

Matthew 19-20; Mark 10; Luke 18 – Ep 201

Matt. 19.1-12; Mark 10.1-12: The Pharisees question Jesus about divorce

Elder James E. Faust taught this about divorce:

What, then, might be "just cause" for breaking the covenants of marriage? Over a lifetime of dealing with human problems, I have struggled to understand what might be considered "just cause" for breaking of marriage covenants. I confess I do not claim the wisdom or authority to definitively state what is "just cause." Only the parties to the marriage can determine this. They must bear the responsibility for the train of consequences that inevitably follows if these covenants are not honored. ***In my opinion, "just cause" should be nothing less serious than a prolonged and apparently irredeemable relationship that is destructive of a person's dignity as a human being.***

At the same time, I have strong feelings about what is not provocation for breaking the sacred covenants of marriage. Surely it is not simply "mental distress" or "personality differences" or having "grown apart" or having "fallen out of love." This is especially so where there are children. Enduring divine counsel comes from Paul: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). "That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, [and] to love their children" (Titus 2:4).

In my opinion, members of the Church have the most effective cure for our decaying family life. That cure is for men, women, and children to honor and respect the divine roles of both fathers and mothers in the home. In so doing, mutual respect and appreciation among the members of the Church will be fostered by the righteousness found there. In this way the great sealing keys restored by Elijah and spoken of by Malachi might operate "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse" (D&C 110:15; see Malachi 4:6).¹

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught:

Selfishness is the cause of most of the domestic problems that afflict so many homes of our nation. I do not have the statistics at hand; your sociologists do. But I know that the divorce rate of America is a tragic disgrace that hangs over this land. I sat for hours the other day, listening to two people who had been divorced but who said they still loved one another. First I talked to the husband. He sobbed and sobbed for his wife and then talked about what a terrible woman she was. Then I talked to the wife. She cried over her husband, and then talked of what a stingy man he was. After I had listened to them individually, I brought them together and said to them, "There is only one thing wrong with you. You're just too miserably selfish. You are unwilling to sacrifice for one another. You are unwilling to lay aside your own little comforts in order to accommodate one another."

I heard President Stephen L. Richards say on one occasion that the answer to marital problems was not divorce but repentance. Repentance in cases of this kind will involve giving up something in the interest of one's companion.

The root of our traffic evil, my brethren and sisters, lies in selfishness. The man who cannot sacrifice five minutes in getting somewhere and speeds up the highway without respect for the rights of another,

¹ James E. Faust, [Finding Light in a Dark World](#), Deseret Book, 1995, 136. See also "Father, Come Home", *Ensign* May 1993, pp.35-37, emphasis added.

is the man who causes many of our problems. This is nothing but selfishness. It is nothing but an unwillingness to show respect for the interests of others.²

Culture

The Pharisees themselves debated the grounds for divorce implied in Deuteronomy 24:1-4: the school of Shammai, predominant in Jesus' day, argued that the passage allowed divorce only if one's spouse was unfaithful; the school of Hillel, which eventually won out, said that a man could divorce his wife if she burned the toast (a later rabbi of this school added, "Or if you find someone more attractive!"); see Mishnah *Gittin* 9:10; *Sifre* Deuteronomy 269.1.1; more generally for the freedom to divorce, see, e.g., Sirach 25:26; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 4.253; Life 415, 426; Philo, *Special Laws* 3.30 Although Shammai's school was generally dominant before AD 70, other sources indicate that the more liberal position of Hillel's school was closer to general practice on this issue (though Pharisees apparently widely regarded divorce as tragic). The success of a protagonist's wisdom under "testing" with difficult questions was an ancient theme (cf. 1 Kings 10:1); some questioners had hostile intentions.³

