¹⁸ There was a nineteenth century minister who named a short gate the “eye of the needle” after the parable. A camel could not enter unless it was

unloaded from bags. But this was unknown at the times of the Apostles. Jesus' proverb is just another funny and exaggerated image used to teach.

Matthew 19:25; Mark 10:26; Luke 18:26 “Who then can be saved?” The listening disciples now feel that it is impossible to get into heaven. But Jesus has already taught that they need to be willing to live the law of consecration. Zion can only be built on that principle (D&C 105:5; 3 Nephi 26:19; Moses 7:18). We find stories of wealthy righteous prophets in the OT (i.e. Job, Abraham, Isaiah, etc.) suggesting that if one selflessly serves the Lord with all their heart, their wealth doesn't need to be a barrier to entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 19:26; Mark 10:27; Luke 18:27 “Jesus beheld their thoughts” (JST). Salvation is a gift from God, and only through Him are all things possible. The JST adds to each of these verses (additions *in italics*):

MATTHEW 19:26

With men this is impossible but *if they will forsake all things for my sake*, with God whatsoever things I speak are possible.

MARK 10:27

With men *that trust in riches* it is impossible, but not impossible *with men who trust in God and leave all for my sake, for with such* all things are possible.

LUKE 18:27

Unto them, I tis impossible for them who trust in riches, to enter into the kingdom of God; but he who forsaketh the things which are of this world, it is possible with God that he should enter in.

Matthew 19:27; Mark 10:28; Luke 18:28 We have left all we had to follow you” (NIV) Peter again is the spokesperson for Twelve. He comes across as so earnest and relatable.

Matthew 19:28 “in the resurrection, . . . ye shall sit upon twelve thrones . . .” (JST) Jesus promises them a rich reward for their sacrifices. The JST changes the KJV, “regeneration,” for “resurrection,” The Greek word is “a new creation.” Ministers from the time of the Prophet Joseph used the biblical word, “regeneration,” as the Holy Spirit instigating a rebirth. With the JST change to resurrection, it emphasizes the role that the early apostles will play in the future. Jesus prophesies that the apostles will judge the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:29–30; Luke 18:29–30 “no man who has left house, or . . . shall not receive manifold” All sacrifices are acknowledged, remembered, and rewarded by God. All three Synoptic Gospels include this promise.

Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:30 “**But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first**” This is an example of a simple chiasm found in the Bible. This prophecy has multiple applications. In part, it foretells that the gospel will be taken from the Jews to the Gentiles. The JST in Mark, Jesus adds a gentle rebuke for Peter’s bragging: “*But there are many who make themselves first, that shall be last . . . This he said, rebuking Peter.*” Jesus has just promised him he will become a great judge—but still offers a good reminder to beware of pride.

LAST FEW WEEKS BEFORE JESUS’ PASSION AND RESURRECTION

Parable of The Laborers in The Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

As we follow the Prophet Joseph Smith’s counsel to understand parables by looking to “the question which drew out the answers,” we have to look back to Peter’s question in Matthew 19:27, “Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; What shall we have therefore?”¹⁹

Matthew. 20:1 “. . . **early in the morning to hire labourer’s into his vineyard**” This is very early start of the work day The Hebrew day begins at 6:00 am as the first hour (daytime was divided from 6:00am to 6:00pm for the day hours, and four watches for the night hours). The analogy of God’s servants working in His vineyard is reiterated in scripture (especially, Isaiah 5:1-7, and Jacob 5, the Allegory of the Olive Tree). We can interpret the timing of this parable on several different planes. The early morning could refer to the early history of mortality. Perhaps the householder starts his search at sunrise, which could represent the beginning of Adam’s and Eve’s posterity. Or perhaps the “morning” refers to the beginning of a dispensation. On an individual level, those who have been born into families where you begin serving in God’s vineyard in your early years of life after baptism. It may also be seen as one work day, and just refer to someone who begins to work as soon as the sunrises.

