
Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

NOTE: With Chapter 19 we begin what is considered Book 5 of the Gospel. Book 5 contains a great deal of knowledge of individual problems of different forms of discipleship. In addition, “We have seen the Pharisees plotting to kill Jesus since Matthew 12. Forbidden under their own law from carrying out a death sentence, they will need to find him guilty of breaking Roman law or get him to provoke the secular authorities.” *Cavins and Christmyer*

DAY ONE

Read Matthew 19:1-15

1. In verse 3 the Pharisees ask, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any cause whatever?” Jesus reiterates his position from Matthew 5:31-32, allowing for the caveat of “unless the marriage is unlawful.” From verses 7-9, why do you think the Pharisees’ question is a test for Jesus?

NOTE: According to the Jewish law of Jesus’ time, a husband could divorce his wife for any cause, but a Jewish wife could not divorce her husband. Divorce implied the right to remarry. Without a *certificate of divorce* allowing *her* to remarry, a woman would need a male relative willing to take *her* into his house or she would be forced to live on the street. Two different sects of Pharisees debated what constituted sufficient grounds for divorce (one more lenient than the other). The Pharisees take Deuteronomy 24:1 as a positive commandment, whereas Jesus understood it as merely a temporary concession because of the people’s hardness of heart. He contrasts this concession with God’s original will for men and women expressed in the creation story (Genesis 2:22-24). *Sacra Pagina*

2. Jesus avoids the trap the Pharisees are trying to set for him by bringing up those who shouldn’t marry, rather than arguing exceptions. From verses 10-12, record one or more of the reasons one should not marry.

3. While the Pharisees were focused on the topic of divorce, Jesus' answers are more focused on marriage and yet he notes that "not all can accept this word." "Our Lord speaks figuratively here, referring to those who, out of love for him, choose to offer their lives completely to him." (*Navarre Bible*) Share an example of a person whose gift of singular commitment to God has made them an example of Christ's love.

NOTE: Christ is the center of all Christian life. The bond with him takes precedence over all other bonds, familial or social. From the very beginning of the Church, there have been men and women who have renounced the great good of marriage to follow the Lamb wherever he goes, to be intent on the things of the Lord, to seek to please him and to go out to meet the Bridegroom who is coming. Christ himself has invited certain persons to follow him in this way of life, of which he remains the model. *CCC 1618*

4. Then children were brought to him so he could bless them. From verses 13-14:

What did the disciples do?

What was Jesus' response?

5. CONNECTION: The blessing of the children became a teaching moment for the disciples and for us: that we all will be welcomed by our Lord if we come to him with the simple faith and joy of a child. Share an experience you have witnessed between children and adults that reminds you of these verses.

Read and record Romans 8:14 and today pray for the children of the world: those who have families, those who are orphaned, those who are loved and those who have no one to love them. All are children of God.

NOTE: No matter how old you are, when a two-year-old hands you a toy phone, you answer it. Much as God answers each of our prayers in his loving way.

DAY TWO

Read Matthew 19:16-30

NOTE: As today's lesson begins, Jesus is approached by a rich young man who asks what "good" he must do to attain eternal life. Jesus responds by telling him that if he wishes to enter into life, he must keep the commandments (verses 16-17).

6. The young man asks Jesus which commandments he should follow. Jesus responds with some of the commandments that relate primarily to our relationships to others, which the man says he has observed. When he asks Jesus what he still lacks, what is Jesus' answer? (verse 21)

7. The young man went away sad and Jesus says, "it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (verse 24) Why might it be harder for the rich to enter the kingdom of God?

NOTE: In the Old Testament, riches were (one) sign of God's blessing (but there are also warnings about the potential corrosiveness of wealth). In ancient static economies, it was difficult for someone to become rich without taking resources from someone else. In today's world, economies are more fluid, yet "It is important to recognize that the source of our earthly accomplishments and good fortune comes from the Lord and thank him through the ways we use our money and material goods. For whatever gifts we have been given: family, friends, job, money, life ... are all thanks to the Lord." *Wealth and the Kingdom of Heaven, Ascension Press*

8. When the disciples heard Jesus tell the young man to give away all his possessions, and that it would be difficult for the rich to enter heaven, they were astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved? (verse 25) From verse 26, what was Jesus' answer? (Good memory verse)

NOTE: In verses 27-28 Jesus continues to reassure the disciples that those who have followed him, in the new age, when the Son of Man is seated on his throne of glory, will be on 12 thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (19:28)...it is more likely that what the Twelve are promised is that they will be joined with Jesus, in the time of final judgment... *NABRE*

9. In this lesson Jesus has stressed "action words" to achieve our goal of eternal life: "go, sell what you have, give to the poor, come, follow me," but above all, "follow me" and you will be rewarded with eternal life. Complete and meditate on verses 29-30:

And everyone who has given up

or father or mother or children or lands

will receive a hundred times more,

But many who are first will be last,

10. CONNECTION: Following Jesus means we must identify and set aside anything that is an impediment to our discipleship. We will be rewarded for the good we do, but we must live by God's commands: serving others, loving others, denying ourselves, and taking up our crosses to follow Jesus. Consider something you are willing to sacrifice or have left behind to be "last" in this world and "first" in God's.

