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September 26th: Zechariah 6 & Matthew 19:1-15

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The vision of the chariots and the crowning of Joshua the high priest. Jesus teaches concerning divorce.

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Transcript

Zechariah chapter 6. Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black horses, the third white horses, and the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them strong. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord? And the angel answered and said to me, These are going out to the four winds of heaven.

After presenting themselves before the lord of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes toward the north country, the white ones go after them and the dappled ones go toward the south country. When the strong horses came out, they were impatient to go and patrol the earth.

And he said, Go, patrol the earth. So they patrolled the earth. Then he cried to me, Behold, those who go toward the north country have set my spirit at rest in the north country.

And the word of the lord came to me, Take from the exiles Heldai, Tobijah, and Jediah, who have arrived from Babylon, and go the same day to the house of Jeziel the son of Zephaniah. Take from them silver and gold, and make a crown, and set it on the head of Joshua the son of Jehozadak the high priest, and say to him, Thus says the lord of hosts, Behold the man whose name is the branch, for he shall branch out from his place, and he shall build the temple of the lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the lord, and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne.

And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the council of peace shall be between them both. And the crown shall be in the temple of the lord as a reminder to Helam, Tobijah, Jediah, and Hen the son of Zephaniah. And those who are far off shall come and help to build the temple of the lord.

And you shall know that the lord of hosts has sent me to you. And this shall come to pass if you will diligently obey the voice of the lord your God. The Night Visions of Zachariah take up the first six chapters of the book.

The series of the visions end in this chapter with the eighth. The visions give Zachariah and through him the people an insight into what the lord is doing in their days. Although many of them are discouraged by external opposition and by the apparent reduction in the glory of the restoration temple, the lord wants them to perceive, not by human sight, but by faith in his promise and vision, what is really taking place.

Something far more glorious than they might otherwise have appreciated. To this point we've had seven visions. The first is the horsemen in the deep, the world being at rest, but at rest because the lord has yet to act for his people.

That was all going to change very soon. The second, the four horns and the four craftsmen. The four horns scatter Judah, representing pagan powers, like the four horns of a false altar.

However, the four craftsmen are sent to cast them down, establishing the throne of the lord instead. The third is the man with the measuring line, a man sent out to measure Jerusalem as the holy place of the lord's dwelling. The fourth vision concerns the cleansing of the high priest.

Satan's opposition is overcome as the high priest Joshua has his filthy garments removed and he is clothed once more for his office, representing the removal of the iniquity of the people. The fifth vision was of the lampstand and the olive trees. Zerubbabel and the people were fueled like a glorious lamp by the power of the Holy Spirit for their work in the land.

The sixth vision was of a flying scroll, the lord's judgment coming out from the temple to purify his people. The seventh, a woman in a basket going out from the land. The

wickedness that had been at the heart of the people was being removed and expelled.

And now the eighth vision is of the chariots and horses going out. James Jordan has argued that there is a chiastic structure in these visions. The first of the night visions had four sets of horses and this vision has four chariots, as in the first vision the horses and their riders patrol the earth.

We've returned to elements of the first vision when the world was at rest, but now the lord is going to act in a new way, establishing his order and disrupting that false peace. At the heart of the temple, in the Holy of Holies, the lord's chariot was situated. First Chronicles chapter 28 verse 18 speaks of the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the lord.

Outside the temple there were chariots of water. Angels are presented as riding chariots in the ascension of Elijah. We also see chariots in 2nd Kings chapter 6 verse 17 where the eyes of Elijah's servant were opened to see horses and chariots of fire on the mountains surrounding them.

Psalms 68 verse 17 also speaks of the chariots of the lord. Chariots were military vehicles, key parts of the armies of many ancient near eastern nations. In contrast to the horses of the first vision, these chariots are prepared and sent out for war.

Here there are four chariots. In Zacharias' visions we have already seen four sets of horses, four horns, four craftsmen and four winds of heaven. The number four seems to represent, among other things, the whole of the earth, each of the directions of the compass and each corner of the world.