Matt. 19.13-15; Mark 10.13-16; Luke 18.15-17: Jesus blesses the little children

Matt. 19.16-26; Mark 10.17-27; Luke 18.18-27: Jesus teaches a rich young ruler

Greek traditions also reported aristocratic young men who wanted to study under a famous teacher but were too spoiled to carry out what the teacher demanded... Only a few radical Greek teachers demanded such things of would-be disciples. Jesus' demands are more radical than later Jewish charity laws permitted (lest the benefactor reduce himself to poverty); later regulations limited charity to twenty percent (which was nonetheless considerable on top of tithes and taxes). This was a severe test, not only of whether the disciple would value the teacher above earthly possessions, but even of his claim to love his neighbor as himself.⁴

Easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (Matt. 19.24; Mark 10.25)

"The camel going through the eye of a needle **does not refer to some hypothetical little gate in or alongside a main city gate, through which a camel is supposed to edge his way on its knees after being stripped of its burden.** The present writer has seen the remnants of numerous ancient cities and gates throughout the Near East, and his conclusion is that such a little gate did not exist! Such a notion is a figment of the imagination of someone who was probably trying to explain the image without understanding an important figure of speech that Jesus used."⁵

² Gordon B. Hinckley, October 17, 1962, *BYU Speeches of the Year*, 1962, p. 5, emphasis added.

³ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, IVP Academic, 2014, p. 93.

⁴ Keener, *Background*, p. 94.

⁵ D. Kelly Ogden, *Where Jesus Walked: The Land and Culture of New Testament Times*, Deseret Book, 1991, p. 116, emphasis added. R.T. France concurs with Ogden. He explains, "More widely adopted has been a suggestion popularized in the nineteenth century that "the eye of the needle" was the name for a small gate within the large double gate of a city wall through which pedestrians could enter without the need for the large gates to be opened as they would be for a camel train. It is suggested that a camel might be forced through such a gate with great difficulty, and further spiritual lessons have then been extracted from the observation that in order to do so it would have to bend its knees and be stripped of its load. This romantic speculation has been repeated so often that it is sometimes treated as established exegesis. Unfortunately, while this suggestion was not new in the nineteenth

Here Jesus clearly uses hyperbole. His words reflect an ancient Jewish figure of speech for the impossible: a very large animal passing through a needle's eye. On regular journeys at twenty-eight miles per day, a fully loaded camel could carry four hundred pounds in addition to its rider; such a camel would require a gate at least ten feet high and twelve feet wide. (A needle's eye in Jesus' day meant what it means today; the idea that it was simply a name for a small gate in Jerusalem is based on a gate from the medieval period and sheds no light on Jesus' teaching in the first century.) Mainstream Judaism never denied the rich a place in the kingdom of God; many of its benefactors and leaders were rich. Jesus allows that the rich may, by God's mercy, enter in, but only by giving their abundance to the destitute.⁶

Hugh Nibley put it bluntly:

"We are told that the apostles were amazed beyond measure when he told them that. They didn't know about any postern gates through which a camel comes. That's an invention of modern-day criticism. ***There is no evidence anywhere at all that there was a gate called 'The Eye of the Needle.'*** No, Jesus really meant it: ***It's impossible. You've got to get rid of your treasures.***"⁷

Who then can be saved? (Matt. 19.25)

Alonzo Gaskill's comments here may be useful:

As Latter-day Saints we speak freely and often about the "Plan of Salvation" or, perhaps better put, the "Plan for Salvation." Indeed, sacred scripture gives this divine "Plan" many names. Elder Boyd K. Packer compiled the following list of scriptural titles for Heavenly Father's Plan:

- The merciful plan of the great Creator (see 2 Nephi 9:6).
- The plan of mercy (see Alma 42:15).
- The plan of mercy (see Alma 42:31).
- The great plan of redemption (see Jacob 6:8; Alma 12:25-26, 30, 32; 17:16; 18:39; 22:13-14; 29:2; 39:18; 42:11, 13).
- The eternal plan of redemption (see Alma 34:16).
- The great plan of redemption (see Alma 34:31).
- The plan of salvation (Jarom 1:2; Alma 24:14; 42:5; Moses 6:62).
- The plan of our God (see 2 Nephi 9:13).
- The great plan of the Eternal God (see Alma 34:9).
- The eternal plan of deliverance (see 2 Nephi 11:5).
- The plan of happiness (see Alma 42:16).

century, there is in fact no evidence at all for such usage of "the eye of the needle" either in nonbiblical sources or in ancient commentaries on the gospels." R.T. France, [The Gospel of Matthew](#), Eerdmans, 2007, p. 664.