Matthew 20:2 “**a penny a day**” or in Greek, *denari*, was the average daily wage for a laborer or a soldier for a day.²⁰

Matthew 20:3 “**the third hour**” is 9:00. We are idle in the market-place when we are not working for God.

Matthew 20:4-5 “**whatsoever is right I will give you**” A monetary price is not set, but a fair wage is promised. More laborers are called at noon, 3:00 and 5:00 pm. These different times may represent different times of one’s life, or even times in the history of the world. The times may be random, or represent a specific period. In light

of the dispensations outlined in the Bible, perhaps each of these times could fit into the period when God sent Adam (6:00 a.m.), Noah (9:00 a.m.), Abraham (noon), Moses (3:00 p.m.) and Christ (5:00 p.m.). The timing across scripture is not consistent, but within the book of Revelation, one day is 1,000 years (D&C 77:6).



Icon of the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard. Photograph by bobosh_t via Flickr.

Matthew 20:6–7 “eleventh hour” This was 7:00 pm, which means there is very little time to work in the daylight. If we use the dispensation analogy above, this is the last dispensation, opened by the restoration with God calling the Prophet Joseph Smith shortly before the advent of the millennium. In this interpretation, we are living in eleventh hour on Saturday night. This is the perspective of D&C 33:3, “the field is white already to harvest; and it is the eleventh hour, and the last time that I shall call laborers into my vineyard.” We are blessed by the Lord as the last group of laborers in the vineyard. We have not had to wait for either the Lord’s resurrection or the restoration of all truth—we just need to work our very hardest for the time we have been allotted. The parable has many different levels of meanings as well. Older converts and life time members all serve their best as they work together to build God’s kingdom.



[Peasant woman binding sheaves by Vincent van Gogh, 1889. Image via Wikimedia Commons.](#)

Matthew 20:8–9 “give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first” The parable elaborates on Jesus’ message in Matthew 19:30 (last will be first). This is the characteristic of the kingdom of heaven. Elder Talmage said, “The principle which Christ lays down is, that, while nothing done for Him shall lose its reward, yet, from one reason or another, no forecast can be made, no inferences of self-righteousness may be drawn. It does not by any means follow, that most work done—at least, to our seeing and judging—shall entail a greater reward. On the contrary, ‘many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.’ Not all, nor yet always and necessarily, but ‘many.’”²¹

Matthew 20:10–12 “murmured against . . . borne the burden and heat of the day” From an economic perspective, this parable creates a disturbing dynamic: all receive the same wages even if some work all day in the hot sun vs. work a couple of hours in the late evening. The time frame may be the time of life or the history of the world. From a spiritual perspective though, this is liberating and empowers all who come unto Christ and work for Him—even at the end of life (or in the next life). We are all children of a merciful God who welcomes all to join in the covenant. We rejoice with all who come to covenant.

Matthew 20:13–14 “Friend, I do thee no wrong” The Lord is no respecter of persons, all are alike unto God, black and white, bond and free, male and female, young and old. Our mortal sense of equality is warped—we must trust in God’s omniscience. I presume we all agreed to the wages of mortality prior to our arrival. We must take what lot is ours and do our best with it.

Matthew 20:15 “eye evil” refers to one who looks with envy or malice on the goal of fortune of others.

Matthew 20:16 “many be called, but few chosen” According to the context of this parable, all who are willing are called to work to build the kingdom, but it appears that the workers must do something more than receive their call to be “chosen.” The Lord repeats this teaching to the Prophet Joseph Smith while in Liberty Jail, and answers *why* this is the case in D&C 121:34–37.

And why are they not chosen? Because their hearts are set so much upon the things of this world, and aspire to the honors of men, that they do not learn this one lesson—That the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven, and that the powers of heaven cannot be controlled nor handled only upon the principles of righteousness. That they may be conferred upon us, it is true; but when we undertake to cover our sins, or to gratify our pride, our vain ambition, or to exercise control or dominion or compulsion upon the souls of the children of men, in any degree of unrighteousness, behold, the heavens withdraw themselves; the Spirit of the Lord is grieved; and when it is withdrawn, Amen to the priesthood or the authority of that man.

