

The Gospel of Matthew

9. Teachings on the Journey to Jerusalem:

Marriage and Divorce (19:3-12)

The Children (19:13-14)

Leaving Behind One's Possessions (19:16-30)

The Parable of the Laborers (20:1-16)

The Conclusion of the Journey (20:17-34)

Sunday, March 5, 2006

10 to 11 am in the Parlor.

Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

**Draw your Church together, O God,
into one great company of disciples,
together following our Lord Jesus Christ
into every walk of life,
together serving him in his mission to
the world,
and together witnessing to his love
on every continent and island.**

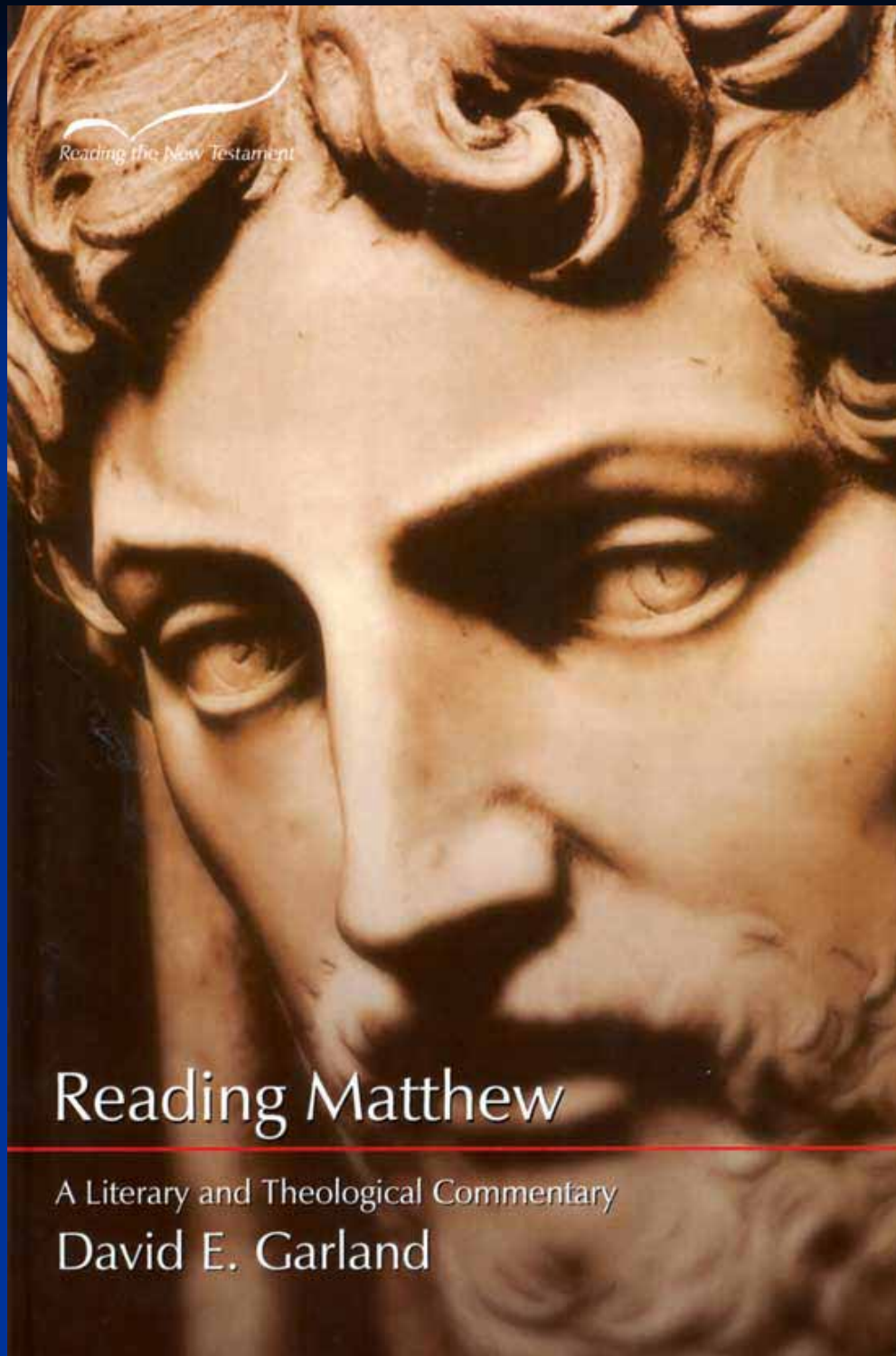
- New Zealand Prayer Book, p. 141

INTERPRETING
I · B · T
BIBLICAL TEXTS

THE
GOSPEL
OF
MATTHEW

Donald Senior

- **The Gospel of Matthew** (**Interpreting Biblical Texts Series**), Donald Senior, Abingdon Press, 1997, ISBN 0-687-00848-4
- **Dr. Senior** is Professor of New Testament Studies at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago.



