

This morning we're headed to Matthew 19. It's actually where we'll be hanging out for the rest of this series, but last week was important to start in Acts 8 with the story of the Ethiopian eunuch. I promise not every sermon in this series is about eunuchs but it's going to seem like that again today. So just take my word for it. My apologies also if it's making for any odd lunch conversations.

Discipleship is another weird concept. What does it really mean? To be a disciple is basically to be a follower – maybe we should say a devoted follower of someone or something. Discipleship is the condition of being a disciple. This feels like it breaks a grammar rule of not defining a word with the word. I feel like this doesn't really help me. I think I need to see what it looks like. Like in a spelling bee – can you use that word in a sentence? Not really, but I can use it in a paragraph. Sarah is a disciple of Jesus. She follows His teachings. As such discipleship is a lifelong pursuit of following Jesus, learning what He taught, following those teachings, and becoming more like Him. But, that still doesn't help me. It feels very abstract. What does that entail? What does that look like? I still need an example. I need a picture. My mother and I always say – we're visual people. We just need to see it to decide. We'd think about rearranging a room – we couldn't imagine it – we'd just need to actually move all the furniture to see it and decide that no that does not work so let's move it all back. I need a visual.

This leads me to Matthew 19. The Pharisees have come to Jesus to test Him by asking a controversial question about divorce. Some topics are universally controversial and have been throughout history. Jesus, as per usual, recognizes what they're doing and doesn't fall for their trap or take the bait for an argument, but rather answers their question in a completely different way. He gives a really great sermon on marriage in the process, which

we'll come back to next week – spoiler alert, actually the next two weeks will hit on why marriage is a big deal to God. What you need to know today is that in verses 3-9 of this chapter, Jesus has just affirmed the value and importance of marriage and He has affirmed what the Scripture has said about marriage throughout the Old Testament. But then, He turns and makes an incredibly compelling case for the state of singleness. The disciples are super confused by what Jesus has just said – which to be honest the disciples were often confused by what Jesus said. They ask Him a question by way of a statement, **“If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” Matthew 19:10** Now, we know for sure that Peter is married because he has a mother-in-law that we were already introduced to in chapter 8 when Jesus healed her from a fever. It would make sense that most if not all of these 12 men who we know as His Disciples were married so it's a little late to be asking this question. Should we not have married? Wait, what is Jesus saying? I can sort of picture Jesus shaking His head and saying, guys, no, you've missed it. Let me start over. Listen up. And then Jesus says something crazy when He uses their question to elevate the role of singleness as a real choice that real people could make and would make, and goes on to use the figure of the eunuch to paint a picture of radical obedience. If you remember from last week eunuchs were considered less than and were excluded from worshipping in the assembly of God's people and from making sacrifices to the Lord. Rather than using the eunuch as an example of exclusion Jesus announces a new role within His own kingdom. In doing this, Jesus fulfills the day the prophet Isaiah had written about hundreds of years before in Isaiah 56 when the eunuch would be welcomed into the family of God and given honor previously reserved only for those who had a family. **Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been**

given. For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.” Matthew 19:11-12

Jesus listed three types of eunuchs. The first two are categories of eunuchs the disciples knew about plus they were the types the Scripture mentions. We looked at some of those passages last week. There were other popular writings at the time of Jesus that talked about these types of eunuchs too. Jesus lists these first for clarity. Had Jesus just said “some people will become eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom” the disciples would have had in mind those eunuchs who were born that way or made that way for a specific reason. The disciples might have missed the point that those who would renounce marriage and become eunuchs for the sake of His kingdom would do so completely voluntarily, not because they had to, not because someone forced them, not because there wasn't any other choice, but out of radical obedience. Jesus was building up to a revolutionary idea – one that was going to shock the disciples, maybe even offend them a little, and would definitely be followed by that mind blown emoji when they text their friends later – you are not going to believe the crazy thing Jesus said today. I mean He's said some crazy stuff but this was weird. He actually said people might choose to remain single in obedience to Him and in service to His kingdom. If Jesus intended to call His 12 disciples to deeper obedience by using the most extreme example available to Him, I think He succeeded.

