

What Jesus Is Looking For...

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[0 : 0 0] This morning, we are going back to Matthew's Gospel. If you've been part of Watermark for a while, you should be familiar with Matthew's Gospel. We've been preaching through it on and off for about four years now.

We do it for a couple of months, and then we go to other books of the Bible, and then we come back to Matthew's Gospel. We called our series, Following Jesus. Someone in the office said we should rename it, Still Following Jesus, because it's been four years of just following Jesus.

But that's okay. And so today, we're going to dive back in where we left off in August last year, which is Matthew chapter 19. And before Iris comes to read, if you've got a Bible or a bulletin, I want you just to look at the first verse with me.

It says this. It says, Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan, and large crowds followed him, and he healed them there.

What's happening here is Matthew 19 marks a bit of a transition in Matthew's Gospel, because Jesus leaves Galilee, the area in the north of Israel, and he's heading down towards Jerusalem.

[1 : 1 3] And why Jerusalem? Because that's where he's going to encounter the cross. For three years, Jesus has been doing his ministry, healing, and signs and wonders, and proclaiming the Gospel.

He's been proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed. But now, his greatest work, his most important work, his death on the cross, is his appointment has come.

And that's in Jerusalem. And so he's making his way towards Jerusalem. And so for the next three months or so, until Easter this year, we're going to follow Jesus' journey through Matthew towards Jerusalem and to the cross.

And when we get to Easter, we're going to end at the cross. And so for the next couple of months, we're going to follow Jesus through Matthew as he makes his way towards the cross. So with that introduction, can I call Iris to come and read the Scripture reading?

It's a long passage of reading, a long passage of Scripture, so buckle up. But let's listen to God's word to us this morning. Good morning, Watermark. The Scripture reading comes from Matthew chapters 19 and 20.

[2 : 1 2] Please follow along on your bulletin, on the screen, or on your own Bible. Starting in verse 1, we read, Now when Jesus had finished these sayings, he went away from Galilee and entered the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.

And large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?

He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 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 not men separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to 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 his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

[3 : 31] The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, Not everyone can receive the saying, but only those to whom it is given.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.

And he laid his hands on them and went away. And behold, a man came up to him saying, Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?

And he said to him, Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments. He said to him, Which ones?

[4 : 41] And Jesus said, You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

The young man said to him, All these I have kept. What do I still lack? Jesus said to him, If you would be perfect, go sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come, follow me. When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. And Jesus said to his disciples, Truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of God.

Again, I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God. When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, Who then can be saved?

But Jesus looked at them and said, With man, this is impossible. But with God, all things are possible. Then Peter sat in reply, See, we have left everything and followed you.

[6 : 03] What then will we have? Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones.

Judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, or father or mother, or children of lands for my namesake, will receive a hundredfold, and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard.

After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace.

And to them, he said, You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right, I will give you. So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same.

[7 : 13] And about the eleventh hour, he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, Why do you stand here idle all day? They said to him, Because no one has hired us.

He said to them, You go into the vineyard too. And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard sat to his foreman, Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last up to the first.

And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius.

And on receiving it, they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, The last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.

But he replied to one of them, Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go.

[8 : 17] I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?

So the last will be the first, and the first last. This is the word of God. Great. Thank you, Iris, for that long reading. Okay.

I didn't introduce myself. If you're new, my name is Kevin, and great to have you with us today. In this passage, there's lots of material, and there's lots that we could dive into and cover.

We could dive into the first kind of section where Jesus talks about marriage and divorce and remarriage, and look at Jesus' teaching there. We could dive into the second story of the rich young ruler, and talk about money, and Jesus' views of money.

We could spend a lot of time in the third parable, that Jesus tells this parable, and talk about his lavish generosity, and his grace, and his mercy. But what I want us to do is to step back, and to try and see what Matthew's doing in this passage together.

[9 : 25] Matthew and Mark both put, certainly the first two stories together, in a very specific order. And there's a reason for that. That's not an accident. It's not by chance.