- **Reading Matthew. A Literary and Theological Commentary**, David E. Garland, Smyth & Helwys, 2001, ISBN 1-57312-274
- **David Garland** is Professor of Christian Scriptures and Associate Dean for Academic Services at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University

SACRA PAGINA

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., Editor



The Gospel of
MATTHEW

Daniel J. Harrington, S.J.

- **Sacra Pagina. The Gospel of Matthew**
Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN, 1991, ISBN 0-8146-5803-2
- **Daniel Harrington** is Professor of New Testament at the Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts

- **Introducing Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God (Matthew 1:1—4:16)**
 - The Birth of the Messiah: The Fulfillment of God's Promises (1:1-25)
 - From Judea of David to the Galilee of the Gentiles (2:1-23)
 - Getting Ready: God's Son in the Wilderness (3:1—4:11)
 - Dispelling the Darkness in Galilee (4:12-16)
- **Jesus' Ministry to Israel - Part 1. Teaching, Healing, and Calling the Lost Sheep (Matthew 4:17—10:42)**
 - Jesus' Debut: Authority and Compassion. Dawn in Galilee (4:17-25)
 - The Sermon on the Mount: Magisterial Teaching, A Charter for Discipleship (5:1—8:1)
 - Restoring Life to Others: Jesus the Healer (8:2—9:35)
 - Great Harvest and Great Dangers: The Mission Discourse (9:36—10:42)
- **Jesus' Ministry to Israel - Part 2. Rejection and Confession (Matthew 11:2—16:20)**
 - Doubt, Indifference, and Dissent (11:2—12:45)
 - The Parable Discourse: the Mysteries of the Kingdom Revealed (12:46—13:54)
 - The Mission Resumes (13:54—16:12)
 - Rejection in Nazareth (13:54-58)
 - The Death of John (14:1-12)
 - Two Great Signs (14:13-36)
 - A Dispute with Israel; An Opening to the Gentiles (15:1-28)
 - Healing and Feeding the Multitudes; Demand for a Sign (15:29—16:12)
- **Jesus' Passion and Resurrection (Matthew 16:21-28:20)**
 - The Journey to Jerusalem (16:13—20:34)
 - Confession at Caesarea Philippi (16:13-28)
 - Transfiguration (17:1-21)
 - Living Together as the Family of God: Life Within the Community of the Kingdom (17:22—18:35)
 - **Teachings on the Journey (19:1—20:16)**
 - **Marriage and Divorce (19:3-12)**
 - **The Children (19:13-14)**
 - **Leaving Behind One's Possessions (19:16-30)**
 - **The Parable of the Laborers (20:1-16)**
 - **The Conclusion of the Journey (20:17-34)**
 - In the Holy City: Conflict, Death, and Resurrection (21:1—28:15)
 - The Messiah in the Temple (21:1-17)
 - The Teacher and His Opponents (21:18—22:46)
 - False Teachers Lead Others to Ruin: Condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees (23:1-39)
 - The Coming of the Son of Man and the Judgment of the World (24:1—25:46)
 - The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus. Finale (26:1—28:15)

Teachings on the Journey

Matthew 19:1—20:16

Teachings on the Journey

Introduction

- The Journey to Jerusalem continues: **“When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went to the region of Judea beyond the Jordan.”** (19:1)

Teachings on the Journey

Introduction

- Story narrative continues to focus on the instruction of the disciples.
- Other characters who enter the narrative serve to initiate scenes for the disciple's instruction:
 - Pharisees (19:3)
 - Children (19:15)
 - A rich young man (19:16)

Matthew 19:1—20:16

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- The Pharisees try to test Jesus: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife *for any cause?*” (19:3)
- “for any cause” – a contentious point of debate in rabbinic circles over the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1.
- Deuteronomy 24:1 implies a man is permitted to write a certificate of divorce if “**she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her**” (Deuteronomy 24:1 NRSV)

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- “something objectionable”
 - The **school of Rabbi Hillel** said this could mean (for the sake of argument) a wife who ruined a dish or was not pretty enough.
 - The **school of Rabbi Shammai** said some indecency must be present or have occurred: such as conversing with men, spinning in the streets with bare arms, loosening her hair in public.