⁶ Keener, *Background*, p. 94.

⁷ Hugh Nibley, [Approaching Zion](#), Deseret Book, 1989, p. 315, emphasis added.

- The great plan of happiness (see Alma 42:8).
- The plan of restoration (see Alma 41:2).
- The plan of the Gods (see Abraham 4:21).

These many titles define the nature of the Plan. Among other things, we learn that it is great, merciful, eternal, redemptive, salvific, restorative, and greatly promoting of our happiness. It is not the “awful plan of damnation,” the “plan of misery,” or the “eternal plan of punishment.”

It was not designed for the purpose of punishing or damning us -- nor was it implemented to bring us misery and suffering. To the contrary, the purpose of the Plan – the whole purpose for which it was created and -introduced -- was the salvation and exaltation of all mankind! God offered it as a gift to you and me – a token of His divine, deep, and abiding love for each of His children and for all of His creations. He sought to give us what He has by creating a plan that could make us like He is. We are the blessed recipients of this most wonderful of all designs.

Typically, when we give a gift to someone we love, we want to give the best we have. If we decide to make or create the gift ourselves, we try our hardest to make it the best our skill will allow. If we purchase it, we want to buy the best our personal finances will allow.

In this sense, the Father is no different than you and I. He has created and offered to us a great gift – eternal redemption and exaltation. Because God is perfect, His plan for accomplishing His goal is perfect -- and thus we could not hope for a better plan. Because He is loving, the gift is given out of love and is ideal (or perfect, complete, nothing lacking), just as His love is ideal, perfect, complete, nothing -lacking.

We must remember – and we must firmly believe -- that the plan of salvation, the great plan of happiness, was designed to work. Indeed, it would not be called the eternal plan of salvation / happiness / redemption / mercy / deliverance / etc. if it did not work – particularly if its primary effect was the damnation of the vast majority of God’s offspring.⁸

Matt. 19.27-30; Mark 10.28-32; Luke 18.28-30: Following Jesus brings everlasting life

“Regeneration” was a term used for the future renewal of the world in Greek circles and naturally applied to Jewish expectations of a new world order (such expectations appear in Is 65:17; 66:22; and in the Dead Sea Scrolls). That the twelve tribes would be restored was one of the standard Jewish beliefs about the end times. Judges were those who ruled Israel in the Old Testament before the institution of Israelite kingship.⁹

When the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19.28)

James E. Talmage wrote:

It is doubtful that Peter or any other of the Twelve had ever conceived of so great a distinction. The day of regeneration, when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of His glory, as Judge and King, is even yet future; but in that day, those of the Lord's Twelve who endured to the end shall be enthroned as judges

⁸ Alonzo Gaskill, [“Odds are, You’re Going to be Exalted,” Meridian Magazine, June 25, 2008](#), accessed 2.21.23.

⁹ Keener, *Background*, p. 94.

in Israel. The further assurance was given that "every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my names' sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." Rewards of such transcendent worth could scarcely be reckoned or their meaning comprehended.¹⁰

Orson Pratt taught:

In the resurrection, they will come forth immortal, eternal, clothed upon with the fulness of that glory that pertains to the celestial kingdom. They will also reign as kings and priests here on the earth. To some of the raised saints there will be given ten cities to rule over. To others there will be given five cities to rule over, according to their works here in this life. All will not have the same power. All will not have the same rule. The Twelve shall have twelve thrones—one throne each, to judge the twelve tribes of Israel. The tribes will need judging, during the whole thousand years they live on the earth; they will need judges in their midst, to make manifest unto them that which is important for men, and women, and children, to know.¹¹