The four chariots in Zacharias' vision come forth from between two mountains. In working out the meaning of the symbolism here, it is helpful once more to remember that Zacharias' night visions focus upon the temple, its rebuilding and the re-establishment of the lord's throne and the people's worship within it. When looking for clues to the meaning of elements of the visionary imagery, we should look first to the temple and to its furniture.

We should observe that the mountains here seem to function as a sort of threshold with the horses coming out from between them. Significantly, they are made of bronze. Commentators speculate about their identity, but the most natural way to understand these is by recalling the two bronze pillars, Jachin and Boaz, that were at the entrance to the temple.

In addition to being a symbolic model of things such as the human body, the temple was a symbolic model of the cosmos. The courtyard contained symbols of the land, the bronze altar. It contained a symbol of the sea, the bronze sea.

And perhaps we should see the bronze pillars as symbols of, among other things,

mountains. Once we have appreciated the connection between mountains and pillars, the meaning of the bronze mountains may make a bit more sense. As in others of Zachariah's visions, what he is seeing is not merely the physical earthly temple but the heavenly reality to which it corresponds and which it symbolizes.

The bronze mountains flank the entrance to the Lord's throne room in heaven from which the chariots are sent forth. As in Ezekiel's vision of the restoration temple and in other aspects of Zachariah's night visions, we see that the divine reality that corresponds to the modest building of the temple is quite remarkable. The people seeing the restored temple may only see bronze pillars of relatively short stature, but these bronze pillars represent the entrance to the Lord's palace and should be seen as if they were vast bronze mountains.

In verses 2 and 3 we are given the colours of the horses of the chariots. We were also given the colours of the horses back in chapter 1, but the colours are different here. The colours of the horses here have much more in common with the colours of the horses in John's vision in Revelation chapter 6 verses 1 to 8. Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, Come.

And I looked, and behold, a white horse, and its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering and to conquer. When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, Come. And out came another horse, bright red.

His rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that people should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, Come. And I looked, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a pair of scales in his hand.

And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine. When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, Come. And I looked, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider's name was Death, and Hades followed him.

And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by wild beasts of the earth. What are we to make of the colours of the horses in Zachariah's vision? Elsewhere in the prophets we see groups of destroyers listed, typically three or sometimes four in number. Most commonly these are given as pestilence, sword, and famine, with captivity as an occasional addition.

The horses in Revelation seem to represent conquest, sword, famine, and death, or pestilence. Here in Zachariah we should presume that the red horses are connected with blood, and therefore the sword, and the black horses with death, mourning, and

desolation, perhaps also economic disaster. The white horses represent victory and conquest.

The dappled horses represent plague, sickness, and pestilence. Jordan suggests that the dappled horses might make us think of leprosy. Zachariah asks the interpreting angel about the meaning of the horses.

He is told that the horses are going out to the four winds of heaven. The four winds of heaven were formally mentioned in Zachariah chapter 2 verse 6 in the third of the visions. For I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the heavens, declares the Lord.

There the Lord declared that he was making his people like the four winds of the heavens. The second vision also referred to four craftsmen responding to the four horns, as in the case of the third vision we should recognise connections to this final vision. In chapter 1 there was a man riding on a red horse, to whom the three sets of horses and their riders reported.

Here there are four sets of horses mentioned, but only three of them are mentioned as going out. There is no reference to the first chariot with the red horses going out. Likely we should connect the chariot with the red horses with the man on the red horse in chapter 1. Although some wonder whether the red horses are referred to as the strong horses in verse 7, it is likely that they do not go out.

The Lord's judgments are occurring by means other than war, chiefly through pestilence and plague and by economic disaster. The chariots that go forth go in the direction of the north and the south. The two chariots that go north are the black chariot, followed after by the white chariot, presumably symbolising devastation and desolation, followed by conquest.