I think one of the things we sometimes do when we read our Bibles, we say, okay, here's a story about, or teaching about marriage and divorce, and here's a story about money, and this guy goes away sad.

But the biblical writers were very careful and clever in the way that they structured their text. And Matthew and Mark both put them in a very specific order.

And there's a reason for that. The writers in the Bible, one of the ways that they communicate their point, that they want us to see, is not by just saying, this is the point, but by actually the way that they've structured it.

And so look at these first two kind of main, big sections in verses 3 to 12, and 16 to 28. Here we have two people, or in the first instance, a group of people, the Pharisees, and the second one, a rich young ruler, both of whom are very devout, very religious, very law-abiding, observant Jews, and they come to Jesus with questions.

[10 : 38] And in both instances, there's a first question, and then Jesus gives an answer, and then there's a second question, and Jesus responds. And then we don't really know what happens with those people, and Jesus turns to his disciples on the side, and has a kind of private conversation.

And so structurally, these two stories are almost identical. And there's a reason for that, because we're meant to read them together. And what we're meant to see here, is that Jesus is going to tell us, or Matthew's telling us, that if we come to Jesus, with something to commend ourselves, if we appeal to any sense of moral virtuousness within us, of what we've done, how we've obeyed the law, how we've been so dedicated, how we've been righteous, if we come with anything other than humility, that comes from the gospel, we will either become pride and hypocritical, because we'll think, oh, look how good I am, or we'll walk away sad and disillusioned, and we'll be disappointed, that Jesus doesn't deliver all that he promises.

Okay? So let me say that again, if we come to Jesus, with any kind of moral sense of, look at what I've done, or how good I am, or I'm the good guy, we'll either become pride and hypocritical, or we'll become sad and disillusioned with Jesus, and walk away empty-handed.

So let's dive in, and see how Matthew wants us to see it. Look at the first pericope with me. Pericope is kind of a section in the scripture. Verses 19, verses 3 to 9.

Some Pharisees come to Jesus, and they ask him this question. Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife, for any reason, any cause? Now, this is not the first time that Matthew has told us Jesus' teaching on marriage, and divorce, and remarriage.

[12 : 30] Back in chapter 5, Matthew gave us Jesus' views on this subject, and it's almost word-for-word identical, what he repeats here in chapter 19, which is that the marriage covenant is not something that you just jump in and out of, like a lease agreement, right?

You like it, so you're in. Oh, you find something else, but better, so you jump out of that one into another one. Jesus says that the marriage covenant is so sacred, that it's something you commit to for life, and that Jesus says that for a person to divorce their spouse in order to marry somebody else, even if they go through the correct legal process, and they go through the divorce, and they get legally married, and they stand in the church, and say their vows before God, he says that if your heart motivation is, let me leave this one just to jump into another one, that's the same thing as having an affair, right?

Just because you go through the right legal or religious process of divorce and remarried, before a priest, in a church, doesn't whitewash your heart motivation of leaving the one for another, okay?

So Matthew already established that in chapter 5, but here he says the same thing. He gives it to us again. Why does he tell us that again? Well, the reason is because he's trying to show us something in this whole big section, and what he's showing us is that it's not those that obey the rules or the law or technically compliant with the Mosaic law that encountered Jesus and his grace and are entered into God's kingdom.

Matthew wants to show us that it's those that are welcome to God's kingdom are not those that obey the rules or follow the rules. It's those who come to Jesus with humility that comes from the gospel, okay?

[14 : 22] So look what happens here. Some Pharisees come to Jesus, and who are the Pharisees? Well, the Pharisees have got a bad reputation because in the gospels they're often the villains, but the Pharisees really were a group of people that wanted to take God's word radically seriously.

They felt that most Jews were far too loose, far too casual with God's word, and they thought, actually, we want to honor God's word, we want to take what God says seriously, we want to be in God's good books, and that means taking his word seriously, and so they were radical and ruthless with obeying every minute detail of the law, okay?

So we sometimes think the Pharisees are these sleazy hypocrites, and yeah, there were some like that, no doubt, but by and large, the Pharisees were people that just wanted to take God's word seriously because they wanted to be on the right side of God's word.