Matt. 20.1-16: The parable of the laborers in the vineyard

Rethinking salvation, exaltation – the power of becoming

"We do not obtain our heavenly reward by punching a time clock. What is essential is that our labors in the workplace of the Lord have caused us to **become something**. For some of us, this requires a longer time than for others. **What is important in the end is what we have become** by our labors. Many who come in the eleventh hour have been refined and prepared by the Lord in ways other than formal employment in the vineyard. These workers are like the prepared dry mix to which it is only necessary to "add water"-the perfecting ordinance of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost. With that addition-even in the eleventh hour-these workers are in the same state of development and qualified to receive the same reward as those who have labored long in the vineyard."¹²

Elder Holland gave Latter-day Saints additional things to think about when reading this story:

I wish to speak of the Savior's parable in which a householder "went out early in the morning to hire labourers." After employing the first group at 6:00 in the morning, he returned at 9:00 a.m., at 12:00 noon, and at 3:00 in the afternoon, hiring more workers as the urgency of the harvest increased. The scripture says he came back a final time, "about the eleventh hour" (approximately 5:00 p.m.), and hired a concluding number. Then just an hour later, all the workers gathered to receive their day's wage. Surprisingly, all received the same wage in spite of the different hours of labor. Immediately, those hired first were angry, saying, "These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day." When reading this parable, perhaps you, as well as those workers, have felt there was an injustice being done here. Let me speak briefly to that concern.

First of all it is important to note that no one has been treated unfairly here. The first workers agreed to the full wage of the day, and they received it. Furthermore, they were, I can only imagine, very grateful to get the work. In the time of the Savior, an average man and his family could not do much more than

¹⁰ James E. Talmage, [Jesus the Christ](#), p. 233.

¹¹ Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses*, Volume 20, March 9, 1879.

¹² Dallin H. Oaks, "The Challenge to Become," *Ensign*, Nov. 2000, 32, emphasis added.

live on what they made that day. If you didn't work or farm or fish or sell, you likely didn't eat. With more prospective workers than jobs, these first men chosen were the most fortunate in the entire labor pool that morning.

Indeed, if there is any sympathy to be generated, it should at least initially be for the men not chosen who also had mouths to feed and backs to clothe. Luck never seemed to be with some of them. With each visit of the steward throughout the day, they always saw someone else chosen.¹³

"A penny a day" (Matt. 20.2)

A denarius was an average day's wage (though landowners often paid extra to get workers during the harvest). The daylong workers would probably develop a sense of camaraderie, often singing together during reaping.¹⁴

The Lord gave them their pay at the end of the day (Matt. 20.8)

Jewish law mandated that laborers be paid the same day, because the wages were often little more than sufficient for a day's needs (Deut 24:14-15).¹⁵

Is thine eye evil because I am good? (Matt. 20.15)

An "evil eye" (literally; cf. KJV) meant a "stingy eye" in common idiom (cf. Prov 28:22). The landowner had been fair to those who worked all day and generous to those who had not; by charging the complainers with ingratitude (socially equivalent to hubris) he shamed them. Jewish people all affirmed that God, who alone rightfully owned all things, was beneficent whatever he gave; they acknowledged that only his attribute of mercy would enable even Israel to survive the day of judgment. ***Jewish teachers employed a similar folk story about the day of judgment, but they used it to make the opposite point.*** Israel, who had worked hard, would receive high wages; the Gentiles, who had labored little, would receive little (*Sifra Behuqotai* pq. 2.262.1.9). In this context, however, Jesus' point challenges those who have wealth and status in this world, Jewish or Gentile, and promises that in the world to come God will redress those who have been oppressed in this world.¹⁶

This story is about God's goodness

This parable—like all parables—is not really about laborers or wages any more than the others are about sheep and goats. This is a story about God's goodness, His patience and forgiveness, and the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a story about generosity and compassion. It is a story about grace. It underscores the thought I heard many years ago that surely ***the thing God enjoys most about being God is the thrill of being merciful, especially to those who don't expect it and often feel they don't deserve it.***¹⁷

Matt. 20.20-28; Mark 10.35-45: The ambition of James and John

¹³ Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, [The Laborers in the Vineyards, April 2012 Conference](#).