The chariot that goes south is the chariot pulled by the dappled horse, representing pestilence and plague. Fittingly, it seems to go to Egypt, which would be struck again as it was in the Exodus. The two great powers that dominated much of Israel's life were the northern power and the southern power.

The southern power was typically Egypt, the power in the north was Assyria, Babylon or Persia or some other power like that. It is possible, as Anthony Pettison notes, that the south country might be a reference to Edom, however Egypt is the more likely possibility. The horses sent forth are described as strong.

They are the war horses of the Lord, eager for battle. As they perform their work, they set the spirit of the Lord at rest, having accomplished the purpose for which they were sent out. The chariots deal with the bad peace that the patrolling riders described in chapter 1 verse 11, establishing a good rest for the spirit of the Lord in its place.

Perhaps we should also note a hint of a Sabbath theme here. After the night vision's end, Zechariah receives a prophecy and is instructed to perform a sign act. He is instructed to take some recently returned exiles, Heldi, Tobijah, Jediah and Jeziah, taking silver and gold from them and making a crown with it.

Returning exiles brought with them large quantities of treasures for the rebuilding of the temple and other purposes, often donated by rulers, as we see in places like Ezra. The form of the term used for crown here is plural but the context makes it clear that this is a single crown. As Pettison notes, some commentators see in this a composite or a two-tiered crown, which would be a fitting image for the vision.

The crown is then placed upon the head of Joshua the High Priest, symbolising the uniting of the offices of king and priest. Zechariah then delivers a prophecy concerning the coming branch. The figure of the branch was previously mentioned in chapter 3 verse 8, again in connection with Joshua.

There it was clear that Joshua himself was not the branch, but that he was a sign of the coming branch. The figure of the branch is mentioned elsewhere in scripture, in places like Jeremiah chapter 23 verses 5 to 6, where it is clear that he is the messianic heir of David. As Jordan underlines, it is the priest who has made a king, not the king who has made a priest.

Although the high priest had a turban with a golden plate with holy to the Lord engraved upon it, here he is given the sort of crown that the king might wear. In the Old Testament kingship and priesthood were separated. However the expectation was that one day a priest would come who would enjoy the prerogatives of kingship.

Most famously there is a reference to priesthood after the order of Melchizedek in Psalm 110 verse 4 which was of great interest to the author of Hebrews. The sign act immediately raises some questions. Is Joshua being identified as the branch? From chapter 3 where he is presented not as the branch but as a sign of the branch, and from the fact that Joshua is not a descendant of David, it doesn't seem to be that he is the one being referred to as the branch here.

The branch is said to branch out from his place, perhaps a reference to his arising from the root of Jesse. He will build the temple of the Lord. Although the temple of the Lord is currently being built by Zerubbabel and according to divine promise Zerubbabel would also finish that building, this seems to point forward to a greater temple which the Messiah, the branch, would construct.

We are told that there will be a priest upon or by his throne. Whose throne? The branch's? Some see two different figures here. Jeremiah chapter 33 verses 17 to 18 speak of continuing Davidic kingship and Levitical priesthood.

For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever. However this does not seem to fit the context or the language well, especially when we consider the way that Joshua the high priest has just been symbolically crowned. It's probably better to take his throne as a reference to the throne of the Lord.

The Lord establishes the branch to rule in his own name. What is the meaning of the statement, the council of peace shall be between them both? It most likely refers either to the branch and the Lord or to the Lord and the people, not to the offices of priest and king considered in the abstract. Seeing it as about the relationship between the branch and the Lord might fit with the description of Psalm 110 verses 1 to 5. The crown is a sign, it will be placed in the temple as a memorial, presumably for the Lord primarily.

It is a sign of the fact that, just as the four men brought treasures from the north country that were used to make a royal crown, the Lord would one day establish the branch who would build the great temple of the Lord, wear the crown of rule and receive tribute and gifts from people of far off for his establishment of the Lord's house. A question to consider, James Jordan underlines the way that this prophetic sign draws our attention to the fact that the prophecies of Zachariah have a near and also a further fulfilment. What are some of the ways in which the other night visions of Zachariah might anticipate a longer term fulfilment? Matthew chapter 19 verses 1 to 15 And said, Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to send her away? He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.

