

OpenTheo

October 30th: Isaiah 12 & Mark 10:1-31

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Songs of salvation. Jesus and the rich young man.

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Transcript

Isaiah 12. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord. For though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.

Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and will not be afraid. For the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day, Give thanks to the Lord. Call upon his name.

make known his deeds among the peoples proclaim that his name is exalted sing praises to the Lord for he has done gloriously let this be made known in all the earth shout and sing for joy Oh inhabitant of Zion for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel the few verses of Isaiah chapter 12 bring to an end the section of the book that began either in chapter 6 or chapter 7 at the end of Isaiah chapter 11 there was a recollection of the deliverance of Israel at the Red Sea in the story of the Exodus verses 15 and 16 of that chapter read as follows and the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt and will wave his hand over the river with his scorching breath and strike it into seven

channels and he will lead people across in sandals and there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt both the preparation of a path through the wilderness and the opening up of a passage through the sea should remind us of the story of the Exodus from Egypt chapter 12 is a reframing of the subsequent song of Moses in the context of a new deliverance a new Exodus just as Moses sang his song after the original crossing in Exodus chapter 15 so the redeemed in the eschatological deliverance in Isaiah's prophecy would sing a new song to one which hearkened back to that of Moses Richard Borkham observes that the song in Isaiah chapter 12 is clearly playing off that song of Moses from Exodus chapter 15 it isn't an entirely novel composition it picks up the words of the opening verses of Moses song in Exodus chapter 15 verses 1 to 2 for instance then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord saying I will sing to the Lord but he has triumphed gloriously the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea the Lord is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation this is my God and I will praise him my father's God and I will exalt him an even stronger background for the songs of Isaiah chapter 12 is found in Psalm 105 in verses 1 to 2 of that Psalm we read Oh give thanks to the Lord call upon his name make known his deeds among the peoples sing to him sing praises to him tell of all his wondrous works a similar verse is found in Psalm 148 verse 13 let them praise the name of the Lord for his name alone is exalted his majesty is above earth and heaven Borkham observes the way that Psalm 105 was verbally linked with Exodus chapter 15 however these links are principally found in places other than those in which its language is adopted by Isaiah chapter 12 in its sharing of key terminology with Exodus chapter 15 Psalm 105 was seen to function as a sort of an interpretation of that earlier song in chapter 12 of his prophecy Isaiah is using that earlier interpretation to develop his own resetting of the Song of the Sea these songs form a natural conclusion of the wider section and there are two songs one from the second half of verse 1 to verse 2 and the other from verses 4 to 6 they use language that should now be familiar in that day yet whereas that coming day has often been spoken of to this point as a day of judgment and doom here it is that day's aspect of salvation that is very much to the fore that day will mark the passing of the Lord's anger against his people the Lord has purged his people through judgment and as the remnant is established they know salvation in the direct identification of the Lord was salvation is of course familiar from the earlier Song of the Sea and the statement I will trust and will not be afraid is very much in keeping with the wider themes of this section Ahaz faced with the threat of the Syro-Ephraimite invasion was charged to trust and not to fear and here we see the vindication of that particular posture just as the Lord provided water for his people in the wilderness so the Lord provides the wells of salvation for his people in their need as God himself is the salvation of his people the waters of these wells of salvation should perhaps be related with the Lord's own personal presence with his people if the first song focuses upon the speaker's own relationship with the Lord and his own personal trust in the Lord the second song is a more outward-looking statement of the greatness of the Lord's acts of salvation