¹⁴ Keener, *Background*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Holland, *The Laborers in the Vineyard*, emphasis added.

James and John's mother makes a request (Matt. 20:20-21)

The indirect intercession of a motherly woman (cf. Mt 15:22) was often more effective than a man's direct petition for himself, in both Jewish and Roman circles (see also 2 Sam 14:2-20; 1 Kings 1:15-21; cf. 2 Sam 20:16-22). Women also could get away with making some requests that men could not. In this case, however, it does not work.¹⁸

You do not know what you are asking for! (Matt. 20:22)

Elder Maxwell taught:

"To the mother of James and John, who wanted her sons to sit on Jesus' right and left hands, Jesus noted simply that the Father had already made that decision (see Matt. 20:21-23). Jesus understood perfectly the maternal instincts that were at play in this mother's questing for her sons. As always, His response was measured and appropriate. We sometimes ask, don't we, for things the implications of which we do not fully understand? Some of the most important prayers we have offered are those that were not answered as we hoped they might have been. There is mentoring in that process too. No wonder the scriptures teach that we are to ask in faith but we are also to strive to ask and to petition for that 'which is right' (3 Ne. 18:20; see also 3 Ne. 26:9; D&C 88:64-65)."¹⁹

Luke 18.1-8: The Widow and the Unjust Judge

Under Old Testament law, judges were to fear God (i.e., consider that he will judge those who break his law and mistreat others) and therefore defend the oppressed. Many ancient societies had severe legal penalties for unjust judges, though the judges often got away with their corruption (taking bribes and the like). In the law, the widow was the ultimate example of the oppressed person, because she had no means of support (e.g., Ex 22:22-24; Ps 146:9; Is 1:17, 23; Jer 7:6-7). She certainly could not afford a bribe; in Jesus' parable here the widow's opponent may threaten something like taking her land in payment for a debt (cf., e.g., 2 Kings 4:1). Although normally only men spoke in lawcourts and women needed advocates to plead cases for them, when women were so audacious as to speak there they generally commanded attention and sympathy.²⁰

Donald and Jay Parry²¹ wrote:

The opening words of the parable instruct us to pray always. These opening words suggest that the parable is essentially about prayer, but the greater context must be considered. As noted, the passages that precede and follow Jesus' instruction that "men ought always to pray" are about Jesus' second coming. The preceding passage details a number of the signs of the times (see Luke 17:24–30) and the words immediately following the parable ask, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

The parable of the importunate widow and unjust judge teaches us how to strengthen our faith so that we will know that the Lord really will return—and so that we will be prepared. We can and must pray in

¹⁸ Keener, *Background*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "Jesus, the Perfect Mentor," *Ensign*, Feb. 2001, 8.

²⁰ Keener, *Background*, p. 227.

²¹ Donald Parry and Jay Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus*, "The Importunate Widow and Unjust Judge," Deseret Book, 2010.

faith, "and not to faint," that we will be strong in the face of the trials of the last days, that the Lord will protect us from our enemies, that he will come and rescue a declining world—and that we will be worthy to stand with him when he appears.