So they come to Jesus and they ask him this question, is it lawful? Which means, is it right in God's eyes? Is it okay? Are we okay with God for a man to divorce his wife for any cause?

And the reason, the question behind that question, is in the first century, there were two schools of thought about the law. There was a more liberal and a more conservative view, a school of thought.

[15 : 38] There was a traditionalist and the progressives. And these two groups, kind of all in for this way, there was debates about what constituted a legitimate divorce, and it all hinged on an interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 verse 1, which is the place in the Old Testament that Matthew speaks about divorce and remarriage.

And so there are these debates, there are these schools, there are these arguments going on, and the Pharisees come to Jesus and say, who's right? Who is God going to accept? The conservatives or the liberals?

The traditionalists or the progressives? Which group of people whose interpretation and obedience to the law is acceptable or good in God's eyes?

Who's justified based on their understanding? But how does Jesus answer the Pharisees? Look at what he does in verse 4 and 6. Jesus doesn't even talk about Moses or the law.

He goes straight back to God, and essentially Jesus says, if you want to know what God wants, don't listen to Moses. You've got to find out who God is and what God says.

[16 : 51] So look what he says in verse 4 and 6. Jesus answered them, Have you not read that he, that's God, who created them from the beginning, made them male and female? You see, and he, God said, therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

So they're no longer two, but one. What God has joined together, let not man separate. Jesus doesn't even bother answering about what Moses said. He goes right back to Genesis 1 and 2, and he says, let's talk about what God wants here.

That's the question. And Jesus says a couple of things here on the side. It's not Matthew's main point, but it's worth noticing. He defines marriage as God's design, not a human invention or social construct.

He defines marriage as being a monogamous relationship between one man and one wife, one woman for life. He defines marriage as the most important of all human relationships.

And this is challenging because he says it's even more important, significant, than the relationship between a parent and their child. So Jesus actually says that the marriage covenant is thicker than blood, which I know that's very challenging in a honor-shame culture, in a culture that takes family value so importantly.

[18 : 10] But look at the main thing Jesus says here. He says, he talks about the oneness and the unity of marriage. Five times he says it. He says, hold fast. Two become one.

No longer two, but one. What God has joined together. Let not man separate. Five times he talks about unity, unity, unity, oneness, oneness, oneness. And so on the side note, let me just say for those of us that are married or looking to get married or think about getting married one day, one of the things God wants us to see, the most important thing about marriage is the unity and the oneness of the two coming together.

And when the Bible says the two become one, he's not just talking about sex. Physical oneness is meant to be a picture and a celebration of a oneness and a unity that permeates the entire relationship.

So it's oneness in beliefs and worship. Husband and wife worshiping Jesus together. It's oneness in conviction and values. Right? It's oneness in finances and assets.

I don't think you can say, okay, we won in this area, we won in this area, we won here, won here, oh, but this area, we're going to be two. There's a oneness. There's a oneness and a direction. God, what are you calling our family to?

[19 : 28] There's a oneness and a unity in pursuing Jesus and abiding in Christ. And so sharing a bed or sharing a house doesn't make you one. Marriage is about a oneness and a unity.

Jesus says that oneness, unity in marriage is at the heart of what makes a marriage. But that's a side note. Look at what the Pharisees say. What are they interested in? They're not interested in what God has to say.

Their question is, but what did Moses say? Right? Because all they're interested in is what does the law say? Are we on the right side of the law or the wrong side of the law? Is God going to accept us or is God not going to accept us?

And what about those liberals out there? Is God going to accept them or not based on their obedience to the law? What do they say? Verse 7, the Pharisees say, yes, but then why did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and send her away?

So Jesus just said, this is what God has said. And their response, let's talk about Moses. So all they're interested in is what is the law? And Jesus shows them that their real problem is not whether they're obeying the rules of the law or not.

[20 : 37] It's not even whether they're technically compliant or not. The real problem is where is their heart? Where is their heart? What's ruling their heart at the moment?

