

## JESUS TEACHES THE WAY TO ETERNAL LIFE

Matthew 19:16-30

Key Verse: 19:26

“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”

This passage teaches us that rich people have a problem: they cannot buy everything with money. They can’t buy love with money, as the Beatles discovered when they wrote the song, “Can’t Buy Me Love.” They can’t buy eternal life with money. Jesus teaches us the way to eternal life. Eternal life is the gift of God for those who believe in him. This word is worth more than Bill Gates’ fortune. Let’s listen to Jesus.

First, Jesus helps a rich young man with the truth of God (16-22).

Look at verse 16. “Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’” This man is different than many who came to Jesus. He was not a poor blind beggar, or a helpless demon-possessed man, or a deteriorating leper. He was young (20). He was a man of great wealth (22). He was able and willing to work. He was a cultural Jew who had kept the law outwardly. He was interested in eternal life. On the surface, he seems to have everything that people desire in this world and to be an exemplary young man.

Upon deeper consideration, however, we can see that he had a great agony. This is not uncommon for the wealthy. Before becoming men of fame and wealth, they have a hope of doing so. They work hard and creatively and find excitement in their work. After attaining success, they enjoy it for a while. Then, a feeling of emptiness begins to settle in. They realize that the things of the world all perish over time. They realize that their own lives are temporal. Day by day, they become fearful and desperate, and money cannot comfort them. Howard Hughes was once one of the richest men in the world. He took over his father’s oil field equipment business and used it as a basis to establish a successful airline and a movie company. At one time his fortune was estimated to be about two billion dollars. He boasted that there was not a person in America whom he could not buy with his money. But he suffered from a fear of germs, thinking he could be infected and die. He spent time in seclusion taking extraordinary precautions against germs by wearing special clothes and doing unusual things. He contributed a lot of money to a major hospital in the hope that it would keep him alive. In the end he died in that hospital. Money cannot buy eternal life, nor can it give real peace of mind. This is the agony of the rich. Though the young man looked honorable, he was driven by a serious life problem.

There is another problem with the young man. He thought he could do something good to get eternal life. He must have been a talented man. He was probably diligent and hardworking. He was used to achieving his goals through hard effort. But we cannot obtain eternal life in this way. Eternal life is the gift of God. It is given by God through his one-sided grace. Therefore, we can only accept this gift by faith and give thanks to God. We cannot earn it. Romans 6:23b says, “...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

How did Jesus deal with this man? Look at verse 17. “‘Why do you ask me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. ‘There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.’” Jesus corrected the man’s concept of good. He thought he was a good man. But Jesus taught him that God alone is good and the source of all goodness. Without God, man is evil, only evil all the time, no matter how attractive he may appear. Rich men may seem to do good things for others with the power of their money. But their real inner motives may be extremely selfish. God knows their hearts. Without God there is no real goodness. Many young people like to say, “I’m good.” It has many meanings. But we must know that without God we are not good at all. This young man needed to realize that he was a sinner, not a good man.

Jesus told him, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.” Jesus knew that this man needed to “enter life.” He had physical life or natural life, but it was not enough. Human beings, made in the image of God, need God’s life in their souls to be truly happy. Without God’s life in them, men are little more than clever animals. To “enter life” means to enter into a relationship with God. Jesus said in John 17:3, “Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” What this man really needed was to know God. God alone could give him eternal life as a gift. The moment that God comes into our hearts, we have eternal life. Jesus said in John 5:24, “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” Those who have God in their hearts do not worry

about their lives in this world. They know God will look after them and provide for them. They can be content in any and every situation and have a joy and peace that the world cannot take away.

The young man had probably expected some kind of praise or recognition from Jesus. At least he might have expected Jesus to give him some new teaching that would solve his problem. But Jesus taught him a key point of the Old Testament: God blesses those who obey him. Jesus taught simply and with absolute authority. It was time for the young man to admit that he was rebellious and selfish and did not want to obey the commandments. But he did not yet know himself a sinner. In his overconfidence, he asked, "Which ones?" Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus patiently taught this man from the word of God. Jesus started with the commands that most people keep outwardly, then worked his way to the ones that are more commonly broken, and concluded with "love your neighbor as yourself," which should have convicted the man. As Jesus spoke, the young man must have thought to himself, "I never killed anyone, I'm good. I never committed adultery, I'm good. I never stole, never gave false testimony, never dishonored my parents, and I love everybody. Great. I made it." So he answered Jesus, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" However, his statement is contradictory. Though his mind felt right, his heart was empty and his soul was dry. If he had really kept all the commandments, he would have been like David who said, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want" (Ps 23:1).

This man was proud and self-righteous. Still, Jesus spoke kindly to him. Jesus helped him to know the real meaning of the commandments, overcoming his superficial, cultural understanding. Look at verse 21. "Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.'" Jesus taught this man how to love his neighbor as himself. Jesus invited him to a relationship with God.

Specifically, Jesus told him to overcome his selfishness by sharing his wealth with the poor. Regardless of how his fortune was attained, he was selfish to enjoy it by himself when his people were suffering from poverty. He had to be mindful of the poor. One young man studies well. But he is indifferent to other students. He often suffers from depression and a sense of meaninglessness. He must learn to care for his fellow students with a shepherd's mind. We have a pretty high standard of living in America. The agonies of most young Americans are luxurious compared to those in other countries. We agonize over school study, social status, delicate romances, even obesity. No one suffers from malnutrition. However, so many people in the world die from hunger and disease. Many do not have clean drinking water. Those who blindly pursue wealth in America are selfish in the sight of God. We should sacrifice our pleasures and comfort to help the suffering poor. Especially, we must send many missionaries to carry the gospel to those who don't know Jesus.