And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. The disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry. But he said to them, Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given.

For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it. Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray.

The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. For to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and went away.

In the first half of Matthew 19 Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea and is immediately tested by the Pharisees concerning his teaching. Jesus is asked by the Pharisees to weigh in on the debate between schools of legal opinion of the day, between Hillel and Shammai. The difference is related to the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24 verse 1 following.

When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house. The school of Hillel had a very extensive list of things that could be included under the some form of indecency in the wife, whereas the school of Shammai held a far more restrictive understanding. They are trying to test him.

We should bear in mind that John the Baptist had just lost his life for speaking out against the divorce and remarriage of Herod. The Pharisees knew that Jesus, if he spoke out on this issue, would be placing himself in dangerous political positions relative to the Herods, but also taking a controversial view on the meaning of the law that would put him on one side or another of a pretty fractious debate. And they cunningly thought that this would give them some sort of leverage over him.

So there are two things going on here, an attempt to entrap Jesus in a dangerous political statement and also an attempt to get Jesus to take a side in a divisive Jewish debate on the meaning of the law. Jesus does not answer their question directly, rather he challenges them concerning the biblical teaching. Where do we find Moses' actual teaching regarding divorce and marriage? If we start with Deuteronomy chapter 24, an obscure case law, we are going about it all wrong.

Rather we must begin at the very beginning. It begins with Genesis chapter 1 and 2. God made them male and female, and a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. That is where we find the teaching on marriage.

What Deuteronomy chapter 24 does is come in as an allowance for the sake of the hardness of the heart of the people. It allows them to divorce their wives but it's a departure from the fundamental intent of marriage which is lifelong union, what God has joined together, let no man separate. And this allowance, this concession is not a command concerning divorce.

It's a falling away from that thing that should give us a clear perspective of what marriage and divorce truly are. That divorce is an undermining of God's fundamental intent concerning marriage. That two people should become one flesh in an indissoluble union.

The difference between a concession and a command is very important. A concession is

an accommodation to human weakness and sin, a recognition that in our fallen state human beings are imperfectable and good laws will make allowances for the sinfulness and the immaturity of people in their societies. Good laws are not counsels of perfection, they must deal with the reality, the messy reality of sinful human lives.

And the law that Moses gave is an example of such a law. It's a good law for a hard-hearted people. But it is not good that people are hard-hearted, nor is a concession given to a hard-hearted people, a good North Star by which to guide our understanding of marriage and God's values concerning it.

Among many other things, for instance, parenting is an exercise in the establishment of justice and the ordering of a just society, and parents will know that there are a great many suboptimal and even bad behaviours that they may have to accommodate or mitigate in their children because their children currently lack the wisdom or the good character to act as they would in some ideal world. And the law that Moses gives in Deuteronomy chapter 24 is an example of this. Good laws are accommodated to the societies and the persons for which they are designed.

They are informed by the deeper and the absolute moral law, but they are accommodated to particular circumstances and persons. If you allowed your teenagers the same liberties as you do your toddlers, it would not be a good thing. Rather, you need to give certain liberties to your toddlers that you don't give to your teenagers because they still have a lot to learn.

When the Pharisees respond to Jesus, Jesus highlights the problem with their response. They ask about what Moses commanded, but yet they are like teenagers who are reminding their parents of all the things that they allowed them to get away with as toddlers. But yet as teenagers, they're supposed to have grown up beyond those things.

They don't need the same allowances. They don't need the same concessions. They should be mature enough to know how to act themselves.

Moses' concessions concerning divorce allowed for divorce, but they did not approve of it. It was an accommodation to the sinfulness and the imperfectibility of human society, not a practice that was to be viewed in any respect positively. We might think of the practices of slavery or polygamy in a similar light, practices that were permitted and regulated but never celebrated or encouraged.