Do they see themselves in need of God's grace and mercy? Or do they come full of pride and self-sufficiency? We are Pharisees. We are right. Not like those guys down there.

In other words, to try and live by the law, by the rules, won't do you any good if your heart is full of self-sufficiency and pride. And so Jesus says then, verse eight, look at what he says.

He says, it's because of your hardness of hearts that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But from the beginning, this was not God's intention. And so I say to you again, whoever divorces a wife, except for the case of sexual morality or unfaithfulness, and then jumps into another relationship, that's the same as committing adultery.

Douglas O'Donnell, one of my favorite commentators, says, take away the disease of hard-heartedness. You can take away all divorce lawyers, divorce laws, divorce settlements, divorce costs.

[21 : 45] And so an example of this, I once knew a man when I was growing up, a friend of my dad's. He was very involved in the church. He was an elder in the church. He used to preach from time to time. But he fell in love with his wife.

Sorry, he didn't fall in love with his wife. That was the problem. He fell in love with his secretary. And so he divorced his wife in order to marry his secretary. And my dad challenged him on this one day and said, how can this be?

How can you do this? And his response was, he said, I guarantee you, I never slept with my secretary until the divorce had legally gone through the process.

In other words, you see what he's saying? He's saying, I was not unfaithful to my wife because I never slept with my secretary while I was still a married man. And yet to say that misses the entire point, right?

But friends, can you see the hypocrisy in that? But friends, you know that we can do that in our own way? All the time. I remember times in my life, you'll be glad to know, not recently, when I was a younger man, when I would be blatantly dishonest with somebody.

[22 : 59] You know, I would lie to somebody, but I could convince myself that in some parallel universe, there was some scheme in which what I was saying wasn't technically all that untrue.

Right? And so I would say something knowing that actually, I'm actually not being honest with this person, but if I, you know, hold my fingers or cross my legs or something, actually, technically what I'm saying is not all that false.

And friends, we all do this. We can find ways of justifying ourselves technically and yet our hearts are far from God. And so maybe someone says, oh, you know, I know I shouldn't sleep with my girlfriend before we married.

We haven't actually had sex together, but we've done everything else. You might as well have. And Jesus says here that it's not the technicalities that's the issue, it's where our hearts are.

You see, friends, if we think following Jesus is about following the rules, we can tick every box. You can go to church on Sunday, be part of a CG, give 10% of your salary, tie it to the church, do all that's expected of you and those are good things.

[24 : 04] And yet Jesus says, that doesn't mean that we love God and love others. You can still be self-righteous and self-justifying because we've done all the right things technically, but we have our hearts.

Jesus says that if we want to relate to God on the basis of the law, what is or isn't allowed, what's acceptable or not acceptable, it shows there's something wrong with our hearts. And so the only way to know God and to encounter His grace and to encounter the living Jesus is to come with a humility that says, God, I don't have what it takes, but I need your grace.

Jesus come, I need you. Because friends, observing the religious rules doesn't save people and being technically right with the law doesn't save people. Jesus saves people and Jesus welcomes those who come in need of Him.

Okay, does that make sense? So let's look at the second instance here and we'll see the same thing. Look at verse 16 to 22. Here we have a man who Matthew tells us is young and he's wealthy.

Luke tells us he was a ruler of some sorts. That's quite a potent combination to be young and wealthy and a man of authority. And he comes to Jesus with a question.

[25 : 16] Verse 16, teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? Okay, so essentially he's asking the same question as the Pharisees. It's maybe well-intentioned, but it's flawed.

He's saying, what must I do to be right with God? To get in God's good books? Or another way of saying this is, what must I do to be considered a good person?

I think that's why Jesus asks and says, why do you ask about what's good? There's only one that's good, that's God. But here he says, what must I do to be considered a good person? To get in God's good books?

And just like the previous conversation, Jesus is going to help him see what's really going on in his heart. Jesus is going to help him see the issue is not about what good deeds you have or haven't done, what rules you have or haven't obeyed.

The issue is what's ruling your heart. And so like he does with the Pharisees, he holds up a mirror to this man to help him see. And so he asks him a bunch of questions.