declared to other people the first song opens with a statement of the speaker to the Lord and then a declaration of his faith and confidence in the Lord in the second song he is summoning others to join with him in his praise the Lord's praises will be declared among his people and declared in such a manner that all of the nations will become witness to his greatness the greatness of God is seen in his identity as the Holy One of Israel God acts for the sake of his holy name as we see in places like Ezekiel chapter 36 verses 22 to 23 therefore say to the house of Israel thus says the Lord God it is not for your sake Oh house of Israel that I am about to act but for the sake of my holy name which you have profaned among the nations to which you came and I will vindicate the holiness of my great name which has been profaned among the nations and which you have profaned among them and the nations will know that I am the Lord declares the Lord God when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes through his work of salvation the Lord demonstrates that he alone is the Lord he is unique and set apart from all others a question to consider how is Isaiah chapter 12 used in the vision of Revelation chapter 15 Mark chapter 10 verses 1 to 31 and he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan and crowds gathered to him again and again as was his custom he taught them and Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife he answered them what did Moses command you they said Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away and Jesus said to them because of your hardness of heart he wrote to this commandment but from the beginning of creation God made them male and female therefore a man shall leave his father and 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 and in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter and he said to them whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery and they were bringing children to him that he might touch them and the disciples rebuked them but when Jesus saw it he was indignant and said to them let the children come to me do not hinder them but as such belongs the kingdom of God truly I say to you whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it and he took them in his arms and blessed them laying his hands on them and as he was setting out on his journey a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him good teacher what must I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus said to him why do you call me good no one is good except God alone you know the commandments do not murder do not commit adultery do not steal do not bear false witness do not defraud honor your father and mother and he said to him teacher all these I have kept from my youth and Jesus looking at him loved him and said to him you lack one thing go sell all that you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me disheartened by the saying he went away sorrowful for he had great possessions and Jesus looked around and said to his disciples how difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God and the disciples were amazed at his words but Jesus said to them again children how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God 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 and they were exceedingly astonished and said to him then who can be saved Jesus looked at them and said with man it is impossible but not with God for all things are possible with God Peter began to say to him see we have left everything and followed you Jesus said truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions and in the age to come eternal life but many who are first will be last and the last first mark 10 Jesus leaves Galilee and enters Judea there he is asked by the Pharisees to weigh in on the debate between schools of legal opinion of the day between Hillel and Shamia the school of Hillel had a very extensive understanding of for any cause in Deuteronomy chapter 24 in the regulation on divorce but the school of Shamia I had a far more restrictive understanding they're trying to test him part of this test may have a political undercurrent to it we should bear in mind that John the Baptist had ultimately lost his life because of speaking out against divorce in the case of Herod Antipas and Herodias his brother's wife it was a dangerous issue to speak out on and so if they could get him to speak out on this they could get him in trouble in Galilee and Perea apart from the political issues involved in teaching against divorce there were also debates among the Jews themselves concerning the subject as I've just noted in Matthew's account of this exchange debates concerning the conditions under which divorce is permissible are much more foregrounded whereas in Mark's account here it's the legitimacy of divorce itself that's focused upon Jewish scholars of those days debated the meaning of the expression something wrong indecent or objectionable in Deuteronomy chapter 24 verse 1 so some of the school of Shamia I believe that this only legitimated divorce in cases of sexual immorality whereas others of the school of Hillel interpreted it very broadly believing that it could apply to something as minor as a wife accidentally spoiling her husband's meal so there are two things going on here there's an attempt to entrap Jesus in a dangerous political statement and second there's an attempt to get Jesus to take a side in a divisive Jewish debate on the Torah and his response is to give them a question in his teaching Jesus frequently answers questions with questions or with parables we can make the parable of the Good Samaritan or of paying taxes to Caesar and his response to that in this way he challenges the questions that people ask him it's very easy to fail to perceive loaded questions or to see the assumptions that are built into supposedly innocent questions Jesus approach to teaching often gets people to reconsider their questions and also shrewdly outwits questions that are designed to trap him or trip him up questions especially questions designed to trip someone up can often be used to defend ourselves from the force of the truth or to undermine people who trouble our conscience questions of the type the Pharisees bring here are also often an assertion of authority relative to someone else we might recall the way that the Pharisees inquire about the disciples behavior and their failure to wash their hands before meals in that case they are asserting their authority as judges and Jesus does not actually answer their question to them rather he challenges

their right to ask the question pointing out that they are people who nullify the law of God through their tradition so answering a question with a question is in part designed to turn the tables to deny people the right to judge Christ while putting them in a position where they have to give an account of themselves the wording of Jesus question to them is important what did Moses command you not what did Moses write concerning divorce but what is the commandment of the law on the matter note that the law is not just the 10 words or the various commandments that surround it is the entirety of the Pentateuch Jesus answer to the Pharisees will expose their improper posture towards the law the answer to Jesus question differs from what he requested they say Moses allowed Deuteronomy 24 though isn't a command concerning divorce is a concession what is the difference between these things well a concession is an accommodation to human weakness recognition that human beings are imperfectible in their fallen state and the good laws will make allowances for the sinfulness and immaturity of people in their societies good laws are accommodated to the societies and the persons for which they designed so for instance if you're raising young kids you will accommodate your requirements to their abilities and their age of understanding and then as they grow up those requirements will increase and you'll expect greater maturity from them in the same way while we are informed by a deeper and more absolute moral law we need to have accommodation to particular circumstances and persons if you allowed your teenagers the same liberties as you give to your toddlers it would not be good Jesus highlights the problem with the Pharisees response they haven't answered his question about what Moses commanded and Moses concessions concerning divorce allowed for the divorce but they did not approve of it it was an accommodation to the sinfulness of human society not practice that was viewed positively we might think of the practices of slavery or polygamy in a similar light these were permitted and regulated but never celebrated or encouraged these practices were never God's good intention for humanity but they were tolerated for a time as an accommodation to sin weakness immaturity and imperfect ability to find out what is really commanded we have to look back further to God's creational intent for humanity and Jesus joins Genesis 1 and 2 together to highlight the permanent unity that was always God's intention in marriage this is distinguished from laws that are accommodated the hardness of human hearts and this distinction significantly reframes the question of divorce the Hillelites and the Shammaites are both approaching the question of divorce primarily within the horizon of the Mosaic body of laws and they fail adequately to consider the horizon of God's creational intent and the result of this is a loss of a sense of the way that divorce undermines God's intent for humanity divorce is a tragic accommodation a legitimate accommodation but a tragic one nonetheless to human sinfulness it's 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 and there's a sort of legalism which snatches at all such allowances of a law accommodated to human sinfulness and imperfection rather than pursuing the righteousness that it should direct us towards such allowances excuse us in these