These practices were never God's good intention for humanity, but tolerated for a time as an accommodation to sin, weakness, immaturity and imperfectibility. To find out what is really commanded, what God really wants, we have to look back further to God's creational intent for humanity. And so Jesus joins Genesis 1 and 2 together to highlight the permanent unity that was always God's intent for marriage.

This is different and distinguished from laws that are accommodated to the hardness of human hearts. Now Jesus' teaching more generally draws us back to these two great horizons, the horizons of the original creation and of the future restoration of all things. And this has the effect of significantly reframing the question of divorce.

The Hillites and the Shammaites both approach the question of divorce primarily within the horizon of the Mosaic body of laws and fail adequately to consider the horizon of God's creational intent. The result is a loss of our sense of the way that divorce undermines God's intent for humanity. Divorce is a tragic accommodation to human sinfulness, not something that is positively allowed.

Jesus may here contrast Moses and God. Moses is the divinely inspired prophet administering the moral law in a particular historical situation. But God is the author of the timeless moral law.

There is a sort of legalism which can snatch at all sorts of allowances that are given in a law accommodated to human sinfulness and imperfection, rather than pursuing the righteousness that it should direct us towards. Such allowances excuse us from the higher standard of the divine righteousness. Note that Jesus doesn't teach that Moses was wrong to allow for divorce under such circumstances.

Such allowances were made on account of people's sinfulness and hardness of heart. But they were not themselves sinful allowances. The Old Testament law provides us with a number of conditions in which divorce is treated as permissible and I believe that the New Testament does not just abrogate those.

Accommodation to the reality of human sinfulness and weakness really is necessary for good law. Whether it is serious abuse, desertion, adultery or some other sort of sin or failure, divorce may be appropriately permitted. We should also recognise that in such circumstances we can't abstract the specific action of divorce from the broader failures of permanent exclusive union that might have precipitated it.

While the act of divorce is an act of very grave moral weight, a purposeful act that ends a marriage, the one who initiates it should not be treated as if they bore the entire weight of the blame for the failed marriage. What Jesus' teaching does then is not to delegitimise the teaching of Moses or even to suggest an alternative legal code to replace it. Rather what it does is relativise it.

The law of Moses and all other legal codes that are necessarily accommodated to human sinfulness are not the North Star of Righteousness. Where necessary accommodations to this sinful age exist, they are signs of how estranged we have become from God's good purpose for humanity. Because we are a hard-hearted and a sinful people, God permits divorce in the case of adultery.

But lifelong, permanent and indissoluble and exclusive unity was always his intent. We see the same thing in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 where, where at all possible, a couple are supposed to pursue reunion, to pursue reconciliation and forgiveness. Now that will not always be possible.

There will be situations where it is wise to divorce. Divorce in itself is not a sin but it is a sign of how badly things have gone wrong. And where at all possible we should be people of the kingdom, people who pursue reconciliation, restoration, healing, setting things right that have gone wrong.

This teaching can all be very troubling for us. We live in a society in which both divorce and serial extramarital relations are rampant. It's a very hard teaching today just as it was in Jesus' day.

We would like God to tell us that it is okay to divorce under conditions X, Y and Z. But that isn't what we are told. Rather we are given the original intent of creation as the standard of our measure, with the concessions appearing more clearly for what they are against that background. Tolerated but not positively validated ways of negotiating human rebellion against God's purpose in marriage.

The fact of God's creational establishment of marriage is a measure by which we must consider divorce. We may break faith with and reject our prior vow in the self-contradiction of divorce, but not in such a way as places us beyond the bounds of God's grace. The church is bound both to uphold the institutions of marriage and to present God's grace to those in the tragic situation of failed marriages.

The possibility of a calling back to the abandoned task of marriage to a particular person can often be there. Sometimes however the conditions for this don't exist. And the difficult question of whether someone should, not just can, get married again is one that people will often struggle with.