[26 : 20] He asks him about the commandments. He says, oh, you know, what commandments have you obeyed? And the guy asks, which ones? And Jesus selects a few. And what's interesting here is that Jesus omits five out of the ten commandments.

He omits the first four about loving God, not having an idol, honoring the Sabbath and not using God's name, misusing God's name. And he also omits the last commandment, which is essentially about not being greedy.

And that's a really interesting one because you'd think that if there's one commandment, Jesus would really nail, you know, double down on to this guy who's obviously loves his money, it would be the last commandment about greed.

But Jesus doesn't do that at first. And the reason is because I think he's going to find another way of really showing this guy what's in his heart, what he's really trusting in.

And Jesus finds a way of asking the guy and saying, yes, you've obeyed that law, you've obeyed that law, you've obeyed that law, but what about the last one? What's really going on in your heart? And so outwardly, this guy is faithful, he's observant, he's a dutiful Jew, he checks off all the requirements, okay, he hasn't stolen anything, he hasn't lied to anyone, he hasn't slept around, he goes to the temple, he offers sacrifices, look at what he says, he says, I've done all these things since my youth.

[27 : 45] I'm a card carrying, observant, faithful Jew, there's nothing that nobody can point at me that I've done wrong. If you ask somebody in the temple, hey, you know, here's this young guy, what's he like?

Oh, he's a good, faithful man, does all the right things, nothing wrong with him. And yet, what he fails to see, and what Jesus does see, is what's really ruling his heart, is a love for money.

And so what does that mean? It means he thinks he ticks all the boxes, but actually he doesn't. Because he hasn't even come close to ticking the first box, which is having no other gods before him, and loving God supremely.

Do you see that? He has a guy who thinks that I follow all the rules, I've done everything that everybody's asked of me, I'm a good man, I've done these good deeds, I give money to the poor, I do everything that's asked of me.

And yet Jesus shows him, if that's your confidence, you've got to leave empty handed, because that's not enough. And so Jesus, very lovingly, applies the same painful remedy by showing him what's ruling his heart.

[29 : 00] And he says, if you want to be perfect, why don't you just go sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and then follow me, I'm sure there'll be no problem for you, right? And what happens? The man goes away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

You see, when Jesus said that, when Jesus said to him, hey, what about following the commandments, you know what the man should have said? If he had the humility that Jesus was looking for, he should have said, you know, Jesus, I've really tried to honor God, I've tried to serve him, but actually, if I'm honest, I'm not very good at that, and I've tried to obey the commands, but God, actually, I've got to admit, Jesus, I love money, and I actually trust in these things, but I want to follow God, Jesus, I need your help, won't you help me?

But he doesn't say that. He says, yeah, I've done all those things, I'm right, I'm good, and Jesus says, he tells them what to do to go and sell his possessions, and the man left sorrowful, for he loved his wealth.

Here we have two groups of people, the Pharisees and this rich young ruler, two group of people that outwardly keep all the rules, they're a picture perfect example of a perfect Jew, nobody can accuse them of anything, the Pharisees were so fastidious, there was not a single thing that anybody could accuse them of, of breaking the rules, and here's this young man that genuinely just want to follow God, he's obeyed all the rules, and yet Jesus shows us that both of these people that are a picture perfect example of what a beautiful, faithful Jew looks like, doesn't have what it takes, doesn't have what it takes, it's not enough, and friends, what these stories show us is that if you come to Jesus on the basis of your track record, your faithfulness, if you come to Jesus on the basis of your obedience to the moral law, or religious law, or obedience to the scriptures, you and I are in deep trouble, because even your so-called perfect track record is not perfect, here the Pharisees see themselves as good guys, here this rich young ruler sees himself as a good guy, and they both leave empty handed, and so look at verse 23,

