



Matthew 19

A change of scenery can be a good thing. It can bring a fresh perspective or a break from a stale routine. It can even re-inspire or redirect our lives.

Icebreaker:

1. Have you ever had a change of scenery that brought about a positive change? If so, talk about what happened.

Chapter 19 begins with a change of scenery, but it's not motivated by a need for something new. Jesus is on the move because He's on His way to Jerusalem to fulfill God's ancient plan (look back at 16:21). It's a journey where every step was one step closer to suffering and death.

Verses 1-12

We're not in Galilee anymore. Ever since 12:14, Jesus's enemies have been on a quest to kill Him. As Jesus moves closer to Jerusalem, the conflict with His enemies is intensifying.

The question posed by the Pharisees is, arguably, as much of a hot-button topic today as it was then. It's essential to realize the setting. This is a trap Jesus's opponents are setting. They want Jesus to incriminate Himself with His answer.

The question itself likely stems from a disagreement between two different sub-groups within the ranks of the Pharisees over how to interpret Deuteronomy 24:1. One group said that sexual immorality was the only cause for divorce; the other claimed that any offense—even cooking a bad meal—was basis for divorce. Their question misses the radical nature of Jesus's Kingdom.

2. What are some of the reasons people get divorced today? As you answer this, be sensitive to how emotionally charged this issue can be.

Jesus responds by making a distinction between what God has *permitted* and what God *desires*. God's desire for marriage goes back to the earliest pages of Genesis, before the Fall. The underlying picture here is that marriage is God's idea and it's designed to endure "until death do us part."

3. How does our society's understanding of marriage compare to these verses?

The disciples' response is that the risk of being trapped in an unhappy marriage is too great. Maybe celibacy is the way to go?! Jesus's explanation is that some are indeed in a position to remain unmarried; however, marriage is God's idea and intent for many. (A eunuch was an official in charge of a harem, and could be someone born without the ability to engage in sexual relationships or someone who was castrated for the role. Others, like Jesus, were "eunuchs" only in the sense that they had abstained from sexual relationships for the sake of God's Kingdom.)

4. Jesus doesn't fully endorse the disciples' conclusion in v. 10, but neither does He refute that celibacy is good for some. How can we encourage and support both single and married adults in our Kingdom Community?

1 Corinthians 7 and Ephesians 5 also help illuminate this topic of marriage, and would be good to include as we consider what all of God's Word teaches.

Verses 13-15

These verses can seem random, but serve as a crucial link between the instructions on husbands and wives, and the ensuing account of the rich young man. Children were commonly presented to rabbis to be blessed by the rabbis. The disciples, though, try to prevent it! In stark contrast, Jesus welcomes the children and honors them with Kingdom status!

5. Children were vulnerable, dependent, and marginalized in Jesus's day. If "the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these," what does that mean for how we are to live and evaluate our lives?

Verses 16-30

The following conversation could not be more different. As NT scholar Craig Blomberg puts it, "The children [from verses 13-15] turn out to be nearer to the kingdom than most might have suspected; the rich man demonstrates that he is further away than most would have guessed." The opening question reveals the man's plan to "do...to have eternal life." He wants a "good deed" that will help him acquire what he senses he's missing.

6. Jesus's response to the man shifts the conversation from *what good he must do* to *who alone is good*. How is this shift critical for us to understand the gospel?

Jesus puts attention on who God is before He addresses what God commands. Commentators point out how the first five of the Ten Commandments are also focused on humanity's "vertical" relationship with God and on the "horizontal" relationship with others in the last five.

The man reports that he has kept the commandments but isn't convinced it's enough. Jesus points him to what's missing—selling it all and giving to the poor—and then he can come follow Jesus. It's an extraordinary call! Here we learn why this is such an impossible requirement for the man: "he had great possessions."

7. How could a *rich young man* be especially susceptible to thinking he could acquire eternal life based on his own achievement or performance?

The man asked what he needed to do and now he has more than he bargained for: "go," "sell," "give," "come," and "follow." This wasn't part of his plan. Jesus relates the difficulty facing the man to the largest animal passing through the smallest space. It's an impossibility for us; however, it's the exact thing God does. We're back at the heart of the gospel—the only one who is good.

8. This is the only occasion where Jesus places such a demand on someone, yet it applies broadly. How does it relate back to the Sermon on the Mount (6:19-24)?

Peter reports that he and the other disciples had done exactly what the rich young man did not. In essence, Peter wants to know, "What's in it for us?" Jesus's reply has spawned debate over exactly what He's describing, but suffice it to say that the disciples can expect to receive

far greater than whatever they've given up to follow Jesus. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Tying the Bow

Marriage is a life-long, sacred commitment that might be broken only in extreme cases. We must shun the values of our world and become like little children. It's hard for a rich person to enter God's Kingdom. Yeah, we don't have to look too closely to find potential discouragement in this chapter! Perhaps it's best to remember that, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

9. Take a few minutes to pray together in your group. Ask the Lord to pour out His mercy and to do in your life what only He can do so that you all might have "treasure in heaven."