In a sense, these workers who are called may choose to be “chosen” by their attitudes and behaviors.

Jesus Prophecies of His Death

Matthew 20:17; Mark 10:32; Luke 18:31 “**Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart**” This is one of the clearest examples of how Matthew uses the word “disciples” in lieu of “apostles.” It sounds like Jesus has a large group traveling together to Jerusalem. This was the norm for safety, as well as a blessing to those in the company of Jesus for that journey.

Matthew 20:18–19 “**The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests . . .**” Although the Gospel authors record multiple prophecies detailing Jesus’ death, when His death actually happens, their shock and confusion suggest that they did not understand them until after His resurrection. Decades later, by the time the Gospel’s were finished, these prophecies were remembered as very important and were sprinkled throughout Jesus’ mission, especially toward the end of His life. His last several weeks of life, he had the burden of knowing how and when he would die, and the blessing of knowing of His resurrection.

Salome’s Desire for her Sons: James and John

Matthew 20:20–28; Mark 10:35–45

Matthew 20:20 Mark 10:35 “**mother of Zebedee’s children**” The mother’s name is Salome (Mark 15:40).²² A group of biblical scholars identify Salome as the “sister” to Mary, the mother of the Lord, who is mentioned in John 19:25.²³ This makes Jesus cousins to the apostles James and John. If this is the case, these familial relations make this conversation more plausible. Possibly a favorite aunt asks Jesus if His cousins can remain close to Him in the future kingdom. Mark does not have the request coming from Salome’s mouth, but from the two men themselves.

Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:36–37 “**two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom**” This request to sit beside Jesus, goes counter to what He has just taught about being no respecter of persons. I think Matthew placed this conversation here, directly after the parable of the workers in God’s vine-



yard, to hit the point again from a third witness that God is no respecter of persons. We don't want to miss His message that entrance into the kingdom requires service and submission.

Matthew 20:22; Mark 10:38 “**Ye know not what ye ask**” Have you asked amiss? With our mortal-myopia, we do not see our life and eternity as God does. Our prayers are filled with desires from our perspective, but we do not see the same view that God does. This is why the Lord instructed Oliver Cowdery, “ask me if it be right” (D&C 9:8); and King Benjamin added the same qualifier for our prayers: “whatsoever ye ask that is right, in faith, believing that ye shall receive” (Mosiah 4:21). The Lord Himself repeated this lesson to the Nephites, if they “ask the Father in my name, which is right, believing that ye shall receive, behold it shall be given unto you” (3 Nephi 18:20). With this perspective we can be grateful that all our prayers are not answered because the Lord will bless us with our answer only when it is right.

“Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink?” The cup that Christ will drink is greater than any could sip. It is the bitter cup, made so by the crushing pain He experienced. (Wine is bitter if the seeds and skin are crushed.) Jesus points out that the apostles will have to drink a bitter cup too; James son of Zebedee died a martyr's death (Acts 12:2), as well as nine of the other original apostles.

“. . . to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” The Lord refers to baptism in a new way. The disciples assume they all entered into Jesus’ service through being converted and baptized by immersion by either John the Baptist or Jesus and His disciples (John 3:22; 4:1–2). Here though, “Jesus’ baptism” is a change that will happen by being immersed in suffering. Have you ever thought of our trials as our baptism? The Father prepares us with trials in order to ready us to serve Him as needed and to become who we need to be in order to return to enter His presence.

Matthew 20:23–24; Mark 10:40–41 “to sit on my right hand, and on my left hand, is not mine to give” Jesus does not usurp His Father’s position. Over and over, He admits that He is only a servant of His Father, and He cannot make such an honorary promise, because it is the Father’s choice. The rest of the quorum were “moved with indignation” or “much displeased” with the situation because it appears that James and John (or their mother) tried to receive a place of honor above the others. It seems they created a competitive environment by asking for the best seats within the quorum.

