

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

These notes are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye, mistakes can possibly be found. Therefore, he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: April 7, 2019

Sermon Title: The Upside Down Kingdom: The Ragamuffin Gospel

Sermon Series: Matthew

Text: Matthew 19:13-15

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Title: The Upside Down Kingdom: The Ragamuffin Gospel
[God is rearranging our expectations]
Text: Matthew 19:13-15
Theme: The Kingdom of God is occupied by those who are stigmatized, ostracized, and marginalized. It is filled with people who can't.

Introduction:

"It is most instructive to ponder the interrelationships among these three passages, and the practical reasons for their being presented together. J. Jeremias calls this arrangement (found in both Mt and Mk) 'a little catechism which instructed the churches how the disciples of Jesus should look on marriage, children, possessions' (Infant Baptism in the First Four Centuries, 50). Observe the kinship between Mt 19 and Eph 5:21-6:9. In addition to the (immediately evident) kinship between Eph 5:22-6:4 (husband and wife, parents and children) and Mt 19:1-15 (marriage, children), there is a parallel between Mt's story of the rich young man and Paul's teaching about the master-slave relationship. For money is unmistakably a major factor in determining relationships between employers and employees (to use the appropriate language for our day and culture). Whether an employer or an employee is enslaved to wealth or enslaved to God (Mt 6:24), will likely be a decisive factor in determining how the employer and the employee relate to each other. In the former case, the relationship is certain to be hostile and destructive - particularly where both parties are slaves of Mammon. In the latter case, the relationship can be amicable and productive. See Richard J. Foster, Money, Sex & Power, especially on the interrelationships among these areas, on the activity of 'the principalities and powers' in all three areas, and especially on the importance of viewing money not merely as a 'medium of exchange' but as a 'rival god' which (like the true God) calls for total allegiance. See further below on Mt 19:23-24."¹

God desires for us to gather together around His word and with His people to Hear what He is saying to us individually and to us corporately.

Let us initially ask ourselves four questions concerning this text.

The Wheel

1. Why should we consider this passage?
 - a. Whether or not we recognize this, we are the marginalized. The only answer we have to our separation from God is God.
2. What do we need to hear from this passage?
 - a. We need to accept that JESUS is KING and we are not.
3. How do we hear this passage properly?
 - a. We MUST see ourselves as the marginalized and separated. And until we do, we will not come and we cannot be saved.
4. What can we expect when we accept this truth?
 - a. If you accept who you are and who He is, you will be received into God's forever family.

This is the only message the world needs to hear and it is the only one we as a church have.

This passage, and all through Matthew's Gospel, Jesus is rearranging our preconceived expectations. The gospel isn't for those who believe they can, but for those who know they can't.

"The Ragamuffin Gospel is a book about the essence of Christianity by former Franciscan priest Brennan Manning. Manning argues that Jesus' gospel was one of grace, and that efforts to earn salvation are impossibly misguided. He states that the true meaning of God's grace has been lost in society amidst a constant search to merely please God, as though the Almighty is only a 'small minded book keeper,' who tallies sins and uses them against humanity."²

"Many believers feel stunted in their Christian growth. We beat ourselves up over our failures and, in the process, pull away from God because we subconsciously believe He tallies our defects and hangs His head in disappointment. In this newly repackaged edition – now with full appendix, study questions, and the author's own epilogue, '*Ragamuffin Fifteen Years Later*,' Brennan Manning reminds us that nothing could be further from the truth. The Father beckons us to Himself with a 'furious love' that burns brightly and constantly. Only when we truly embrace God's grace can we bask in the joy of a gospel that enfolds the most needy of His flock – the 'ragamuffins.'"³

What is a ragamuffin?

- a ragged, disreputable person;
- a child in ragged, ill-fitting, dirty clothes.
- Beggar, Urchin, Vagrant, Orphan, Waif, Tramp, Bum, Vagabond, Guttersnipe,

We find such descriptive offensive. Why? Because we believe we are better than this. Yet in God's economy and ledger, this is EXACTLY what we are and unless and until we see ourselves as such, we cannot be saved.

