

November 29, 2009

FAITHLESS HUSBANDS AND FRUITFUL EUNUCHS
MATTHEW 19.1-15

Mt's structure: narratives and speeches/discourses (chs. 5-7, 10, 13, 18, 23-25).

The placement of the dispute with the Pharisees concerning marriage and divorce, the discussion of eunuchs and the kingdom with the disciples, and Jesus' laying hands on the children and declaring their participation in the kingdom, introduces a section in which Jesus is presented as Israel's true husband coming to his bride.

Mt has a purpose in arranging material the way he does. Not haphazard. Begins this narrative section with a "family theme."

Interesting scenes in 19–22: marriage and weddings (19.1-9; 22.1-14; 22.23-33; and also the king/husband coming to daughter Jerusalem in the "Triumphal entry" in 21.1-11); gardens or vineyards, which in Scripture is bride imagery (20.1-16; 21.33-46); children emphasized (19.13-15; 20.20-28; 21.16; 21.28-32; and possibly the "young man" in 19.16ff.).

Israel's true Husband / King has come. This section introduces the advent of the Husband.

1. JESUS, MARRIAGE, DIVORCE, AND ISRAEL (1-9)

Return to the land of Marriage (1-2): geographical information: leaves Galilee and returns to the region of Judea beyond Jordan.

Jesus has been there 2x in Mt. First, at birth under Herod/Pharaoh and had to flee to a Gentile territory, Egypt. Second, at baptism and had to flee to a Gentile territory, Galilee, after the arrest of John (4.12ff.). Galilee is where he is from chs 4–19.

Images of Judea and Jordan from ch. 3: cleansing and entrance into the Promised Land. Jesus heals people *there*. Restoration/Resurrection occurring so that the bride will be made ready.

cf. Isa 62.4: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and **your land Married** [Beulah]; for YHWH delights in you, and **your land shall be married.**"

The story of the Son and his bride (3-9): Marriage = the reflection of God's own relationship with the world. begins in Genesis.

God's intention: create a bride for the Son. The Father creates a daughter from the side of his Son and gives the daughter to the Son for marriage. Story of history. Story begins with marriage (Gen) and ends with marriage (Rev 21-22).

Theme in Scripture: God chooses Jacob who becomes Israel, God's son (cf. e.g. Ex 4.22, 23). From his son God creates the bride who is also called Israel (just like the woman in the Garden takes on the name "Man" with her husband).

Sinai: YHWH marries Israel. Creates a tent and covers her with the wing of his garment (Tabernacle; cf. Ezek 16; Jer 31.32; Hosea). Status of "wife" does not give Israel a pass but makes her sins all the more heinous.

Bride (i.e. humanity) needs to be cleansed from the fall b/c of corruption of sin. Bride needs to be re-created, cleansed, and resurrected so that she can be prepared for her husband.

God's stewards: priests, kings, and prophets. These men would represent the Husband, YHWH, to them and also prepare them for their ultimate marriage. Pharisees are representative of those stewards in Jesus' day as teachers in Israel (cf. Jn 3).

They failed. Instead of purifying the bride they led them into covenant infidelity. When Jesus speaks about the only just cause for divorce in this passage—Gr. *porneia*, fornication, covenant unfaithfulness—that is a word that perfectly describes what the bride, Israel, was engaged in.

Idolatry = covenant unfaithfulness (even more specifically assoc. with sexual sin). They have chased after other husbands (Heb = *baals*).

Idolatry during Jesus' time = oral law tradition (cf. e.g. Mt 15).

The questions that the Pharisees are asking, trying to trap Jesus and justify themselves, are actually condemning themselves. Looking for ways to escape accountability, but Jesus is telling them that they will be held accountable.

Israel has been seriously unfaithful. B/c of this YHWH has the grounds for divorce. Jesus will tell about the “divorce” of daughter Jerusalem (cf. 21.5) in 23–25.

YHWH has grounds for divorce. The one-flesh relationship is violated. These *men* have torn apart what God has joined together. They have led the bride to unfaithfulness ultimately by the rejection of the Son to whom they were to be married.

2. JESUS, EUNUCHS, AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (10-12)

Eunuchs are generally those males who do not have the physical ability to have children b/c of some deformity from birth or castration that has taken place after birth (cf. v. 12).

“Eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” does not seem to necessitate physical deformity but a choice of celibacy or abstinence from marriage.

Placement of dialogue is interesting: between marriage and children.

Eunuchs have a vocation. They are servants of the king (generally) who have responsibilities concerning his wife/wives.

E.g. the book of Esther. Eunuchs had responsibility to prepare the bride for her presentation to the king.

The leadership of Israel were supposed to be eunuchs in this sense. They were supposed to be preparing the bride for the King.

Jesus comes—YHWH-in-the-flesh—and he is not only the husband, but he must take upon himself the eunuch’s duty. Jesus is *the* Eunuch in this way. He is unmarried “for the sake of the kingdom.”

Not a eunuch in the physical sense. If that had been the case, he would not have been an adequate high priest and perfect sacrifice. He would not have fulfilled the laws of Lev 21.18-21 and 22.24.

3. JESUS, CHILDREN, AND THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (13-15)

Eunuchs cannot fulfill the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, which is the original purpose of marriage (Ge 1). Body of the eunuch is “dead” in this sense. The entire old creation (fall - resurrection) has this status; i.e. it cannot produce life/seed (Ge 3.15).

Foreshadowings of this. Cf. Rom 4. Abraham and Sarah are embodiment of old creation. Both are “dead.” The only way the son will be born is through Abraham’s being “ripped in half” through circumcision. After the “old creation” dies, then the seed/life/fruitfulness can be realized in the bride.

Jesus comes as a member of the old creation and must be cut off through circumcision; i.e. his death (Col 2.11-12). Once he goes through this, his bride will become fruitful.

Isa 56.3-5: “Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to YHWH say, “YHWH will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree [i.e. unfruitful].” For thus says YHWH: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.”

YHWH will give a name to the eunuchs that will not be cut off. Throughout Scripture God grants a name to his people (something he promised to Abraham in Gen 12). This name—their covenant standing with all of its privileges and responsibilities—is then given to the next generation through the laying on of hands and blessing.

Jesus lays hands on these children as the true Jacob/Israel and gives them his name. This is a name (assoc. w/ the kingdom of heaven) that is everlasting and will never be cut off.

Jesus’ actions declare and anticipate the fact that he and his bride will be fruitful. His present status—his death with the old creation—is not permanent. He will be married. He will have children.

1. The responsibility of the leadership in the church is to prepare the bride for her husband.