Matthew 20:25–26 “it shall not be so among you” Even though there are social hierarchies in the world, Jesus wants none of that among His disciples. This is the antithesis of what He has been trying to teach by word and example. Jesus teaches a wonderful principle here that He repeats in the Book of Mormon (Jacob 5:63; Mosiah 2:12, 17; Alma 17:26; Ether 13:12). In God’s eye, the greatest are children and servants, and those who are humble, meek, and submissive to His will.

Matthew 20:26b–27 “whosoever would be great among you must be your servant and whosoever . . . first . . . your slave” (RSV) Jesus turns the cultural norm upside-down. No longer are servants and slaves on the bottom of the social hierarchal pyramid. In His kingdom, those that are the most committed and important in His kingdom are those who submit to serve Heavenly Father. Jesus transforms “great” to “servant” and “first” to “slave.” Obviously, with God as one’s master, there is no worry about abuse. The message Jesus is trying to teach is that we must submit our will to God’s as a slave submits to their master’s. Perhaps this is why wards and families are structured as they are on earth; we often have opportunities to serve without a lot of recognition.

Matthew 20:28 “The Son of man” As discussed in earlier chapters, “son of man” is used by the Lord in a different way than it was used by Ezekiel and the other prophets. Rather than referring to the son of Adam, as the prophet did, when Jesus uses it, it appears to refer to His *divine origins*. As mentioned earlier in Mathtew, Jesus uses this title as uniquely His. Enoch shared the name of Heavenly Father as, “Man of holiness” (Moses 6:37; 7:35). When Jesus is calls Himself the “Son of Man” it is a parallel for “Son of God,” without out offending His audience who does not understand.

“came not to be ministered not, but to minister” Of all the radical changes that Jesus made—from cleansing the temple and Sabbath laws, to restoring the higher priesthood and ordinances—this message is one of the most repeated. It goes against not only social hierarchy, but also the natural man tendencies, and economic theories. But in order to become disciples, we must apply it. Jesus came not only to redeem us, but to teach us how to become like Him. To do that, we must learn to serve each other and our God with a heart filled with love, we must have and as submissive a heart as a servant or child.

“give his life a ransom” Ransom was the price paid for the manumission of a slave. Jesus’ use of the word “ransom” emphasizes:

1. The voluntary nature of self-giving.
2. The vicarious nature of offering sacrificial obedience for someone who could not.
3. The universal nature of the gift.²⁴

Jesus’ example of living each day to be about the Father’s business is the same aim that His disciples must adopt: we submit to God’s will and serve those in our path.

Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus Near Jericho

Matthew 20:29–34; Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43

The three Synoptic Gospels record this miracle with minor differences: 1) Matthew has two blind men leaving Jericho, while 2) Mark has only one man, and 3) Luke has the one blind man entering Jericho. The differences sound like variations within oral histories. The other observation is that the Gospel of Matthew includes healing the blind five times (9:27–31; 12:22; 15:30–31; 21:14; 20:30–34). In one of those, Matthew 9:27–31, Jesus heals two blind men. Perhaps Matthew just mixes up these two accounts (and we have discussed his mix-ups elsewhere too²⁵). This is the last miracle story in the Synoptic Gospels before Jesus’ triumphal entry. This is the only healing of the blind that they all record, fulfilling Isaiah 61:1. Mark’s Gospel gives us the most details about this story.

Matthew 20:29; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35 “a great multitude followed” As Jesus journeys south to Jerusalem, the crowd grows. They may have joined his caravan to Jerusalem for the Passover, or just joined for the day as he passes Jericho.

Matthew 20:30; Mark 10:46; Luke 18:35–36 “blind Bartimaeus . . . sat by the highway side begging” Mark tells us the blind man’s name and heritage. Bartimaeus positions himself on the road to beg. Luke 18:36 adds how the blind man tries to find out what all the noise was about. The news filters through the crowd and he learns that Jesus is coming. Bartimaeus now has a higher motive than begging for money. He wants Jesus to heal him.

Jesus Restores Sight to Blind Bartimaeus by William Hole, 1905.