Remember Matthew 11:25-30, "COME TO ME."

Matthew is setting us up. He is preparing us for this UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM.

He is exposing us to unsettling, startling truth.

The UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM is going to cause everyone to sit up and take notice.

There is one of two ways of viewing ourselves.

- ¹ "When Jesus came down from the mountain, **large crowds followed Him.** ² And a leper came to Him and bowed down before Him, and said, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean'" (Matt. 8:1, 2).
- "**And they were offended in him**" (Matt. 13:57).
- "Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that **the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?**" (Matt. 15:12).

TWO WAYS:

- The YOKE of Jesus (Matt. 11:25-30)
- The YOKE of the Religious Leaders (12:1-14)

We will either accept ourselves for what we are in Adam or we will believe we are “like god.”

VISUAL

1. Sour gummies: we are sour gummies that make our mouths pucker.
2. THE SHADOW - King David and those who followed him.

¹“David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. ²And everyone who was **in distress**, and everyone who was **in debt**, and everyone who was **bitter in soul**, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men. ³ And David went from there to Mizpeh of **Moab**. And he said to the king of Moab, ‘Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me.’ ⁴ And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. ⁵ Then the prophet Gad said to David, ‘Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.’ So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth” (1 Sam. 22:1-5).

Friend, we are just like those who followed King David.

3. Jesus was accused of being a bastard child and now the bastard children are flocking around Him.

Is the issue one of demographic or position?

“Often, 21st century people think that Jesus is saying that we need to become innocent like children or just have faith like children. But his first century audience would have thought about **the vulnerability, dependence, and marginal status of children in their world**. They wouldn’t have thought of an idealized view of children and childhood, but rather that Jesus was telling them to become among those of low status.”⁴

The matter isn’t so much the demographic as much as the marginalized.

In our preceding passage (19:1-12), wives are considered the marginalized and thus protected from the “system.” Here, it is the child.

- I. The setting - [anxious] parents were bringing their [unattractive] children to an [all-inviting] Rabbi to pray over them (v. 13a)

“The fact that they were brought (we may assume by their mothers) indicates that there was something in our Lord’s look and manner that attracted children, and impressed their parents with the feeling that He loved them.”⁵

Perhaps these were the children of those who had been divorced and thus, marginalized. Or perhaps these were the children born out of whoredom. Either way, parents found in Jesus one who would receive them regardless.

Perhaps there is another way of looking at this text based on Matt. 19:1, 2, "Large crowds followed Him and He healed them." The parents wanted Him to pray for their children.

"The key phrase in understanding just what is happening in this scene is, 'that he might lay his hands on them.' These are children who are sick, diseased, ill perhaps to the point of death. And not just one, though we don't know how many. The scene, then, is likely a swarm of desperate parents who are bringing their diseased children to Jesus in the hope that he can do something. It is likely chaotic, with pushing and shoving, and probably more than a few heated exchanges, as each parent feels compelled to vie for Jesus' attention for the sake of his or her child. Desperation makes competitors of us all.

All of which helps to explain, if still not excuse, the reaction of the disciples. They are trying to protect their Lord, keeping him from the crush of the crowds and the contagion of these sickly children.

What the disciples don't understand is that this is exactly why Jesus came - to heal those who are sick, to protect those that are vulnerable, and to respond to those in need. And yet it's more than that. Jesus doesn't just pity these children, he elevates them, saying that, indeed, this is what the kingdom of God is all about and this is for whom the kingdom of God exists. Precisely these sickly, vulnerably, incredibly needy children."⁶

This makes the conflict even more pronounced.