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- Jesus answers by saying God's original intent for marriage is found in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24:
 - So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27 NRSV)
 - ... a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 NRSV)

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- The Pharisees say: “Why then did Moses *command* us to give a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her?” (19:7 NRSV)
- Jesus says “It was because you were so hard-hearted that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.” (19:8 NRSV)

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- Jesus then goes on to say,
 - “And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, **except for unchastity**, and marries another commits adultery.” (19:9 NRSV)
 - “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, **except for marital unfaithfulness**, and marries another woman commits adultery.” (19:9 NIV)
 - “I say to you, whoever divorces his wife (**unless the marriage is unlawful**) and marries another commits adultery.” (19:9 NAB)
- The interpretation of the Greek porneia (translated “unchastity / marital unfaithfulness / unlawful”) is a point of contentious debate among modern Christian theologians, often coming down along denomination lines.
 - This story in Mark’s gospel (Mark 10:11-12) has no exception clause

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- New Revised Standard (NRSV), **“unchastity”**: broader, less defined.
 - NRSV: translation by a broad group of mainstream scholars, majority Protestant
- New International Version (NIV), **“martial unfaithfulness,”** and New American Bible (NAB) **“unlawful”** more specific.
 - NIV: translation by a group of evangelical scholars
 - NAB: translation by a group of Roman Catholic scholars

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- “Choosing which of these possibilities the text intends is difficult and probably impossible. Here is an obvious example where ecclesial practice – permitting divorce or not – can incline a reader or a community to prefer one interpretation over another.” (Senior p. 147)
- The main point is that God’s will for marriage is expressed in the “one flesh” ideal of Genesis 2:24, and not by the oblique reference in Deuteronomy 24:1.

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

Marriage and Divorce

- Story concludes with a private exchange between Jesus and his disciples, found only in Matthew (19:10-12).
- After hearing Jesus' views on divorce, the disciples say **“If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”** (19:10 NRSV)
- Jesus replies there is a range of possible responses to the call of the Kingdom of God.
 - **“Some are incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.”** (19:12 NRSV)

Matthew 19:3-12

Teachings on the Journey

The Children

- **“Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray”** (19:13 NRSV)
 - “lay his hands on them and pray” = a gracious gesture of blessing.
- As in Matthew 18:1-5, children are again lifted up as representatives:
 - of the weak, the dependent, the vulnerable in the beatitudes,
 - of the childlike humility required of all **“Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”** (18:3-4 NRSV)
- Jesus instructs the disciples: **“... the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”** (19:14 NRSV)

Matthew 19:13-15

Teachings on the Journey

Leaving Behind One's Possessions

- A rich young man approaches Jesus and asks “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” (19:16)
- Jesus emphasizes the need to obey the law: **“If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”** (19:17 NRSV)
- Jesus lists the “second tablet” of the commandments, adding at the end the summary **“and ‘you shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”** (19:9 NRSV)

Matthew 19:16-30

Teachings on the Journey

Leaving Behind One's Possessions

- The young man says he has done all that Jesus has said. Is there anything else he lacks?
- Jesus: **“If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”** (19:21 NRSV)
 - “perfect” (Greek *teleios*) = complete or whole
 - *Teleios* is the word also used in Matthew 5:48 as the ultimate goals for the disciples of Jesus **“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”** (NRSV)

Matthew 19:16-30

Teachings on the Journey

Leaving Behind One's Possessions

- Is the invitation to go beyond adherence to the law, to be *teleios* “perfect = whole = complete” an invitation:
 - Intended for an elite group of disciples?
 - Intended to provide a “compass point” and goal for all disciples, where ever they may be in their journey of faith?

Matthew 19:16-30

Teachings on the Journey

Leaving Behind One's Possessions

- The difficulty of the invitation, and the powerful lure of possessions, is illustrated by:
 - The grief of the departing young man, because he had many possessions.
 - Jesus noting “... **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**” (19:24 NRSV)
 - This analogy does indeed seem to say it is impossible for one who is rich to enter into the kingdom.
 - There is no basis to the idea of a gate in ancient Jerusalem called “The Needle”, or one just barely wide enough for a camel to squeeze through
 - The disciples ask in astonishment, “**Who then can be saved?**” (19:25 NRSV)
- Jesus replies to the disciples astonished question, “**For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.**” (19:26 NRSV)
 - Salvation is ultimately a gift from God, not a human achievement.