Matthew 20:30b; Mark 10:47; Luke 18:36–37 “He cried, Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me” (JST) Bartimaeus, calling out, shows his faith in the Lord’s healing power. Notice the different titles used for our Lord. The multitude refers to Jesus by His geographic name, “Jesus of Nazareth” (possibly legal or full name). Yet, when Bartimaeus calls for help, he honors Jesus’ Messianic title: Son of David.

Matthew 20:31–32a; Mark 10:48; Luke 18:39 “. . . he should hold his peace: but he cried the more” The crowd found the loud blind man a nuisance and rebuked him. But Bartimaeus’ determination grows, and he calls out “exceedingly” (Mark 10:48 JST). Jesus stops because He either heard Bartimaeus’ call or He was just prompted. Most English translations say “called for him,” but literally Jesus “commanded” that the blind man come to Him. Perhaps this was needed because of the crowd’s chiding Bartimaeus.

Mark 10:49–50 “Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you” (NIV). I presume it was the density of the crowd that didn’t allow Bartimaeus to stand earlier and run to ask for help, but from his sitting position, he now leaves his robes behind and comes forward to Jesus.

Matthew 20:32b–34; Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41 “What wilt thou that I should do?” Even though it was quite evident that the man was blind, Jesus wants Bartimaeus to ask for healing. Jesus asks us the same question to all disciples, encouraging us to open a dialogue to ask God for our own needs. This echoes the explanation on prayer in the Bible Dictionary that some blessings are made conditional on the asking. The miracles begin to flow after he answers Jesus’ question. (I think that’s what happens?)

Matthew 20:34 “Jesus had compassion . . . immediately . . . received sight, and . . . followed him.” Matthew’s storyline wants to emphasize Jesus’ compassion, not the interplay with the crowd. Jesus’ compassion is an element in his healing (as well as in our healings now). The Gospel of Matthew does not mention it, but this miracle fulfilled Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:7. Unlike John 9’s healing of the blind man, where Jesus also taught a lesson about the appropriateness of doing good on the Sabbath, this time, the healing happened immediately.

Mark 10:52; Luke 18:42–43 “thy faith hath made thee whole” Jesus acknowledges and

Praying woman with upraised hands. Catacomb of Calixtus, Rome, early 4th c. Frescoe. Image via Wikimedia Commons.



honors Bartimaeus' faith—which then furthers the healing of his whole soul. In a community where they attributed blindness to sin, Jesus' additional encouragement would have been gratifying and empowering. Luke also adds that when Jesus' disciples saw the miracle, it gave them even more reasons to praise God.

Requirements of Prayer

Luke 18:1-14

Luke alone includes these two parables in which Jesus teaches the need for prayer and humility in discipleship. In Luke's Gospel, this falls just after an eschatological prophesy, as if they are instructions on preparing for the last days with prayer.

The Parable of the Widow and Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

Luke 18:1 “**pray, and not faint,**” is also translated, “not give up” (NIV), and “always to pray and not lose heart” (ESV), or “pray at all times and they should not grow weary” (AB). Discipleship requires constant hopeful prayer rather than discouragement.

Luke 18:2-5 “**a widow . . . saying, ‘Give me justice against my adversary’**” (ESV) This parable teaches the value of continual prayers to God (similar to Luke 11:5). The widow pleads for help to “avenge” (repeated four times in 18:3, 5, 7, 8), or “Give me justice against my adversary” (BSB). As the widow seeks relentlessly for legal protection from the Judge. Her complaints become annoying, and so in order to stop them, he addresses her needs as soon as he can.

Luke 18:7 “. . . **elect, which cry day and night unto him**” Jesus defines the elect as those who pray day and night to God. The image of the nagging widow with selfish demands is not the role model for Jesus' disciples—the imagery only goes so far. But elsewhere Jesus teaches that He wants praying disciples who seek God's direction to serve Him better. Especially in the context of the calamities of the last days, disciples need to connect through prayer to keep their faith tethered to Him.

Luke 18:8 “**when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?**” I like to answer the questions Jesus asks in scripture, as if I were there with Him. I hope our answer to this question is, “YES—ours!” The JST footnote promises that the Lord will “avenge” the saints of their enemies. But only long-term remuneration is promised—not short-term.