Jesus says to his disciples, truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven, and I don't think Jesus is only talking about material riches, he's talking about those that are rich in self-sufficiency, those who are rich in self-assurance, he says, how difficult it is, again I tell you, it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, in other words, it's impossible, for someone who's rich to enter God's kingdom, when the disciples heard this, they were astonished, they said, well who can be saved, Jesus looked at them and said, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible, friends, good deeds don't save people, religious observance doesn't save people, obeying all the technicality of the rule don't save people, Jesus saves people, God saves people, who can be saved, with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible, now, here's the question, okay, so if Matthew's trying to tell us, it's not those that have got it all together, that are welcomed by Jesus, who is welcomed by Jesus,

[32 : 17] I mean, who can be saved, and how do we make sure, that we are those that are welcomed by Christ, and not those that are left empty handed, so who gets to enter God's kingdom, and encounter the living God, well I don't know if you noticed, the little section, of three verses, in between the two stories, did you notice that, Matthew and Mark, very specifically, put all three of these things together, in that order, and there's a reason for it, because Matthew and Mark as well, are trying to show us, it's not the Pharisees, it's not the rich young ruler, there's another category of people, that are welcomed by Jesus, and this little thing, these three verses, are so small and insignificant, it's so easy, just to read right over it, and skip over that part, and get to the part, about the rich young ruler, but Matthew wants us to stop, and to think about it, and so who is welcomed by Jesus, it's the children, it's the children right, and what's Matthew's point, his point is that, it's not those that have got it all together, that are welcomed by Jesus, it's certainly not those, that think of themselves, as good people, because they've done what, you know, the religious order expects, it's those who come to Jesus, with humility, and the simplicity, and honesty of children, look at what he says here,

Jesus says, let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such as these, belongs the kingdom of heaven, what is it about children, that Jesus honors, well Jesus is not saying, that he likes children, more than adults, it's not children per se, it's those that are like children, and what is it that are, what is childlike that Jesus affirms, I think there's a couple of things, I think it's one that, children generously are brutally honest, right, they haven't grown up enough, to play the game, of the social etiquette, so they don't know how to, drop hints, and manipulate, and say the right things, they're just brutally honest, right, think of young children, they come to their mom, and their dad, and they say, mama help, or dad come, right, they're just, they're just very real, and honest, but the other thing is, young children often, not always, often, they know their limitations, they know that, they need help, right, they're reaching for something, and they can't get it, so they come and grab you by the finger, and they drag you, because they need your help, sometimes children think, that they know everything, that's going on, they don't need your help, and really they do, but there's something about children, that they're just brutally honest, and they know that they're in need of adult help, anyone heard a 18 month, come to their mom and dad, said, mom and dad,

I've done what you've asked of me, right, I've cleaned my nappy, I've gone to the toilet, I've brushed my teeth, now will you please give me my, whatever it is, porridge, or, it's been a long time, since I had 18 month old kids, food or something, right, no, no, kids are, they're demanding, but they're honest, they know they need help, just in the chapter before, in chapter 18, Jesus says, truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you'll never enter God's kingdom, whoever humbles himself, that's the issue, humbles himself, like this child, is the greatest in God's kingdom, and so Jesus' point here, is it's those that know their limitations, and are honest enough, not to come and play the religious game, that come to him and say, Jesus I need you, those are those that are welcomed by him, to encounter his grace, to come to know him, to be brought into the kingdom, friends you need to collapse, into the arms of Jesus, because religion won't save you, and the law won't save you, and being a picture perfect example, of a beautiful person won't save you,

Jesus saves you, and who does Jesus save, those who come to him, with the humility, to acknowledge the need of him, but here's the last question, where do we find that humility, where do we find that humility, the honesty to see ourselves, as we really are, to bring the real self, to the real Jesus, you see the Pharisees, okay the Pharisees, are sometimes wrapped up in themselves, I mean it says here, that they came to test Jesus, there's a bit of cynicism in their heart, but the rich young ruler, he seems fairly genuine, right, I mean he seems like a genuine seeker, he really wants to know, and yet he's in some way, pushed away by Jesus, and what about the disciples, even the disciples, kind of trust themselves, because look at what Peter says, in verse 28, after Jesus says how hard it is, he says, Jesus says it's impossible with man, but with God all things are possible, well Peter says in reply, see Jesus, we have left everything to follow you, what reward will we have, so even the disciples, kind of feel like, we've been so faithful, surely that puts us in God's good books, so where do we, where do we find the humility, and the honesty, to come to Jesus, and say Jesus,

