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~ **The Rich Man, The Camel, and the Kingdom** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Matthew 19:1-29.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Matthew 19:1-29 NASB	Matthew 19:1-29 NLT
<p>When Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; ² and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there.</p> <p>³ Some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and asking, “Is it lawful <i>for a man</i> to divorce his wife for any reason at all?” ⁴ And He answered and said, “Have you not read that He who created <i>them</i> from the beginning MADE THEM MALE AND FEMALE, ⁵ and said, ‘FOR THIS REASON A MAN SHALL LEAVE HIS FATHER AND MOTHER AND BE JOINED TO HIS WIFE, AND THE TWO SHALL BECOME ONE FLESH’? ⁶ So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” ⁷ They *said to Him, “Why then did Moses command to GIVE HER A CERTIFICATE OF DIVORCE AND SEND <i>her</i> AWAY?” ⁸ He *said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. ⁹ And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.”</p> <p>¹⁰ The disciples *said to Him, “If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry.”</p> <p>¹¹ But He said to them, “Not all men <i>can</i> accept this statement, but <i>only</i> those to whom it has been given.</p> <p>¹² For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother’s womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are <i>also</i> eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept <i>this</i>, let him accept <i>it</i>.”</p> <p>¹³ Then <i>some</i> children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples</p>	<p>When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went down to the region of Judea east of the Jordan River. ² Large crowds followed him there, and he healed their sick.</p> <p>³ Some Pharisees came and tried to trap him with this question: “Should a man be allowed to divorce his wife for just any reason?”</p> <p>⁴ “Haven’t you read the Scriptures?” Jesus replied. “They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female.’” ⁵ And he said, “This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’ ⁶ Since they are no longer two but one, let no one split apart what God has joined together.”</p> <p>⁷ “Then why did Moses say in the law that a man could give his wife a written notice of divorce and send her away?” they asked.</p> <p>⁸ Jesus replied, “Moses permitted divorce only as a concession to your hard hearts, but it was not what God had originally intended. ⁹ And I tell you this, whoever divorces his wife and marries someone else commits adultery—unless his wife has been unfaithful.”</p> <p>¹⁰ Jesus’ disciples then said to him, “If this is the case, it is better not to marry!”</p> <p>¹¹ “Not everyone can accept this statement,” Jesus said. “Only those whom God helps. ¹² Some are born as eunuchs, some have been made eunuchs by others, and some choose not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom</p>

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rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." ¹⁵ After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

¹⁶ And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

¹⁷ And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ Then he *said to Him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS; ¹⁹ HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." ²⁰ The young man *said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" ²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go *and* sell your possessions and give to *the* poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." ²² But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

²³ And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

²⁴ Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁵ When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁶ And looking at *them* Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

²⁷ Then Peter said to Him, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?" ²⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.

of Heaven. Let anyone accept this who can."

¹³ One day some parents brought their children to Jesus so he could lay his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples scolded the parents for bothering him.

¹⁴ But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are like these children." ¹⁵ And he placed his hands on their heads and blessed them before he left.

¹⁶ Someone came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

¹⁷ "Why ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ "Which ones?" the man asked.

And Jesus replied: "You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself."

²⁰ "I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"

²¹ Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁴ I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

²⁵ The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

²⁶ Jesus looked at them intently and said, "Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is

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	<p>possible.”</p> <p>²⁷ Then Peter said to him, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?”</p> <p>²⁸ Jesus replied, “I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.</p> <p>²⁹ And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

From *Through Peasant Eyes* by Kenneth Bailey

1. The five commandments mentioned in Luke 18:20 deal with loyalty to family, physical destruction of another, respect for property, verbal destruction of another, and loyalty to family again. In 18:28 the categories are loyalty go family and property and in 18:22 Jesus wants him to give up property and to give him ultimate loyalty
2. In 18:18 the rich man called him “Good Teacher.” He was trying to flatter Jesus. In the Middle East, when one gives a noble title, one expects one in return. He probably expected Jesus to reply, “Noble Ruler.” Jesus challenges him at the very beginning and replies, “Why are you calling me good when we know that only God is good.” Why are you trying to flatter me with an exalted title hoping you will receive one in return? If only God is worthy of exalted titles, why do you want one in return? Let’s get to the point – what are the commandments?
3. “The family estate is of supreme value in Middle Eastern society because it is a symbol of the cohesiveness of the extended family. One must observe at close range the lengths to which a Middle Eastern family will go to keep a part of the extended family in the ancestral home (even in today’s mobile society) to sense that the thrust of what is demanded of the ruler. He is asked to place loyalty to the person of Jesus higher than loyalty to his family and his family estate, for in a very deep sense the latter two are one. 164
4. The rich man grieves over his wealth because he loved money but he also grieves because he must give up his status. His wealth would have been partly the family estate over which he ruled. He was the ruler of the estate. To give it up meant to give up his status which was a difficult thing in that culture. Jesus was asking him to go from being a leader to being a follower.
5. 18:26 – Then who can be saved? Here is their thinking, “Rich men are able to build synagogues, endow orphanages, offer alms to the poor, refurbish temples, and fund many other worthwhile efforts. If anyone is saved, surely it is they. Jesus says that such people cannot enter the

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kingdom by such noble efforts. We commoners do not have the wealth to carry out such noble deeds. Who then can be saved?" 167

6. "In the old obedience, the faithful were told not to steal another's property. In the new obedience, one's own property may have to be left behind. In the old obedience one was told to leave the neighbor's wife alone. In the new obedience the disciple may be required to leave his own wife alone. In the old obedience the faithful were to honor father and mother, which of course, popularly understood meant (and still means) to stay home and take care of them until they die and are respectfully buried. In the new obedience the disciple may have to leave them in response to a higher loyalty. It is nearly impossible to communicate what all of this means in our Middle Eastern context. The two unassailable loyalties that any Middle Easterner is almost required to consider more important than life itself are family and the village home. When Jesus puts both of these in one list, and then demands a loyalty the supersedes them both, he is requiring that which is truly impossible to the Middle Easterner, given the pressures of this culture. The ten commandments he can manage, but this is too much. Only with God are such things possible. Surely the shock of the passage cuts deeply into the presuppositions of any culture. Our point is that this shock is felt all the more intensely in a traditional culture where these particular values are supreme. 169

Answer these reflective questions.

The Pharisees asked Jesus about divorce laws in their days. One school of thought is that divorce was permissible for immorality only. The other is that a man could divorce his wife for any cause. Why do you think this was so important to the Pharisees?

Jesus said the kingdom of heaven belongs to little children. Why did he say this? In what ways do children illustrate the kingdom of God?

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Why do you think the rich young ruler did not follow Jesus?

What do you think was the most important thing in the rich young ruler's life? What is most important in your life? Is Jesus at the center of your life or is something else?