The Parable of The Praying Pharisee and Publican

Luke 18:9-14

Luke 18:9 “were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else” (NIV) Jesus chooses another story to teach His self-righteous audience who “trust in themselves.” In this section, Jesus repeatedly highlights this theme. He denounces those who pridefully think they are better than others.

Luke 18:10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray” The two men represent opposites in the society. As mentioned in earlier weeks, Pharisees “or separatists” made up the largest group among the Jews (6,000 men) at the time and were honored for keeping the commandments with exactness. According to Josephus, they held “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.”²⁶ They believed in The Law, Prophets, Writings, and oral laws. They emphasized purity from following the rites of the oral laws, tithes of money and food, and strict Sabbath observance.²⁷ Publicans on the other hand were generally despised as they worked for the Romans to collect taxes.²⁸ The NT often categorizes publicans with sinners (Matthew 21:31; Mark 2:16; Luke 15:1; etc.).²⁹

Luke 18:11 “the Pharisee stood” and prayed thus with himself” The prayer is not to God, but to aggrandize himself as seen in his posture. Contrast the stance and prayer of the two different men—one stands while the other smites his breast and looks down from a distance. The Pharisee’s contempt for the rest of humanity is evidence of his lack of charity. The publican, on the other hand, smites or pounds his chest. This was a sign of sorrow and compunction. His humility won’t even allow him to look up to heaven.

Luke 18:12 “I fast twice a week” Some Jews at that time fasted Monday and Thursday to honor the memory of Moses ascending Mt. Sinai on Thurs and came down on Monday.

Luke 18:14 “everyone that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself” Again we see the Lord turning the social order upside down. His main point is that the humble will be exalted. Similarly, he preached that the least will be the greatest (Luke 13:30).

Header Image: Christ and the Rich Young Ruler by Heinrich Hofmann, 1889. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

The Pharisee and the Publican by James Tissot, 1899.



ENDNOTES

1. Jacob Neusner, *The Economics of the Mishnah*, 65. Male slaves were released on the seventh year, unless they choose to be a servant for life. Women were not released, as they became a servant-wife and also bore their master's children. In the Roman world, slaves were released at age thirty or thirty-five (some sources record as high as age forty). Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4.545. Ken Campbell, ed. *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 135.
2. Strong's Concordance of the Bible.
3. *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII. 297–298. “the most accurate interpreters of the laws.” Josephus also claims there were 6,000 Pharisees or “separatists.” As the largest and most enduring Jewish group of the era, they recorded the history from their perspective. Their sacred texts included: The Law (Torah), Prophets, Writings, and ten thousand oral laws. They especially focused on strict Sabbath observance, the rites of the oral laws that made them pure, and tithes. Pharisees also believed in the resurrection.
4. Evelyn and Frank Stagg, *Woman in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1978), 86; Ben Wirtherington, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (NYC: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 20. David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the Bible: The Social and Literary Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 73.
5. *Mishnah*, Nashim, *Gittin* 1–9. *Gittin* 2.4. “All [men] are qualified to write a bill of divorce, even a deaf-mute, an imbecile, or a minor” (*Mishnah, Gittin*, 2.4).
6. *Mishnah, Yebamoth*, 13.1. The famous rabbi Hillel (60 BC to 20 AD), explained that after a girl was twelve-and-a-half, she “may exercise right of refusal four or five times” in the selection of her husband. In opposition, the rabbinic school of Shammai complained, “The daughters of Israel are no [such] ownerless property!” They allowed a young girl, who had not gone through puberty, to live in her father's home until “she is come of age.”
7. Lynne Hilton Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women* (Palo Alto, CA: Good Publisher, 2015), chapter 6.
8. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 25:23b. These writings of Ben Sira, were considered as a candidate for the Jewish cannon and are found in the apocrypha.
9. Arthur Ernest Cowley, Adolf Neubauer, eds., *The Original Hebrew of a Portion of Ecclesiasticus* (Oxford England: Oxford University-Clarendon Press, 1897), 24.
10. Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 25:12–18 “Give the water no passage; neither a wicked woman liberty to gad abroad. If she go not as thou wouldn't have her, cut her off from thy flesh. . . . The wickedness of a wife changes her appearance, and darkens her face like that of a bear. Her husband takes his meals among the neighbors.” He continues, “[the husband] cannot help sighing bitterly. Any iniquity is insignificant compared to a wife's iniquity; may a sinner's lot befall her!” Ben Sira bemoaned, “An evil wife is an ox yoke which chafes; taking hold of her is like grasping a scorpion . . . Any wound, but not a wound of the heart! Any wickedness, but not the wickedness of a wife!” Ben Sira, *Ecclesiasticus*, 26:7, 25:13.
11. *Mishnah, Ketuboth* 6.6. Recorded after the NT was compiled, but probably applicable, Abba Saul justified divorce “if she curses his parents in his presence.”

