

# Matthew: His Life And His Gospel

## – Part 12

**Matthew 17:14-21** [New King James] *“And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.’ Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.’ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’”*

We cannot but be moved by the faith of the boy’s father. Even though the disciples had been given power to cast out demons, [Matthew 10:1] here was a case in which they had publically failed.

**Yet in spite of the failure of the disciples, the father never doubted the power of Jesus Christ Himself.**

There is something very poignant about this, which is universal and modern.

There are many who feel that the leaders of the Christian Church, the disciples of Jesus Christ in our day and generation, have failed and are powerless to deal with the ills of the human situation. Yet in the back of our minds there is a feeling *“if we could only get beyond Jesus Christ’s human followers,”* if we could only get behind the façade of ecclesiasticism and the failure of the Church, if we could only get at Jesus Christ Himself, we would receive all the things we need.

**Jesus Christ was not condemning the disciples for sub-standard faith, He was trying to show them just how important faith in Him would be in their future ministry.**

If you are facing a problem that seems big and immovable like a mountain, turn your eyes from the *“mountain”* and look at Jesus Christ for more faith.

Only then will your work for Jesus Christ become more useful and vibrant.

**Real religion is to rise from our knees before the Eternal God to meet the needs of other human beings, [James 1:27].**

**Real religion is to meet with God in a secret place, [Matthew 6:6] to receive strength from God in order to give it to others.**

**Matthew 17:22-23** [New King James] *“Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, ‘The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up.’ And they were exceedingly sorrowful.”*

**The disciples did not understand why Jesus Christ kept talking about His death, they did not know as yet that Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection would make His Kingdom, the Kingdom of God, possible through the forgiveness of all human sin.**

**Matthew 17:24-27** [New King James] *“When they had come to Capernaum, those who received the temple tax came to Peter and said, ‘Does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ And when he had come into the house, Jesus anticipated him, saying, ‘What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth take customs or taxes, from their sons or from strangers?’ Peter said*

to Him, 'From strangers.' Jesus said to him, 'Then the sons are free. Nevertheless, lest we offend them, go to the sea, cast in a hook, and take the fish that comes up first. And when you have opened its mouth, you will find a piece of money; take that and give it to them for Me and you.'

All Jewish males had to pay a temple tax to support the temple's upkeep, [Exodus 30:11-16]. Only Matthew records this incident, perhaps because he had been a tax collector.

As usual, Peter answered the question without really knowing the answer, putting Jesus Christ and the disciples in an awkward position. Jesus Christ used the situation, however, to emphasise His Kingly role.

Just as kings pay no taxes and collect none from their family, Jesus Christ, the King, owed no taxes. But Jesus Christ supplied the tax payment for both Himself and Peter rather than offend those who did **not** understand His Kingship.

**Matthew 18:1-6** [New King James] *"At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'*"

**This was a natural question for the disciples to ask Jesus Christ who was constantly speaking about the Kingdom of God. Yet the answer Jesus Christ gave was not what they expected.**

Mark's account of this incident and question was precipitated by a discussion the disciples had, [Mark 9:33-34].

**Jesus Christ used a child to help His self-centred disciples get the point.**

**A child is humble and eager to learn, with no status or influence. Children are also trusting by nature, and through their trust in their parents can learn to trust their Heavenly Father.** Jesus Christ warned that anyone who turned little children, both physical and spiritual, away from faith in the Eternal God, by not being trustworthy as a parent or that of a spiritual leader, would receive severe punishment.

**Matthew 18:7-9** [New King James] *"Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire."*

It is again and again New Testament teaching that uselessness invites disaster. The person who is not serving other human beings in some way, or worse still, being an evil influence on others, is in danger of punishment from the Eternal God if they do not cut out of their lives those things which make them the handicap they are to others.

**Matthew 18:10-11** [New King James] *"Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."*

**Our concern for children, both physical and those who are young in Christian faith, must match that of God the Father for all human beings.**

Certain angels are assigned to watch over children and they have direct access to God the Father, [Psalms 91:11; Acts 12:15 – spiritual children also have personal angels.]

**These words ring out sharply in cultures where children are taken lightly, ignored or aborted.**

**If their angels have constant access to their Heavenly Father, the least we can do is to allow children to approach us easily in spite of our far too busy schedules.**

**Matthew 18:12-14** [New King James] *“What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to seek the one that is straying? And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”*

The emphasis here is on the worth of each individual, while in the same parable in Luke it is the joy over the one repentant [Luke 15:1-7] sinner, [2 Peter 3:9].