I need your grace, well look at the parable, that Jesus tells in chapter 20, and we won't go into it, in much detail, it's a fascinating parable, it's challenging, but his point is clear, his point is found in verse 15, Jesus says, or in the parable he says, am I not allowed to do, what I choose is what belongs to me, or do you begrudge my generosity, and that's the key isn't it, Jesus point is that, those who think they deserve, God's kindness and generosity, those who think they can earn it, find themselves corrected, but those who come to him empty handed, wholly relying on his lavish generosity, and his kindness, are those that receive grace and mercy, friends the parable is meant to, upend any sense of entitlement, or earning or meritocracy, or sense that we've deserved, God's grace and kindness, Jesus says that, everything we have, apart from the fires of hell, we'll lean for this way, everything, the thing that we deserve, is the fires of hell, and everything else we get apart from that, is his mercy and his grace, and his lavish generosity, and so, what this tells us is two things, it's a challenge and encouragement, it's a challenge to those of us, who like the Pharisees, or like the rich young ruler, think that either our pedigree, or our class, or our family background, or our religious devotion, or all the things we've done, earn us God's grace and mercy, and it's a challenge, and Jesus says, if you come to Jesus, because you've ticked all the boxes, you're going to be very, you're either going to be hypocritical and proud, or you're going to be sad and disillusioned, but either way, you're going to go home empty handed, but it's a great encouragement, because some of us maybe, here this morning, you feel like,

[39 : 14] God I am so unworthy, actually my life is a mess, actually God I don't deserve anything, and Jesus says, you're the exact kind of person I came for, and if you'll come to him and realize, God everything you give me is your generosity, God I need you, and I'm banking on you, and if you'll come with the humility of children, but also the confidence of the gospel, Jesus says, I'll pour out my grace on you, I'll wash you with my grace, and so friends, let's come to Jesus, let's come not just today, but every day this week, let's come not just now, but always for the rest of our lives, let's come in repentance, acknowledging our guilt and our sin and our shame, but let's come in bold confidence and faith, knowing that Jesus lavishly and generously, wishes to pour out his grace on people like us, let's come without pride, let's come without self-sufficiency, come without any sense of earning or deserving his grace, let's come on our knees, but also come boldly, with humble confidence, because Jesus loves to welcome sinners like us, and give us his grace, let's pray together,

Father, I thank you so much for Matthew's brilliance, and the way he structured his text, and the way he's shown these juxtapositions, the Pharisees and the rich young ruler, with the simple children, Jesus, we hear your message, we hear what you're saying to us this morning, it's not those of us that think we've got it all together, that you welcome, it's those who acknowledge our need for you, Jesus, we say we need you, Lord, we need you, every hour, we need you, God, Lord, I pray, won't you help us to, like the rich young man, to see what's going on in our heart, to see what rules our hearts, help us to see, God, our pride and our self-sufficiency, and God, help us to forsake, any sense of earning your grace, but help us, like the children, God, to come to you, in humility, in a boldness, and a confidence, that God, your lavish generosity, is all we need,

God, I pray for us, maybe those of us, that aren't Christians this morning, help us to see, God, that you're not asking us, to do a whole bunch of good deeds, to be welcomed in your kingdom, you're helping, you're asking us, just to get in our needs, and acknowledge our need for you, God, I pray for those of us, that have been Christians, for a long time, and maybe we find it so easy, to, we say the right things, we do the right things, we play the game, we do what's expected of us, but actually our hearts, have been captured, by something else, Christ, won't you come, and capture our hearts, this morning, won't you come, and help us, to love you supremely, above all else, and Jesus, as we go, into the city, of Hong Kong, this week, I pray God, may we go, in a sense on our knees, in that humble confidence, that all we need is you, God, I pray these things, in your great, and gracious name, Amen.