Read Hebrews 12:1-2 and with the sign of the Cross, begin your prayer to strengthen "the great cloud of witnesses" within The Cornerstone, who are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

NOTE: The Christian begins his day, his prayers, and his activities with the Sign of the Cross: "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The baptized person dedicates the day to the glory of God and calls on the Savior's grace which lets him act in the Spirit as a child of the Father. The sign of the cross strengthens us in temptations and difficulties. *CCC 215*

DAY THREE

Read Matthew 20:1-16

NOTE: Chapter 20 begins with the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (in some translations the Generous Vineyard Owner). As a reminder, a parable is an apparently simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, to teach a great truth or to challenge the hearers to change their own behavior. *National Catholic Education Commission*

11. In this next parable, a vineyard owner offers a day's wage to laborers at the beginning of the day and then, as the day goes along, adds additional laborers and pays all of them the same amount. What was the complaint of the laborers who worked all day? (verse 12)

12. From verses 13-16, summarize the response of the vineyard owner and note how you might feel as the early worker or the late worker.

13. Who or what do you think each of the following represents?

The vineyard

The vineyard owner

The first group of laborers

The later groups

14. In these last two parables, Jesus answered the disciples' question, "Who then can be saved?" (Matthew 19:25) What do you see as the message for you in these parables?

15. CONNECTION: In the parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, Jesus is teaching the disciples that it is never too late to start to work for the Lord. Every laborer for the Lord will receive eternal life, which is "God's minimum wage for everyone who works in his vineyard." (*Martin*) Everything disciples do, whether small or great, contributes to the kingdom. How do you see this parable illustrating God's justice and mercy?

Read and record 1 Timothy 4:10 and write a prayer of gratefulness today for God's ever-welcoming love for all.

DAY FOUR

Read Matthew 20:17-23

NOTE: As Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the disciples aside and spoke to them "on the way." (verse 17) While this could literally mean along the path they were traveling, "the way" is also Jesus, the way to heaven and the path of sanctity. (see John 14:6)

16. The disciples do not yet completely understand that Jesus is the Messiah (Matthew 16:21 and 17:22-23) or the prophecy of his passion. What new information does Jesus give them in verses 18 and 19?

17. The mother of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, comes to Jesus with a question. She asks that her sons sit at Jesus' right and left in his kingdom. He replies, "You do not know what you ask."

What does he then ask James and John?

How do they answer?

18. Refer to the Commentary, page 102, to understand the metaphor “cup” used here and in Old Testament Scriptures. Record at least one of the following:

Psalm 16:5

Psalm 116:13

19. Jesus responds to James and John that indeed they too will suffer (“drink his cup”) but the seats of honor they request are not his to assign. What reason does he give in verse 23?

NOTE: Both James and John, it is said, suffered greatly for proclaiming the gospel. James was the first apostle to be martyred. Acts 12:1-2 is considered a report of the death of James. John lived several more decades than his brother and was banished to work the mines on the island of Patmos before dying of old age in Ephesus.

20. CONNECTION: It seems that the disciples still think Jesus will “establish some sort of heavenly realm on earth, in which positions of authority and preeminence will be filled by loyal followers.” (*Perrotta*) The misunderstanding and confusion surrounding the third passion prediction reminds us how hard it is to understand and accept suffering. What has helped you stay strong in your faith during times of trouble?

Read and record Joshua 1:9 and today write a prayer asking God to help you face any difficulties with the courage of your faith.

DAY FIVE

Read Matthew 20:24-34

NOTE: Inevitably, the other apostles hear of the episode. Understandably, they become annoyed. In their petulance, they demonstrate that they are equally prone to the temptation of ambition succumbed to by James and John. Jesus gives them a lecture about power and authority. *McBride*

21. The other ten apostles become indignant (verse 24). Jesus tells them then what they must do to be great. How does his teaching on being a servant resonate with you in your life?

22. Jesus continues by confirming that, “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Look up the definition of ransom and note how you think Jesus was applying it here. (see also Commentary, page 102)

23. As they left Jericho, a great crowd followed them and two blind men by the side of the road heard Jesus was passing by. From verses 30 and 31:

What did they call out to Jesus?

What would that title indicate?

24. Jesus asked them what they wanted him to do for them, and they asked that their eyes be opened. Moved with pity, he touched their eyes, and they received their sight. How do you see this as a model for “holy boldness” in approaching Jesus with our prayers.

25. CONNECTION: Through chapters 19-20 Jesus has spoken “difficult words about marriage and celibacy; about humbling oneself and assuming a posture of service to other people; about leaving behind security, comforts, and familiar people; about forgiving others and welcoming God’s generosity toward them. He has laid out a program for personal change that requires a healing of the way one looks at oneself and others.” (*Perrotta*) Is there one small change you could make that might make you an even better disciple?

Read and record Isaiah 42:16 and let these thoughts lead you into prayer.

FINAL THOUGHT for the WEEK

Think of one way in which you might improve your Christ-like view of the world.

The lyrics of the hymn “Amazing Grace” are a wonderful prayer with which to end this week’s lesson:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch; like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Read pages 96-104 in the *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* by Barbara E. Reid, O.P. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) © 2010, 1991, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, D.C. All Rights Reserved. Used by permission.

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