Jesus promised the young man treasure in heaven. God remembers those who care for others sacrificially (Lk 14:14). They accumulate treasure in heaven. Treasure in heaven is eternal in nature. It does not perish, spoil or fade. Those who have this treasure are truly rich people. Ultimately, this treasure is Jesus and the eternal life that he gives.

When Jesus said, "come, follow me," Jesus was offering to make this young man his disciple. Jesus volunteered to be his shepherd and teacher. Jesus would help him change in inner character until he bore the glorious image of God. Jesus invited him to join in his gospel ministry that would bear fruit worldwide and throughout eternity.

How did the man respond? Look at verse 22. "When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth." The young man could not part with his great wealth. He loved his wealth and power and honor more than eternal life. In truth, he was an idol worshiper who loved wealth more than God. He was a selfish man who loved his own comfort and pleasure more than his fellow man. He was not a good man, but a sinful man. It was time for him to repent of his sins and seek God's help. But he was unwilling to change. He could not but go away from Jesus with grievous sadness in his soul.

Second, with God all things are possible (23-26).

It was a shock to the disciples to see this rich young man go away sad. Usually people who came to Jesus went away blessed and happy. Jesus seemed to give this man a hard time, and he went away sad. Sometimes Bible students go away sad. Jesus "sends the rich away empty" (Lk 1:53). In truth, this is Jesus' best love for them. Jesus does not try to make people feel good all the time. Jesus wants to plant truth of God in their hearts that will lead to eternal life.

We can be sure that Jesus' heart was broken as he watched this man go away. Jesus deeply understood his agony. It was with a note of sorrow that Jesus said in verses 23-24, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell 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." Jesus taught his disciples to understand the agonies of rich young men. They should not envy those who enjoy wealth and pleasure in this world. They must see the agony of their souls and have compassion on them and pray for them. Most of all, as Jesus did, they must teach the word of God to them until they realize that the things of the world all perish, and only Jesus can give them eternal life.

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" They felt it was impossible for anyone to be saved. Actually, this is true. If we spend enough time digging, we will find fatal flaws and weaknesses in every person. When we think about people, it is impossible for anyone to be saved.

Look at verse 26. "Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" Instead of dwelling endlessly on fallen man's depravity, we must look up at God. Though men are weak and helpless, God is mighty to save. God can save men from their sins and from the power of death. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." God has provided the way of salvation. Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have eternal life. We must simply believe Almighty God who loves us and sent Jesus as our Savior. For example, there is a man of God in Columbus, Ohio named Dr. Henry Park. He was born the second son of a rich Korean businessman. Had he remained a loyal son in his father's house, he would have inherited great wealth and could have lived like a prince. But as a college student he accepted Jesus. He valued life in Jesus more than all the treasures of this world. He decided to follow Jesus. He married a godly woman who prayed for him to grow spiritually. He left his father's household and came to America as a missionary. He grew in the character of Christ as a sacrificial servant of others and a humble student of the word of God. He mastered American English and became an excellent Bible messenger. He overcame American culture by getting a Ph.D. and then becoming a professor shepherd. He raised several spiritual leaders who have grown to be wonderful servants of God. Dr. Park will tell you that he did not do this; God did this through him. His key verse is, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." God can save anyone who trusts in him.

Third, Jesus' blessing is best in this world and the next (27-30).

When Jesus mentioned God, Peter stopped thinking about the rich young man and remembered God's work in his life. He and the other disciples had left everything to follow Jesus. So he brought this to Jesus' attention and asked about his reward. Look at verses 28-30. "Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And 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. But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.'" In these verses we learn about Jesus and the abundant blessing he gives those who follow him.

Actually, Jesus is the one who left everything and came into this world as a humble shepherd. Jesus is in very nature God. Jesus is the Son of God who was with God in the beginning. His dwelling place was heaven and myriad of angels obeyed him joyfully. But he put aside his glory, honor and majesty, and came to this world in human form. While on earth, Jesus was humble and lowly and called himself "the Son of Man." He was mistreated and persecuted by the religious leaders. He spent his time caring for the poor and needy. He patiently bore with his weak disciples. Soon he would go to the cross and die for the sin of the world. But God would raise him from the dead and give him all authority in heaven and on earth. Jesus would take his rightful place on the throne as King of kings and Lord of lords. All peoples would come before him. His one word would give entrance into the kingdom or an eternal sentence to divine punishment. At that time, his disciples, who shared in his sufferings, would also share his glory, reigning with him.

This Jesus, who is King of kings, rewards abundantly those who follow him, both in this life and in the age to come. Those who follow Jesus never lose in the end. No matter what we sacrifice in this world, Jesus repays 100 times more. This does not necessarily mean that if we give up one video game, Jesus will give us 100 video games. But it is Jesus' assurance that life with Jesus is 100 times more blessed than life without Jesus.

Today we learned that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. But with God all things are possible. Jesus left everything to come into this world to save us. Let's accept Jesus in our hearts. Let's learn to be shepherds for students who are like the rich young man. We must help them with the truth of God, like Jesus did. In this way, we can work with God to change America from a nation of rich young people to a sacrificial, missionary-sending nation.