people's minds from the highest standard of divine righteousness that's never what they were supposed to do note that Jesus doesn't teach that Moses was wrong to allow divorce under some circumstances the 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 simply abrogate these accommodations to the reality of human sinfulness and weakness really is necessary for good law where there are serious abuse for instance or desertion or adultery or some other such sin or failure divorce may be appropriately permitted we should also note in such circumstances that we should not 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 it's a purposeful act that ends a marriage the one who initiates it should not be treated as if they bore the entire weight of blame for a failed marriage it may be that the blame lies almost entirely on the other side what Jesus teaching does is not simply to delegitimize the teaching of Moses or to suggest an alternative legal code to replace it but rather to relativize it the law of Moses and all other legal codes that are necessarily and appropriately accommodated to human sinfulness are not the North Star of righteousness in Mark Jesus teaching on divorce seems to be more absolute than it is in Matthew where there are allowances made for the legitimacy of divorce in the case of adultery the lack of such qualifications in Mark can help us to understand the radicality of Jesus teaching in ways that might be unclear to many readers of Matthew in Jesus teaching in Mark especially divorce is framed not primarily by the conditions of this present sinful age but by God's creational intent at the beginning where necessary accommodations to this sinful age exist including those given for adultery these accommodations are exposed for what they are their signs of how estranged we have become from God's good purpose for humanity because we are a hard-hearted and sinful people God permits us to divorce in the case of adultery but lifelong permanent indissoluble and exclusive unity was always his intent and this teaching can be troubling for us we live in a society in which both divorce and serial extramarital relations are rampant it's a hard teaching today as it was in Jesus own day we would like God to tell us that it is okay to divorce perhaps under conditions X Y & Z but this is not what we're 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 they're 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 and so the church is bound both to uphold the institution of marriage and present God's grace to those in tragic situations of failed marriages and there may be the possibility of people being called back to the abandoned task of marriage to a specific person but sometimes the conditions for this simply no longer exist the end of chapter 9 of Mark had a couple of

instances that drew attention to children as models for the kingdom and here again children are brought to Christ and the disciples seek to prevent them being brought to Christ but Jesus rebukes them these children again are models of what it is like to receive the kingdom of God we have to receive the kingdom of God with the humble dependence of children here it should be clear that the children aren't just being brought forward as examples of something that refers to adults the children are being valued in their own right Christ blesses the children and the children are given attention here we also see Jesus doing something beyond his exorcisms or his healings he's blessing people and people are bringing children to him in order to receive this blessing many people have talked about Jesus radical teaching and practice concerning women or the poor or people outside of Israel and all of these things are appropriate and important to talk about but along with all of these things we should talk about how radical Jesus approach to children was Jesus is then approached by a man who asked what thing he must do to inherit eternal life and it's easy to misread Jesus discussion with this man many have seen Jesus as highlighting the futility of seeking righteousness according to the law driving the man to despair of his righteousness but when we read the story this isn't actually what he says and to arrive at such a reading requires some considerable contortions of interpretation Jesus actually teaches that keeping the commandments is necessary for entering into life the twist in some ways is in how this is understood he highlights the second table of the law and we should note that there's no reference to covetousness rather that commandment is fulfilled in selling and giving to the poor and there's a fulfillment of the commandments on a deeper level by following Jesus himself that is how you fulfill the first table how you fulfill the duty of love to God by following Christ if the final commandment the commandment concerning covetousness highlights the greed of the man and his attachment to his possessions the call of Christ to follow him highlights also the tragic way in which those possessions have prevented him from actually serving God from loving God as he ought the man is a prisoner of his love for money and even when Christ who is described as loving him and calling him to follow him offers him this great honor an invitation he cannot accept it because he is so bound up with his money and he cannot leave that behind Mark doesn't have the same degree of teaching concerning riches as Matthew does but here and in other places like it he does show us the way that riches can weigh us down preventing us from serving and following our true master this naturally makes many of us feel uncomfortable we want our wealth and possessions to be off-limits for Christ we'll serve him in all sorts of different ways but not if this is what is required of us wealth is a power that can prevent us from entering the kingdom of God something that can master us and we should be very fearful of it of falling under the sway of things that we think we own but really own us however those who give up things for the kingdom are promised to return not just in the age to come but also in the present age and while it may be humanly impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God with God all these things are possible a question to consider what do you believe that Jesus is referring to in verses 29 and 30 truly I say to you there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or

children or lands for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands with persecutions