**Matthew 18:15-17** [New King James] *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”*

**“Your brother”** limits this to those within the community that recognises God as their Father.

**Too often when someone wrongs us, we do the very opposite of what Jesus Christ is saying; we turn away in hatred or resentment, seek revenge or engage in gossip.**

By contrast, we should seek private reasoning with the offender as the first step in love, as difficult as that may be.

*“Gained your brother”* is probably in the sense of keeping them as a member of the Christian community, [verse 17].

The refusal to listen to a private word means that it has become a corporate affair, so two or three witnesses must be called, presumably to try to the facts and conciliate.

If this fails they are to give evidence of the offence to the community publically, limited to the local church of believers.

Failure to listen to the church means excommunication, [1 Corinthians 5:1-6; 1 Timothy 1:18-20].

The heathen and tax collectors are a type of outcasts of God’s people, though they were in fact responding to the gospel message, [Matthew 21:31, 43].

**Matthew 18:18-20** [Amplified Bible] *“Truly, I tell you, whatever you forbid and declare to be improper and unlawful on earth must be what is already forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit and declare proper and lawful on earth that already be permitted in heaven. Again I tell you, if two of you on earth agree about anything and everything, whatever they shall ask, it will come to pass and be done for them by My Father in heaven. For wherever two or three are gathered, drawn together as My followers in My name, there I AM in the midst of them, [Exodus 3:14].”*

The conditions for what is done on earth being ratified in heaven are real agreement in prayer, gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ and His presence in the midst. **Only when anything is done strictly according to the will of Jesus Christ as expressed in His words and His life as recorded in the Christian Bible will it have the authority of Jesus Christ who is in heaven at the right hand of God the Father.**

**Matthew 18:21-22** [New King James] *“Then Peter came to Him and said, ‘Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.’”*

**We owe a great deal to the fact that Peter had a quick tongue. Peter's impetuosity drew from Jesus Christ teaching which is immortal.**

On this occasion Peter thought he was being very generous and that he was doing well, he expected to be warmly commended, but Jesus Christ's answer in fact tells us there should be **no limit** to our forgiveness of others.

**The parable that follows teaches us a lesson that runs through the whole of the New Testament, a person must forgive in order to be forgiven.**

**Matthew 18:23-35** [New King James] *"Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."*

"Ten thousand talents" is an unrealistic amount of millions of pounds in today's currency, while "a hundred denarii" was only a few pounds. We all have a debt, beyond price, to Jesus Christ.

**An unforgiving person cannot be in a position of forgiveness before God, [2 Corinthians 5:10-12].**

**Matthew 19:1-9** [New King James] *"Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished these sayings, that He departed from Galilee and came to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them there. The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.' They said to Him, 'Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?' He said to them, 'Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted 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; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.'"*

Jesus Christ is dealing with what was in His day as in our generation a vexed and burning problem.

**In God's eyes the union of marriage between a man and a woman is a very sacred relationship.**

To see how and why God places such importance on marriage we have to look at the "spiritual" purpose of a physical marriage.

**Revelation 19:6-9** [New King James] *"And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, 'Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, 'Write:*

*“Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.”*

**This is the ultimate goal of a physical marriage for both physical husband and his wife to prepare to be part of the wife of Jesus Christ when He returns to this earth as King of kings and Lord of lords, [verse 16].**

Jesus Christ’s wife, the true Christian Church, has *“made herself ready”* [verse 7]. All the guidelines for a good physical marriage are given and need to be applied to our marriage now, add to these *“righteous acts of the saints,”* [verse 8].

**John 7:38-39** [New King James] *“He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.”*

**The flow of “living water” refers to acts of love for other human beings, [Romans 5:5].**

**This is the “wedding garment” referred to in Matthew 22:11-12.**

Divorce is tolerated by God, [Mark 10:2-12] but is an *“abomination before God,”* [Deuteronomy 24:1-4]. God hates divorce, [Malachi 2:16].

**Matthew 19:10-12** [New King James] *“His disciples said to Him, ‘If such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry.’ But He said to them, ‘All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother’s womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it.’”*

**A good reason for remaining single is elaborated on by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter seven.**

Paul was unmarried because all the travelling he had to do in his work as apostle to the Gentiles would have been unfair for a wife and any children he had.