Matthew 19:16-30

Teachings on the Journey

Leaving Behind One's Possessions

- Peter takes the lead and asks a question that may have been on the mind of many of the disciples: **“We have given up everything and followed you. What will there be for us?”** (19:27 NRSV)
 - Will receive a “hundredfold” (as in Mark 10:29-30)
 - Will **“sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”** (19:28 NRSV)
 - Senior: “The community that follows Jesus and obeys his teachings will bring to completion God’s promise of a reassembled and renewed Israel” (p. 149)

Matthew 19:16-30

Teachings on the Journey

The Parable of the Laborers

- After answering Peter that the disciples the disciples will judge the 12 tribes of Israel, Jesus then tells the disciples a parable that begins and ends with (and apparently intended to explain), **“the first will be last, and the last will be first.”** (19:30, 20:16)
- **The Parable of the Laborers:**
 - A landowner hires laborers to work in his vineyard at various times of the day, up to “the last hour.”
 - At the end of the day, he pays all of them the same wages.
 - Those who worked all day grumble that they deserve more, because they worked more.
 - The landowner replies **“My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?”** (20:13-15 NRSV)

Matthew 20:1-16

Teachings on the Journey

The Parable of the Laborers

- Meaning of the parable:
 - Our response to the call of discipleship, the call to be “perfect = whole = complete,” is important, but ultimately, achieving “perfection = wholeness = completeness” is **“For human beings ... impossible ...”** (19:26 NRSV)
 - So in the end, God’s generosity alone is what counts, not human achievement.
 - And **“... for God all things are possible.”** (19:26 NRSV)

Matthew 20:1-16

Teachings on the Journey

The Parable of the Laborers

- Another possible meaning / facet of the parable:
 - A vineyard is the traditional symbol for Israel
 - Could “the first hired” = the religious leaders of Israel, and
 - could “the last hired” = tax collectors, sinners, the Gentiles?
 - God’s indiscriminate and abundant generosity will allow both a share in the Kingdom of God.

Matthew 20:1-16

The Conclusion of the Journey

Matthew 20:17-34

Conclusion of the Journey

Introduction

- The journey is nearly complete and Jesus is about to reach Jerusalem.
- Jesus:
 - Gives his final and most detailed prediction of his coming passion and resurrection (20:17-19)
 - Gives the disciples some final instructions on the use of power (20:20-28)
 - Heals two blind men, in a final healing story (20:29-34)

Matthew 20:17-34

Conclusion of the Journey

The Final Passion Prediction

- Jesus gives his final and most complete description of the coming passion and resurrection:
- **“Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death, and hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified, and he will be raised on the third day.”** (20:18-19 NRSV)

Matthew 20:17-19

Conclusion of the Journey

The Zebedee's Sons' Power Grab

- The mother of the two sons of Zebedee (rather than the sons themselves as in Mark) comes to Jesus with her sons and asks **“Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at your right and the other at your left, in your kingdom.”** (20:21 NRSV)
- When the other disciples hear about this request, **“they became indignant at the two brothers”** (20:24)

Conclusion of the Journey

The Zebedee's Sons' Power Grab

- Jesus uses the incident to instruct his disciples on the meaning of **power** in the Kingdom.
 - In the community of God, power is expressed in humble service towards the other.
 - **“whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** (20:26-28 NRSV)

Matthew 20:17-28

Conclusion of the Journey

The Healing of the Blind Men

- As in Mark, the Journey to Jerusalem concludes with a story of Jesus healing blindness.
- As Jesus and the disciples leave **Jericho** followed by a great crowd, two blind men on the side of the road cry out “**Lord, Son of David, have pity on us!**” (20:30 NRSV)
- “**Moved with pity, Jesus touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight, and followed him.**” (10:34 NRSV)

Matthew 20:29-34

Conclusion of the Journey

The Healing of the Blind Men

- Story has a symbolic side:
 - In Matthew, sight is a symbol for faith.
 - The community of disciples, faced with challenges of faith to follow Jesus in “the way of the cross,” can cry out to Jesus like the blind men, “**Lord, let our eyes be opened.**” (20:33 NRSV)

Matthew 20:29-34

Next Session:

In the Holy City: Conflict, Death, and Resurrection

The Messiah and the Temple (21:1-17)

**The Teacher and His Opponents
(21:18—22:46)**