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote, "Jesus now teaches, in a parable, how the preserving prayers of the saints will finally prevail in the day of his coming. He is not here speaking of the simplistic principle that earnest and repetitious importunings will eventually be heard and answered, though this may be true in some cases. . . . Rather, this parable . . . teaches that if the saints will continue to importune in faith for that which is right, and because their cause is just, though the answers to their prayers may be long delayed, yet, finally in the day of vengeance when he judges whose judgment is just, when he comes to rule and reign, the faithful will be rewarded."²²

Shall not God avenge his own elect? (Luke 18.6-7)

This parable is a standard Jewish "how much more" (*qal vahomer*) argument: if an unjust judge who cared not for widows can dispense justice, how much more will the righteous judge of all the earth, who was known as the defender of widows and orphans, do so? In the context, God would administer his justice especially when Jesus came to judge the earth (17:22-37). The principle is familiar from the Old Testament: God is faithful to act on behalf of and to vindicate his people, by his acts in the present and especially his final day of judgment.²³

Application

There are multiple possible applications of this parable:

1. The parable's widow is likened to the latter-day Church during its infant days, when it was suffering from immense persecution. In Doctrine and Covenants 101, a revelation given to Joseph Smith on December 16, 1833, the Lord quoted part of the parable of the importunate widow and unjust judge and likened it to his Church, or the "children of Zion," at that time period. The heading of that revelation explains that "at this time the saints who had gathered in Missouri were suffering great persecution. Mobs had driven them from their homes. . . . Threats of death against individuals of the Church were many. The people had lost household furniture, clothing, livestock, and other personal property, and many of their crops had been destroyed." Doctrine and Covenants 101:81–92 reads: "Now, unto what shall I liken the children of Zion? I will liken them unto the parable of the woman and the unjust judge, for men ought always to pray and not to faint, which saith—There was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man. And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying: Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while, but afterward he said within himself: Though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, ***I will avenge her***, lest by her continual coming she weary me. Thus I will liken the children of Zion. ***Let them importune at the feet of the judge***; And if he heed them not, ***let them importune at the feet of the governor***; And if the governor heed them not, ***let them importune at the feet of the president***; And if the president heed them not, then will ***the Lord arise and come forth out of his hiding place, and in his fury vex the nation***; And in his hot displeasure, and in his fierce anger, in his time, will cut off

²² Bruce R. McConkie, *The Mortal Messiah*, 3:287–88.

²³ Keener, *Background*, p. 227.

those wicked, unfaithful, and unjust stewards, and appoint them their portion among hypocrites, and unbelievers; Even in outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Pray ye, therefore, that their ears may be opened unto your cries, that I may be merciful unto them, that these things may not come upon them." As mentioned earlier, the **Joseph Smith Translation of Luke 18:8 makes a strong connection between the parable of the importunate widow and unjust judge and Jesus' second coming**. This verse reads, "I tell you that he [Jesus] will come, and when he does come, he will avenge his saints speedily" (emphasis added).

2. The parable also applies to each of us who has adversaries that are harmful to our spiritual life, whether the adversaries are other mortals, evil beings, or particular sins that continue to plague us. We, like the importunate widow, must pray always for help against these adversaries. As we do, ***our Heavenly Father will hear our prayers and bring us deliverance.***
3. ***The parable speaks of every literal widow*** (and, by extension, every other individual) on the earth who has approached the Lord with the words, "Avenge me of mine adversary," or the like. She should follow the example of the importunate widow and continually approach God with her righteous desires and seek help from the Lord.²⁴

Luke 18.9-14: The prayers of the Pharisee and the Publican

Pharisees were considered the most pious people in regular Palestinian Jewish society (Essenes were less involved in society; many lived in the wilderness); tax gatherers were considered the most despicable, often regarded as traitors to their people. Pharisees did not want tax gatherers admitted as witnesses or given honorary offices.²⁵

"I fast twice a week!" (Luke 18.12)

Many of the most pious fasted— without water, despite the health hazard—two full days a week (Mondays and Thursdays); some believe this was only during the dry son. (Considering this pattern of fasting hypocritical, some early Christians insisted on fasting on Wednesday and Friday instead! *Didache* 8.1). Pharisees were meticulous about tithing to the full extent one could infer from the several different tithes, together constituting more than twenty percent of one's income). When they were not certain that the food they purchased had been tithed on, they would tithe it just in case. (Tithes involved a portion of agrarian produce.)²⁶

Luke 18.15-30: Suffer the children, a certain ruler, the needle's eye, who can be saved?