12. Wilson, *Christ's Emancipation of New Testament Women*, chapters 1 and 5.
13. <https://www.lds.org/search?lang=eng&query=value%20of%20marriage>
14. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
15. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.
16. Mark often gives stronger emotions. This is especially evident in the Lord's passion. It is Mark who shows the Lord in deep anguish and pain in Gethsemane and on the cross.
17. Paul Y. Hoskisson, ed. *Sperry Symposium Classics: The Old Testament* (Provo and Salt Lake City, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Deseret Book, 2005), 83–99.
18. Hugh Nibley, *Approaching Zion*, edited by Don E. Norton (Salt Lake City and Provo, UT: FARMS and Deseret Book, 1989), 315.
19. Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, Reprint, 1980), vol. 5. 261. This is taken from the prophet's Journal, kept by Willard Richards, Jan. 29, 1843.
20. In 44 BC, Julius Caesar paid 225 denarii for a year of skilled labor (with skilled representing a range of tasks). In 27 BC, an unskilled laborer or soldier was paid 1 denarius. On an annual basis, a centurion earned 3,750, and the highest-ranking military officers, 15,000 denarii per year.
21. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ, 5th ed.* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News, 1916), 486.
22. We learn a few details about the names and family relationships of the women in the Gospels in Matthew 27; 56; 28:1; Mark 15:40; 16:1; Luke 24:10; John 19:25. For a detailed table of this see Come Follow Me, *Easter*, Table 1.
23. Raymond Brown, *The Anchor Bible Series: John X111–XX1* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 98; “. . . the tradition that Salome, wife of Zebedee and mother of John, was Mary's sister, a relationship which makes John the cousin of Jesus” (also see note on xix 25 in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 29A). He lines up the women listed in different places in the Bible and finds a possible family relation (see verse in note above).
24. *Ibid.*, 243.
25. Matthew's account at the triumphal entry uses two donkeys and everyone else just one. Matthew adds an incorrect heritage for the prophet Zechariah son of Berechiah
26. From the 900BC. For more see Lynne Hilton Wilson, “The Confusing Case of Zacharias,” *Religious Educator*, 14.2 (2013), 107–123.
27. Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII. 297–298.
28. Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper Collins' Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1996), 842.
29. Even the Romans looked down on publicans. Supposedly, Theocritus, a third century Greek poet was asked what the worst wild beast was, and he answered, “On the mountains, bears and lions; in the city, publicans.” Fredric William Farrar, *The Life of Christ* (New York City: Dutton, 1874), 247. Jews tried to avoid marriages with publicans: “Take not a wife out of a family where there is a publican, for they are all publicans.”
30. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Hagner, “Tax Collectors,” 741–743. Eerdmans, *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1278. The Romans hired tax collectors in each region to enforce their 1% income-tax, 1/10 ground tax on production, a poll or head tax levied on all men over fourteen and girls over twelve up until age sixty-five, and an “indi-

rect tax,” which covered imports and exports that crossed a major street or harbor. The tax ranged from 2.5% to 12.5%, providing plenty of room for favors or extra charges or partiality. Edersheim, *Jesus the Messiah*, 133.