

FOLLOW ME

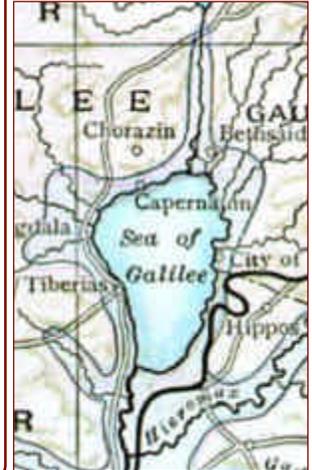
LESSON THIRTEEN: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MARK 10



FAST FACTS

- Jesus taught that God made marriage, and therefore people should not separate.
- Jesus further taught that God allows divorce, not because He is pleased with it, but as a concession to people.
- Jesus taught that children should not be prevented from coming to Him, and that Christians must receive the Kingdom with the attitude of a child.
- A rich young ruler refused to give up his possessions to follow Christ.
- We must not value or trust riches more than we do God.
- Christian leaders must humbly serve others.
- Jesus healed Bartimaeus of his blindness.

MAP



MARK 10:1-12

Much like our culture, first-century Judea also had a significant problem with divorce. The Pharisees themselves were divided on the issue: some followed Rabbi Shammai, who taught that divorce was permissible only when one spouse committed adultery, and others followed Rabbi Hillel, who permitted divorce for a wide variety of reasons. Jesus looked at the problem from a different perspective than the Pharisees: rather than focus on acceptable reasons for divorce, He was concerned with marriage itself.

Jesus acknowledged that the Mosaic Law permitted divorce (Deuteronomy 24:1). The reason for this, however, is not because God finds divorce to be acceptable — it is a concession from God for our human weakness and failure to maintain a healthy relationship (v. 5). God's intent in bringing a man and woman together in marriage is to form a new social group, a transforming relationship with each other and with Him. This intention can be clearly seen in the Holy Apostle Paul's description of marriage in Ephesians 5:22-33.

MARK 10:13-16

As in Mark 9:36-37, Jesus again told His Disciples that people who wish to receive the Kingdom of God must be like little children. There are many characteristics of children to which Jesus might be referring in this passage: their openness to — and simple trust in — others, and their eager anticipation and grateful acceptance of gifts (rather than believing they are owed the gifts).

OUR FAITH TEACHES

The Orthodox Church understands marriage to be a holy mystery established by God. At the same time, however, the Church — out of concern for the salvation of her members — allows for divorce and remarriage.

Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos explains:

[The Church allows divorce and remarriage] only in the context of individual pastoral guidance, and for grave reasons such as abandonment, permanent insanity, adultery, forcing the spouse into prostitution, or endangering the life of the spouse. In such cases, it is not that the Church "dissolves" a marriage by granting a divorce, but rather that the Church officially acknowledges and certifies that a marriage has already tragically failed. To quote St. Cyril of Alexandria (fifth century), "It is not a writ of divorce that dissolves marriage before God, but bad actions." The Church acts by God's mercy to recognize the failed marriage and to allow the possibility of another in order to forestall worse moral consequences.

Fr. John Matusiak points out that it is possible to be unfaithful to a spouse in ways other than sexual adultery:

I have never seen a case [of divorce] that did not involve adultery - whether it be a case of giving oneself over to another person, or to another thing, such as alcohol, drugs, work, etc. One can surely put their spouse in a secondary position as a result of becoming infatuated, obsessed and/or controlled with/by another person; one can also surely put their spouse in a secondary position as a result of becoming infatuated, obsessed and/or controlled with/by power, wealth, addictions, careers, etc.

We should also note how Jesus responded when the Disciples tried to keep children away from Him: He was *angry*. Children are to be allowed — in fact, they're to be *encouraged* — to come to Christ; it is for this reason that children are baptized, chrismated, and receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church. St. Basil the Great explains, "We consider every time of life, even the very earliest, suitable for receiving persons in to the community of faith."

MARK 10:17-31

This rich man — whom we learn from St. Matthew was young (Matthew 19:22), and from St. Luke was a ruler (Luke 18:18) — was a good man: St. John Chrysostom says he was "good rich soil," alluding to such passages as Mark 4:8, 20. The rich young ruler was eager to follow Jesus (v. 17), and he faithfully kept the commandments (v. 20).

There is one problem, however: the rich young ruler ultimately loves his money and possessions more than he loves God. When God — Who gave him all the luxuries he enjoyed — called him to give those luxuries to the poor, the rich young man refused: he was sad that he couldn't completely follow Jesus, but he still refused.

The problem was not that the man was rich: Blessed Theophylact says, "It is not riches that are evil. It is instead those who hold onto wealth who deserve to be accused." There have been many saints who were rich and powerful, and yet they fully loved God. One of the primary problems that the rich young ruler had (besides simply being materialistic and loving his luxuries more



LOOK AT YOURSELF

In these lessons we have often talked about the need to love God more than material things. Do you also remember to *trust* God more than you trust your ability to do everything yourself? We sin when we rely on our own strength to avoid temptation, or even to do the right thing, rather than relying on God to empower us and guide us. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote in the fourth century, "As fish cannot swim without water, and a bird cannot fly without air, so a Christian cannot advance a single step without Christ." Before doing anything else, we should pray to God for His guidance and strength. Our attitude in everything we do should be like that of the Holy Prophet Isaiah: "Trust in the LORD forever, for in Yah, the LORD, is everlasting strength" (Isaiah 26:4).

then God), and against which Christ warns us, is *trusting* in wealth. We must never think that *we*, by earning enough money and buying enough possessions, are truly self-sufficient and able to provide for all our needs: we must be like little children (remember vv. 36-37) and trust in *God* to provide for all our needs (and particularly our salvation).

MARK 10:32-52

This passage, like 9:33-50, discusses what it means to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus predicted in great detail His coming Passion and Resurrection, and yet again the Disciples misunderstood His teaching, with Ss. James and John even claiming that they would be willing to similarly suffer in order to become leaders with Jesus in glory (vv. 35-40; St. Matthew describes their mother asking for them to sit at Jesus' right hand (Matthew 20:20-28)). Jesus responded that the point of Christian ministry — and, in reality, the point of everything we do — is not to receive power, wealth, or fame, but instead simply to serve the people of God.

According to St. John Chrysostom, Bartimaeus, whom Jesus healed from blindness, illustrates what it means to follow Christ: "He will save assuredly; yet he will do so just in the way he has promised. But in what way has he promised? On our willing it, and on our hearing Him."

WHAT DID I LEARN ABOUT FOLLOWING JESUS?

- Divorce is a serious problem in our society. How does Jesus teach me to view marriage?
- Is my relationship with God like that of a child with his or her father? Do I trust Him and enjoy my relationship with Him?
- Is there anything I value more than my relationship with God? Do I rely on God, or do I think I can handle everything myself?
- Do I engage in faithful, humble service to others?