There is some gospel to be seen in Moses' law. God is not allowing people to slip beyond the reach of his grace and restoration, even in the messiness of their compromised lives. God can speak his law even into the lives that have been tangled up by sin and failure, by things that have gone wrong.

God can still speak his grace into those situations. Divorce and remarriage don't cause people to slip off God's map. But yet that truth must always be held alongside the other truth that this was not God's intent from the beginning.

The disciples are startled by the toughness of Jesus' teaching. If marriage is really this serious, it would seem to be a trap that you don't want to get caught in. If you have to stick with your wife under all these circumstances, and you can't just abandon her for various reasons, then it's maybe not something that you want to get in.

Jesus responds with another startling teaching. He talks about those who become eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven. Now there are many different types of eunuchs.

Some are born eunuchs. You can think of intersex persons particularly. People who can't bear children.

People who may even, in some extreme cases, have indeterminate sex. Then there are those who have been made eunuchs by other human beings, castrated and made to serve in particular capacities. Jesus talks here about a further type of eunuch.

Those who have become eunuchs for the kingdom. When we think about eunuchs, probably what we think of first is their giving up of sexual pleasure and partnership. But in Jesus' day, what was probably most prominent was the fact that they gave up progeny and legacy.

They committed themselves completely to the cause of the kingdom that they aligned themselves with. So if a eunuch served a particular king, they were completely, personally invested in serving that kingdom. Because their entire hope and destiny for the future lay upon the destiny of the kingdom.

They had no children to bear their name after them. What they were going to leave behind was the kingdom itself. In speaking about those who have become eunuchs for the kingdom of God, Jesus is likely talking about people who have given up the prospect of having marriage and children to commit themselves completely for the kingdom of God.

Now this isn't the same thing as singleness. It's not just a statement about how good singleness is as a thing in itself. Rather, it's about people who have given up marriage for the sake of throwing in their lot completely with the cause of the kingdom.

You can think about Paul as an example of this. As one who did not take a wife, or maybe was widowed and did not take another wife, in order that he might serve the kingdom of God completely. One can also imagine people being a bit shocked by Jesus using the example of eunuchs as associated with the kingdom of heaven.

Eunuchs were seen, among other things, as unmanly. As those who had been quite literally emasculated. We should not miss the scandal of the association that Jesus is drawing here.

The people who would serve his kingdom would often seem unmanly to other people of their day. They were not playing the games of honour that people of their day were playing. They were peacemakers, rather than men who were constantly looking for chances to prove their manliness in war.

They were people who would turn the other cheek when offended, when their honour

was attacked. And what man will not defend his honour? They were defined by suffering, rather than by the infliction of violence and power. They were people defined by service of and concern for the weak, rather than mastery over others.

They were people who forgave, rather than pursuing vengeance. And in this particular example they were also people who were prepared to give up having children, and give up having marriages, for the sake of serving their Lord by following him to the final unmanly indignity of the cross. While Jesus very clearly extols manly virtues in certain other contexts, and calls for his disciples to express and display some of these virtues, and we see these things celebrated elsewhere in scripture, we should never forget the scandal that his teaching presented to men of his day, and to men of our own.

After this teaching, children are brought to Jesus to be blessed. The disciples rebuke those bringing the children. Children are distractions from the business of men, and they lack honour and status, but yet Jesus pays attention to them.

He places a child in the midst of his disciples and says that they need to be made like that child. Once again, Jesus is challenging some of the reigning values, particularly among men of his day. Values that constantly privileged the strong over the weak, men over women, adults over children.

Jesus, without denying or undermining the differences between these groups, radically reconfigures the orders of value that lead people to exalt one group over another. Not only does he welcome such children, he declares that to such belongs the kingdom of heaven. A question to consider.

Looking at our own societies and our churches, an outside observer would probably not be led to believe that the exemplary society that we hold up above all others is one in which children are at the centre. What are some of the ways in which we can reform the lives of our churches and societies so as more fully to express Jesus' teaching at this point?