II. The crisis - the disciples were prohibiting them from pressing Jesus (v. 13b)

"The behavior of the disciples is also not surprising at this time. (see Mark 10:13-15) They are fully involved in the idea of Jesus as their Messiah; the One that was prophesied about. The One that would 'set the captives free' and destroy the Roman rule. They were not interested in wasting Jesus' time with powerless children who had no political influence. There was a mission to accomplish and no time to waste. But their mission was not Jesus' mission; at least not at first."⁷

It is important to remember that the disciples still reflected the prevailing attitudes toward marriage and children. These children might be doubly cursed by being the offspring of the already marginalized and stigmatized.

This is the same "feeder" for the next paragraph. You have polar opposites at play with "divorced" women and the RICH YOUNG RULER. Not surprisingly, you have children caught in the middle. Here we have the classic story of the RICH YOUNG RULER. This individual has everything going for him. He fits comfortably into the theological and social culture of his day. If anyone is worthy, surely he is. Yet, Jesus says, "Sell everything and follow me." Such an invitation calls him to acknowledge what is already true. It does not matter how much you have through position, power, and possessions. Regardless of your circumstances and situation you are unable to do anything to affect the vertical. You are no different the women and children of that culture.

The disciples were shocked by His answer concerning marriage, children, and wealth. Why? Because we cannot accept our own inability to affect our relationship with God. The only answer we have is JESUS.

Think about this structurally.

19:30 "But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Rich Young Ruler

20:16 "So the last shall be first, and the first last."

Hired Workers

20:26 "It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you [FIRST] shall be your servant [LAST], 27 and whoever wishes to be first among you [FIRST] shall be your slave [LAST]; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Seats of Power

22:14 "For many are called, but few are chosen."

The Son's Marriage

23:11 "But the greatest among you [FIRST] shall be your servant [LAST]. 12 "Whoever exalts himself [FIRST] shall be humbled [LAST]; and whoever humbles himself [LAST] shall be exalted [FIRST]."

The Problem with the Pharisees and Scribes

This is the primary idea within this section. Those who "we" ostracize, stigmatize, and marginalize, are the very ones whom the Father draws, the Spirit calls, and Jesus saves.

Think about this, "How has the church become a fortress for the fashionable and not a hospitable for the hurting?" Should we not be a place where the ostracized, stigmatized, and marginalized find hope, healing, and wholeness in Jesus? The church is a showcase where the gospel is prized and broken sinners find a welcome. The Church is a place where the weight of the vertical is lifted and the lost find their way, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the mute speak. Our theological and social construct is such that we read this as only physical, but it is a spiritual matter. Friends, we come together to hear Jesus say, "COME TO ME AND FIND YOUR REST." We live in persistent dysfunction and the only answer we have for this is JESUS. Anything else we add to HIM is a travesty. It is a theological and social crime to give people anything other than JESUS. And unless and until HE IS PRIZED nothing else you and I offer is of any spiritual value.

"He, however, responded very differently to what the disciples may have considered a well-meaning effort to shield him from an unnecessary interruption. Jesus asked that the little children be allowed to come to him and that they should not be hindered. He then used the opportunity to stress an important truth, "The kingdom of God is for [or belongs to] such. Amen [Truly], I say to you, Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will not, no [never], enter into it."⁸

III. The climax – Jesus rebukes the disciples and invites the children to come (v. 14)

Jesus is acting counter-cultural. How many times have those who attended a church been put out, put off, or put away by the reception they received? How many times must we see the soul through the eyes of Jesus before we fully acknowledge that we are the marginalized and not the might, that we are the powerless and not the potentate, and that we are the slave and not the master? Friends, we cannot correct all the craziness that exists within our churches, but we can work to make sure we are the place where the marginalized are welcomed, received, and blessed.

IV. The new setting – Jesus blesses the children (v. 15)

The kingdom of heaven is made of such people. Who are these people? Is Jesus saying the kingdom is populated by infants and children? Or is He saying the kingdom is made up of those whom society would marginalize and deem unfit? Friends, this is why we call ourselves, “The Island of Misfit Toys.”