**Matthew 19:13-15** [New King James] *“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.”*

The disciples must have forgotten what Jesus Christ had already said about children, [Matthew 18:4-6]. **Jesus Christ wanted the children to come to Him because they have the attitude needed to approach God the Father a childlike trust in God. The receptiveness of little children was a great contrast to the stubbornness of the religious leaders who let their education and sophistication stand in the way of the simple faith needed to believe in Jesus Christ.**

**Romans 8:14-15** [New King James] *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”*

**“Abba” is the word framed by the lips of infants and expresses unreasoning trust. “Father” expresses an intelligent apprehension of the relationship. The two together express the love and intelligent confidence of the child.**

**Matthew 19:16-22** [New King James] *“Now behold, one came and said to Him, ‘Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?’ So He said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.’ He said to Him, ‘Which ones?’ Jesus said, “You shall not murder,” “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “Honour your father and your mother,” and, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” The young man said to Him, ‘All*

*these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”*

To get the complete picture of this man we have to glean certain things.

Only Matthew tells us that he was “young,” [verse 20].

Only Luke tells us that he was a “ruler,” [Luke 18:18].

**This man came to Jesus Christ seeking for what he called “eternal life,” but the way he phrased the question betrays him. He asks “what must I do?” He was thinking the same way as the Pharisees in terms of keeping rules, laws and regulations. He knew nothing of the religion of grace.**

Jesus Christ answered him in His own terms, the keeping of commandments.

This man responds by asking “which ones?” Jesus Christ responds with the Ten Commandments that refer to the duty of one human to another **not** those that refer to our duty to God.

The young man replied that he had kept all the commandments that Jesus Christ mentioned from his youth, yet felt that there had to be more that he had to do.

So Jesus Christ told him to sell all he had and give it to the poor, then follow Him as a disciple.

The young man claimed to have kept the law. In the legal sense, that might be true, but in the spiritual sense it was **not** true because his whole attitude towards his fellow human beings was wrong. That is why the analysis of his attitude was selfish. That is why Jesus confronted him with the challenge to sell all and give it to the poor. **This man was so shackled to his possessions for his own comfort and convenience.**

The word translated “eternal” is “alōnios” which is the way that God likes. It is characteristic of God, “that God so loved that He gave,” [John 3:16].

Eternal life is based on an attitude of loving and sacrificial generosity to our fellow human beings.

**This young man’s tragedy was that he loved things more than he loved people,** any person who has this attitude must of necessity turn their back on Jesus Christ as they walk away.

**Matthew 19:23-26** [New King James] “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, ‘With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

The interpretation of these verses that I prefer is that, at dusk the main gates of a city were closed and barred, the only way into the city was through a small gate often called “the needle’s eye” through which a camel could, with great difficulty, pass through and then only if it shed all the load it was carrying.

**Matthew 19:27-30** [New King James] “Then Peter answered and said to Him, ‘See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?’ So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. **But many who are first will be last, and the last first.**’”

**To put Peter's question bluntly, he was asking "what do we get out of following You?"**

**Jesus Christ could have rebuked Peter for the kind of spirit in which the question was asked, for it showed Peter had no idea what following Him meant.**

**Instead, Jesus Christ used Peter's question to give us great laws of Christian life.**

**1) It is always true that every person who is part of Jesus Christ's campaign will share in His victory. All who share Jesus Christ's warfare against evil will share in His ultimate triumph.**

**2) It is always true that when we become a Christian we receive far more than we ever have to give up.**

**What we receive is not new material possessions, but a new fellowship, both human and divine.**

If becoming a Christian meant we had to give up friends, it ought also to mean that we enter a wider circle of friendship than we ever knew before.

**3) When we become a Christian we enter into a divine fellowship with an active Holy Spirit to lead us in our new way of life and develop in us the "fruits" of the Holy Spirit that are the very character of the Eternal Holy God.**

**4) Finally, there will be surprises in the final assessment, for God's standards of judgement are not human standards of judgement that we see in society all around us.**

The reason is that the Eternal God sees into the heart and mind of every human being and knows very well the motives behind every action we make, [Psalms 139:1-16].

**It may be that those who are humble in today's society will be great in the Kingdom of God, and those who were great now in this life will be humbled in the World Tomorrow, after Jesus Christ's Second Coming.**