

November 4, 2018

“It’s Not What You Think”
Matthew 19:16-22

FCF: Flawed impressions of important things

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The way to know God is not what we think.
(magnet) We need to listen to Jesus and hear what He says.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

We all face a danger of flawed impressions of important things. You may have heard of the film, *First Man*, the story of Neil Armstrong and the Apollo 11 moon landing. The Apollo program went so well it was cut short by a few missions. It was a victim of its own success.

But things were not so clear early on. In the mid 60’s, some scientists thought the moon, without rain and wind to erode the surface, would have harsh, jagged mountains. Others thought that moon dust would be so loose that anything that landed would completely sink into it. It’s good that they got that figured out. Otherwise, the first landing could have gone very differently.

Let me say it again. We all face a danger of flawed impressions of important things. Not just in terms of pioneering voyages to outer space but in spiritual matters with eternal stakes.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 19:16-22](#)**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

I came across a very interesting news article a few days ago ([READ Evernote article](#)):

Mary McLaurine has an unusual condition called [developmental topographical disorientation](#), or DTD. This means she can’t form a mental map or image of her surroundings. Unlike most people, Mary has no internal compass. Here’s how she described a typical incident of dealing with her DTD:

I was staying at a friend’s home and decided to take their dog Otis for a walk. As I started back, I had no idea where I was. I was only blocks from where I had started my walk, but I was lost. Fear and adrenaline pulsed through my veins and I began to sweat profusely. My surroundings looked completely unfamiliar. It was as though I’d been dropped into the middle of a foreign land.

I hadn’t written down the address of the home where I was staying. Walking in any direction would be just a guess: Am I getting closer to or farther away? Would I have had to knock on someone’s door to use their phone to call the police?

How could I expect them to return me to a place if I had no address to provide?

Fortunately, Mary found someone to guide her back to her house. With DTD there is no brain injury—no car accident, no brain tumor, or stroke. People who have this condition, basically get lost every day in the most familiar surroundings.

Obviously, this is a real problem for her. The right way is often not what she thinks it is.

Where are we in our study of Matthew’s Gospel? The Galilean ministry has ended. Jesus and His disciples have begun the journey to Jerusalem. Here in ch. 19-20, we are learning of life in Jesus’ kingdom, His rule and reign on earth begun with His first coming to this earth.

All of which leads to questions about entry into His kingdom. Looping back to the story about Mary McLaurine, the way to know God is not what we think. The way to know God is not what we think. Which means we need to listen to Jesus and hear what He says. Specifically, as we see in our text, we need to hear what He says on three things. First, the absolute goodness of God. Second, the critical place of the law. And then, third, our desperate need of Jesus.

I. THE ABSOLUTE GOODNESS OF GOD

So first, the absolute goodness of God. This is fundamental ([READ Matthew 19:16-17a](#)).

A) The Question

This man comes to Jesus with a question. Some questions are good. Some are not.

1. What he was asking

He asks what thing or list of things he needed to do in order to be saved, to enter the kingdom.

2. What he was assuming

“What must I do?” Which assumes what? That he can do something. It’s a flawed assumption.

B) The Answer

How does Jesus answer this man, often referred to as “the rich young ruler?”

1. The expectation

His expectation is that Jesus’s answer will be directly tied to and flow from his question.

2. The redirection

But that’s not what happens. Given this man’s assumptions, Jesus takes an indirect route to get to his heart. Jesus redirects him. He moves the focus from “what is good” to “who is good.”

Why? This man needs to come to grips with the absolute goodness of God.

Application:

As do we. As does anyone if they would truly know God. We need to move away from the endless foolish comparisons we make with each other to the only comparison that matters - not with fellow fallen human beings but with the living God and His white hot blazing glory.

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II. THE CRITICAL PLACE OF THE LAW

But how would someone come to grips with the absolute goodness of God? By seeing the critical place of the law ([READ Matthew 19:17b-19](#)). Jesus is not saying we can be saved by works. He is meeting this man on his terms, pressing on him the purpose of God’s commands.

A) For Expression

Let me mention just two. The first being that God’s commands are an expression.

1. God’s character

That is, they are an expression of His character, a demonstration of His priorities and His heart.

2. Our response

And our obedience to those commands is to be an expression of belief, of our trust in Him. It’s not to earn anything. It’s out of a desire to please the One who already takes such pleasure in us.

B) For Conviction

So that’s the first purpose - as an expression. But the second is one of conviction.

1. Generally speaking

God’s commands are given not just as a map but as a mirror. He wants us to see the bentness of our hearts. Not just “Have you murdered?” but “Have you hated?” They are meant to expose us.

2. Specific case

In this man’s case, Jesus gives a list of commands which are all outwardly observable. Why? Again, He is meeting the man on his terms, pressing in out of love to expose him to himself.

This man needed to come to grips with the goodness of God and the place of the law.

Application:

As do we. As does anyone if they would truly know God. And what is the effect of such exposure - especially upon religious church-going people? “Something’s broken in me. I don’t fulfill His commands because I can’t. I don’t do good because I’m not good. Only God is.”

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III. OUR DESPERATE NEED OF JESUS

Where does that take us? To our desperate need of Jesus (**READ Matthew 19:20-22**).

A) To Redeem

Clearly, we need Jesus to redeem us, to pull us out and set us free from this bondage.

1. Passive obedience

We need His suffering in our place, taking in full the penalty we deserve upon Himself.

2. Active obedience

We need His living in our place, the perfect account of His righteousness transferred to ours.

This what we need. And, if we turn in trust and faith to Him, it’s exactly what we have.

B) To Reveal

But how do we come to see this? We need His work not only to redeem but to reveal.

1. We are delusional

For we are delusional. We see it with this man. Jesus had just said that the kingdom belongs to those who come to Him as children, with trust and humility. And this man thinks that somehow he could put God in the position of owing him salvation. Listen. There are many images of God in the Scriptures - shepherd, father, rock, king, and many others. But debtor is not one of them.

2. We are idolaters

We need His work of revealing for we are delusional. And we are idolaters. Not all of us need to sell and give away all we have to follow Jesus. But this man did. Jesus saw that’s what it would take. For this man’s heart was so divided he would have to divest it all so as to follow Jesus.

Like this man, every bit like this man, ours is a desperate need of Jesus.

Application:

Actually, there is a sense in which we all do need to sell what we have to follow Jesus. We all need to repent, to turn from whatever we worship and serve, from whatever we get our meaning, purpose, identity, and security apart from Jesus. We need to sell it all and turn to Him.

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CONCLUSION:

When you think about it, this is a surprising ending (**READ Matthew 19:21-22**). We’ll look more into that next week. But this is a surprising ending. Why did this man respond this way? Because of Jesus’ shocking teaching. It was too much for him. It was too much for him.

But should this surprise us? Should it surprise us that Jesus' teaching is so shocking? After all, as we read elsewhere, God's ways are not like our ways. Given the nature of this message - the necessity of a rescue coming from outside ourselves, a rescuer come down from heaven to earth - should the "otherworldliness" of this message surprise us? It really shouldn't.

What this message should bring is joy. For with Jesus, there are no more hoops, no more having to impress anyone or prove anything. He's done it all already. And so we're free. Again, the way to know God is not what we think. We need to listen to Jesus and hear what He says.

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