The third type of eunuch as described by Jesus is an example of what a disciple who is prepared to lose herself or himself for the cause of Christ will look like. Remember when we did the series on Revelation, and we talked about how some things were literal and some were figurative? Well, same thing here. Jesus is calling literal men and women who

can accept this call to renounce marriage because of the kingdom of heaven, but He is also figuratively using the image of the eunuch to exemplify what radical obedience to Christ will look like. There are some, myself included who have been called to renounce marriage. But, remember in the part of this passage that we'll come back to next week – Jesus affirmed marriage – while talking to a bunch of married guys, and affirmed singleness, which was good because He Himself was single. In other words, not everyone was to accept this word as a call to singleness but some were. And not everyone was supposed to be married but some were. I'm getting ahead of myself though because this is next week's message on marriage being something Jesus says God set up from the beginning. But this morning we are considering the eunuch who renounces marriage for the kingdom as a figurative character. There was something for Jesus' married disciples listening that day in Matthew 19 to learn from this third type of eunuch and there are important lessons for all of us today who call ourselves disciples of Jesus. Married or single, there is something we can all learn about discipleship from the figure of the eunuch. So let me give you 3 lessons he teaches us and then we'll circle back to what discipleship looks like.

Lesson 1: Loyalty to the King and His Kingdom

In the ancient world kings lived in constant fear of being dethroned. In Israel if you remember – God promised David he would never cease to have a son on the throne. So when God tore the kingdom away from Solomon's son, Rehoboam, He left him the tribe of Judah and Benjamin to rule and it was passed down generation after generation. Israel on the other hand was ruled by lots of different family lines. There was always a coup in the making. Someone who would raise up an army – overthrow the reigning king and establish

their own dynasty. The result was that kings were paranoid and super particular about who would serve them and get close to them.

The eunuch's inability to create a family of his own made him an excellent candidate for service in royal households. The biblical examples we have of eunuchs are those serving in foreign courts in places of prestige and importance. The court of King Xerxes in the book of Esther makes multiple references to the eunuch who worked for him. If you remember the Ethiopian eunuch from last week's story also served in a court – he worked for Queen Candace of Ethiopia – and he had a high-ranking position. It is noteworthy that many believe Nehemiah to have been a eunuch because history says the Persian kings typically had eunuchs in their service. At the very start of the book of Nehemiah we learn he was cupbearer for the king – the person bringing food to the king had to be trusted – this was a prime way of getting rid of the king – poison him! Eunuchs were thought to be more loyal to the king for the sole reason that they had no heir by which to establish their own future dynasty and therefore held little threat.

Additionally, the eunuch's who served kings fully relied on them for provision for themselves. There was no one else to care for them either. Remember, sons were a person's retirement plan. So kings relied on eunuchs to care for them and eunuchs relied on the king to provide for them. In this way the eunuch's future was tied to the continued reign of the king and his heirs who would succeed him. He swore complete allegiance to the king – I'm all in. I'm not in this for myself. I'm not here to seek a position or a title or a reputation I'm just here to serve. In return the King promised to provide and meet the needs the eunuch had for protection, a place to live, a seat at the table, and a future. The lesson for all of us is

that following Jesus looks like total and complete allegiance and loyalty to the King in order to further His kingdom alone.

Lesson 2: There is a personal cost involved in serving the King

Now remember who Jesus is talking to in Matthew 19 – His disciples. The calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John, in Matthew 4, had been a call to abandon physical comfort and security to follow Jesus. These four guys were professional fishermen at the time when Jesus called them, they were most likely making a very good living and providing well for their families, yet they left their boats immediately, denying their own career goals, financial safety, and future provision for the sake of the king and the kingdom. In Matthew 19:27 Peter will remind Jesus that they have “left everything to follow you.” Discipleship is not without cost. We sometimes get this confused with salvation. Salvation from Jesus is a free gift, but discipleship will cost everything. However, Jesus had already told His disciples what the cost to follow Him would be back in chapter 16 when He said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” Matthew 16:24** What we each deny of ourselves is different for each of us. I mentioned in a sermon earlier this year that I don’t like pop or anything with carbonation. If I were going to fast something for the next 30 days and said I think I’ll deny myself pop – that’s not a sacrifice. I do that anyway. If I said I was giving up a morning cup of coffee that is denying myself. So, the ask might be different, but it doesn’t change the fact that there is a cost for every person. For those 4 disciples in particular it had to do with their livelihood. But let’s look at some other costs:

The demands of discipleship are on full display in Matthew 19. We’ll talk about the demands for Christian marriage next week when we go back to the beginning of the

chapter, but Jesus demands faithfulness in marriage for those who follow after Him. He demands total and complete obedience in every area of our lives, including sexual activity, for the sake of the kingdom. Later in verse 21 of this chapter there is a rich young man who comes to Jesus weighing the cost of following Jesus. What will it really require for him? What will it really cost? Because he's been following all the rules – it was no problem for him to do so – he was a good guy. He was already not murdering, not stealing, not lying, honoring his parents – most of that wasn't too hard for this guy. He comes asking what he'll really have to deny to truly follow. Jesus says it will cost him the selling of his earthly, material possessions in exchange for treasures in heaven. The rich young man walks away – he didn't realize what it would cost to follow Jesus was the things he actually had and really liked. Oh, well, if it's going to hurt a little, if I'll have to deny myself something I really want, if it's going to cost me then I'm not willing to pay the price. That's when Peter comes to Jesus to ask – wait, we have left everything – we've done what you said – what will there be for us? Jesus says – for some what it will cost to follow me completely is saying no to marriage and children but **“everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” Matthew 19:29**

“The whole of the New Testament teaches that the radical demands of Christian discipleship must be met within the mysterious context of a disciple who is prepared to lose himself in his openness to the gifts which God alone can give.” Francis Moloney The king will provide for you – a life of service to the King is not devoid of pleasure and good things – but it will cost you before you receive those good gifts in return.

There is a side lesson on the cost of serving the King. A lesson 2B of the eunuch. It only applies to a few not all but it's an important lesson for all of us to be aware. **"For the sake of pleasing the King [there are those who] have been willing to offer him this prized area of their sexuality, and have been willing to stay single as their Master did."**

Michael Green. For some the cost to serve the king is the very thing we're all taught is a normal rite of passage – to grow up, get married, start a family. There are some who are asked to deny themselves for a season and remain single and others who will count the cost for a lifetime. Just as in every other cost that's been named – only you know what Jesus is asking of you.

Lesson 2B is over – back to the lesson for all of us. This third type of eunuch that Jesus uses is an example of what a disciple who is prepared to lose herself or himself for the cause of Christ will look like. To be clear: Singleness is not greater than marriage and marriage is not greater than singleness. The point being made in Matthew 19 is about total surrender and the cost of obedience and that makes both marriage and singleness a matter of discipleship. It means our careers, our retirement plans, and our possessions – are matters of discipleship. It means our future plans, our callings, our money – matters of discipleship. The way we live, every area of our lives – our work life, sex life, thought life, church life – matters of discipleship. Are we prepared to lose ourselves for the cause of Christ and being a servant of the King?

The eunuch serves as a call for all followers of Christ to renounce anything that stands in contrast to the call to deny themselves and take up a cross. **"To be 'eunuch priests' for the sake of the kingdom is to have a will for total dedication and the renunciation of all**

lesser ideals, objectives and obligations.” A. E. Harvey There is a cost to discipleship, but the rewards for obedience to Christ far outweigh the initial price.