Everything in Matthew’s gospel speaks of the marginalized. Our problem is that we think too highly of ourselves. Although all of us are made in the image and likeness of God, none of us are able or capable of working our way up to God. There is nothing within our makeup that can do enough to gain God’s approval. There is nothing we can do to cover our sin’s debt.

We must rethink how we go about doing church and ministry. I cannot tell you what this looks like, but I am committed to making sure those who are marginalized find in Jesus a welcome. As it relates to our children, we will do what we can to make sure you have what you need in leading them to Jesus.

Author’s Strategies:

It’s placement within the chapter and section emphasizes how the “last will be first, and the first last.”

Every culture has those who are dismissed as insignificant and thus, marginalized. These, however, are those who find the gospel attractive (cf. 1 Cor. 1:23-31).

Biblical Context:

The Birth story uses “child” often (2:8-21). Its other occurrence is 14:21 and 15:38 in feeding the multitudes. It will not occur again until Matthew 18 and 19.

- “And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:2).
- “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3).
- “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:4).

- “And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me” (Matt. 18:5).
- “But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matt. 18:6).
- “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10).
- “Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (Matt. 18:14).

“The main point of 19:13-15 is essentially the same as 18:2-5, it may be asked why Matthew did not join the two passages together.”⁹

- “Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them” (Matt. 19:13).
- “But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14).

Jesus speaks of the “little ones” [**mikros**]

- “And **whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water** only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward” (Matt. 10:42).
- “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: **notwithstanding he that is least** in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matt. 11:11).
- “**Which indeed is the least of all seeds**: but when it is grown, it is the **greatest** among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt. 13:32).

3. In light of the emphasis of this passage in its context, state the **author’s main idea** for *his audience* (in one short sentence).

Only the “infants, weary, and heavy-laden” will come to Jesus (Matt. 11:25-30). Unless you become as an infant and accept you are weary and heavy-laden, you will not come to Jesus.

4. What parts of this passage **connect to the gospel** of Jesus Christ? What *particular facet of the gospel* is in view? [What are its Christological / Christo-centric contributions?]

Q. How does this descriptive in this chapter contribute to and advance our Christology?

A. Jesus came to heal the sick, cleanse the leper, and raise to life the dead.

5. In light of your gospel connection, what **argument** (one short sentence) will you make to **your audience**? What **applications** from this argument will you make for the believer? The unbeliever?

To the believing: never forget who you were in Adam and who you become in Christ.
To the unbelieving: unless and until you come as a child, you can never be saved.

WHAT @ ME?

Your greatest need is JESUS. AND ...

You never outgrow your need for JESUS.

NOW WHAT?

"COME AND SEE" just how glorious the gospel is.

"GO AND TELL" everyone who is ostracized, stigmatized, and marginalized that JESUS SAVES.

HOW DO WE BECOME THIS?

You already are this. OWN IT.

Everything we do should shout visually and verbally, THE WELCOMING MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL.

HOW DO WE BECOME THIS?

You and I come as we are, but we will never be what we were.

¹ https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ekno_chamblin%5ENT.Chamblin.Matt.19.13-15.html/at/Jesus%20and%20the%20Children

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ragamuffin_Gospel

³ <https://www.amazon.com/Ragamuffin-Gospel-Bedraggled-Beat-Up-Burnt/dp/1590525027>

⁴ <http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/2015/09/bet398002.shtml>

⁵ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers on Matthew 19:13.

⁶ <http://www.davidlose.net/2014/10/matthew-1913-15/>

⁷ <https://commonmansbiblejourney.wordpress.com/2011/11/23/108-matthew-1913-15-jesus-loves-the-little-children/>

⁸ <https://wernerbiblecommentary.org/?q=node/422>

⁹ https://thirdmill.org/magazine/article.asp/link/https:%5E%5Ethirdmill.org%5Earticles%5Ekno_chamblin%5ENT.Chamblin.Matt.19.13-15.html/at/Jesus%20and%20the%20Children