Children were people of no social status, and the disciples would not want the important time of their rabbi taken up with blessing them. But Jesus says that the kingdom belongs to those considered insignificant, those who do not approach it on the merits of their own status.²⁷

Luke 18.31-34; Matt. 20.17-19; Mark 10.32-34: Jesus foretells his death and resurrection

Standard Jewish messianic concepts did not accommodate a suffering Messiah (most Jewish references to that idea are from the second century or later). Although Jesus saw this idea in the Scriptures (24:44-46), Jewish tradition's different way of reading the Bible (normally passages about suffering were not

²⁴ Parry and Parry, *Understanding the Parables of Jesus*.

²⁵ Keener, *Background*. p. 227.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

applied to the expected triumphant Messiah) makes it difficult for the disciples to fit their belief in Jesus as the Messiah with the plain words he speaks.²⁸

Luke 18.35-43; Matt. 20.29-34; Mark 10.46-52: Blind Bartimaeus is healed

“Blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the highway side begging” (Mark 10.46)

"How simple Mark's message is. There is no artifice, no embellishment, no filigree. There is just the quiet, straightforward, but powerful narrative that builds with unalloyed intensity, reducing the gospel message and Christian living to its essence. Consider, for instance, the remarkable account of Bartimaeus, the blind man, sitting by the roadside just outside Jericho, begging from the passersby, hearing the shuffle and shouts of an approaching crowd, discerning in the passing hubbub one name repeated again and again, realizing, crying out of his own darkness into the dust and confusion of the highway, 'Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' *The people of the crowd looking down on this negligible bit of human flotsam, telling him to be quiet, to 'hold his peace,' but Bartimaeus persisting, continuing his cries louder and louder.* It is easy to see what an imaginative writer might do with such possibilities. But listen to the absolute simplicity of Mark's conclusion of these events, and feel the power of his unadorned narrative:

And Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called. And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth thee.

And he, casting away his garment, rose, and came to Jesus.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said unto him, Lord, that I might receive my sight.

And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way. (Mark 10:49-52.)

"How joyous it would be if we too could have the faith to call without ceasing, to arise, to see, to be whole again, and, by the power of our faith, take the way with our Master. Through the words of Mark this joy comes nearer to realization. Simplicity is power, in words and in faith."²⁹

The blind, the severely disabled and others who could not engage in the traditional occupations of the day could support themselves only by begging, normally on a busy roadside. Judaism considered it righteous to help them. Jericho was a prosperous town with a good climate, and Timaeus's son no doubt received adequate support there. "Bartimaeus" means "son of Timaeus" (bar is Aramaic for "son"); Mark clarifies that this was literally true in his case (not simply a name or title as in some bar names in 15:7; Acts 1:23; 4:36; 13:6; 15:22).³⁰

“Many charged him that he should hold his peace, but he cried the more a great deal” (Mark 10.48)

Except for what they had learned from listening to others recite, blind people in that time were largely illiterate in the law (Braille had not been invented yet, so they could not read, although like vast numbers of other illiterate Jews they could hear the Torah read). Although they were protected under the law of

²⁸ Keener, *Background*, p. 228.

²⁹ Neal E. Lambert and Richard H. Cracroft, "The Powerful Voices of the Gospels," *New Era*, Jan. 1973, 39-40.

³⁰ Keener, *Background*, p. 155.

Moses, they were largely socially and economically powerless, and Jesus' followers view this blind man's loud pleas as an intrusion, the way they had viewed the children (10:13). The disciples may have viewed Jesus' final journey to Jerusalem as a royal procession, and it was foolhardy and impudent to interrupt a royal procession.³¹

³¹ Ibid., p. 155-156.