Lesson 3: Complete and continued obedience to the King is required

Ultimately, the eunuch teaches us a lesson about obedience. I mentioned Nehemiah is thought to be a eunuch because of the role he served in a foreign king’s court. There’s no mention of a wife or children for Nehemiah – only his father’s name and a brother. When we consider his story, we see a few key points about obedience. He was serving King Artaxerxes when he began to feel a call to follow the Lord in a new and deeper way. Nehemiah heard about a need in Jerusalem, a city hundreds of miles away – close to 800 miles if you went straight across but that has you going through a desert. There was a stirring when he heard about the neglect and the ruins around Jerusalem. He began to pray – **O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands... Nehemiah 1:5** God began to move in his heart and download a plan for what could be done. It would not be without great personal cost. Nehemiah had a certain future in his role as cupbearer. His needs were provided for by staying in the court and not making any waves. In fact, when King Artaxerxes asked Nehemiah if something was wrong, and he explained that the walls were down in Jerusalem, the land of his ancestors, and the King asked what was it Nehemiah was getting at – we’re told Nehemiah breathed a quiet prayer for help – it seems he was nervous to make this request not knowing how the king would respond. It could have been seen as an act of insurrection and perhaps he could have been killed for wanting to leave to build another kingdom. Because remember loyalty to the king and his kingdom is a big

deal! But King Artaxerxes was willing to let Nehemiah return to Jerusalem to do what God had put in his heart to do.

When he arrived in Jerusalem it wasn't smooth sailing. There was persecution by others who didn't understand God's call, there was physical danger as they built the walls again around Jerusalem and restored the gates, there were many distractions which tried to pull Nehemiah's attention from the call of God – but Nehemiah was determined to obey and serve the true King of all Kings. He knew what God had told him to do. The opposition to the building project increased and his enemies tried to get him to stop. Nehemiah responded by sending a messenger to say, "I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you." They kept after him to come down off the wall and engage with them but Nehemiah prayed to the Lord – now strengthen my hands. There was a work to be done, a command from God to be obeyed and nothing would stop him. He had pledged complete allegiance to the Lord, his loyalty was to the King of Kings and to building His kingdom alone. **"The book of Nehemiah demonstrates that commitment is costly. It requires our time, our resources, our thought life, and even our very soul. The depth of these requirements will increase with every obstacle we encounter... this cupbearer willingly paid the costs necessary to ensure that his commitments stood strong...Nehemiah's commitment to the Lord's work rested upon...the recognition of the Lord's calling and enablement, as well as his dependence on him."** – David M. Hoffeditz

It costs something to serve the Lord with radical obedience, but obedience is what is ultimately required of every follower of King Jesus. In the end, Nehemiah's obedience resulted in the walls being rebuilt, the book of the law being read, a revival of repentance

sweeping across the city, a return to purity, and a restored city. He completed the assignment the Lord had put in his heart to do.

This is what discipleship looks like. **Discipleship looks like an individual who will give everything they have and all that they are, no matter the cost, in obedient service to King Jesus.** There is a work for you to do. The King has need of your service. What is He asking you to surrender to Him today?

Jesus told His disciples that day in Matthew 19 – not everyone can accept this word... but the one who can accept this should accept it. These are the lessons these single individuals bear witness to to us today. Not everyone will live for Jesus. The rich young ruler proves that not everyone is willing to lay down everything in complete surrender to do so. Each of the disciples showed us that we will all be asked to give up something for the sake of following Jesus. Nehemiah shows us there are personal costs attached and not everyone will understand your assignment or call. And the eunuch who renounces everything for the kingdom of heaven – well Jesus intends for us to learn from him what discipleship looks like. There is a cost but the return is that the King will provide for us all that we need – salvation, forgiveness, provision, family, legacy. You name it and the king provides it. **When we serve the King, the King takes care of us in return.** This is the greatest lesson we learn from this single witness. *(band come back)*

Will you stand with me this morning – what is God speaking to your heart? What is standing between you and complete surrender to the Lord? The King is looking for obedient surrender today. I have no idea what it will cost you but I believe there are people in this room right now who need to make their way to the front – to the altar – to lay down the remaining thing they've been holding on to. You can come now as they sing. What do

you need to give to Jesus? Your life? Your comfort? Your relationship? Your plan for your kid? Your job? Your financial security? I don't know. But discipleship looks like daily surrender to Jesus. It looks like complete surrender to the King. It looks like complete obedience to whatever Jesus is speaking to you. Come to the altar this morning and surrender all you have and all you are to Him.