

JESUS TEACHES A RICH YOUNG MAN HOW TO ENTER LIFE

Matthew 19:16-30

Key Verse: 19:21

"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.'"

In the previous passage the Pharisees asked about the theory of divorce. But Jesus taught them the happiness of marriage by saying, "...at the beginning the Creator `made them male and female,' and said, `For this reason a man will leave his father and mother (not necessarily his uncle, but precisely his father and mother) and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." The Pharisees' question was about the theory of divorce based on Moses' law. But Jesus nullified their question by talking about the happiness of marriage and nailed it down with, "What God has joined together, let man not separate." The marriage problem and the divorce problem seem to be light matters. But modern people invite unhappiness and tragedy when they marry without God and divorce according to their sinful nature. Therefore we must marry in God and be happy all our lifetimes after marriage by respecting and loving each other dearly, so dearly and affectionately. Our happiness in marriage is passed on to our children. Happiness and confidence last in them until they get married and even after, forever. In today's passage a rich young man came to ask what he could do to get eternal life. Eternal life is God's gift. But this young man wanted to get eternal life through his own effort. Let's study why this rich young man wanted to get eternal life.

First, what must I do to get eternal life? (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?'" The rich young man's question seems to be an unlikely question. He was rich, even though Jesus' time was the time of great suffering for the Israelites. It is very clear that he was a rich young man, while most of his people were poverty-stricken. That he became a rich young man tells us that he was a hard working man; it seems that this man had no problem because he was a rich man. If Reptavia in the movie "Fiddler on the Roof" saw him, he would sing, "If I were a rich man, la la la la la...."

What was his problem? These days many people think that if they have money they have no problems. But this rich young man had a problem of how to get eternal life. Perhaps he studied hard. He also worked hard to become a wealthy man. Common sense tells us that he was a lucky man. He was the envy of all the Jews, and was especially among all the young Jewish girls. But he came to Jesus and wanted to learn how to get eternal life. Usually those who do not make a great achievement or those who are poor are panting to possess wealth and fame. This is their only desire. But this young man had a heart's desire to have eternal life. So his problem was the problem of those who have made a great success and want to maintain their wealth and fame. Those who have wealth and fame want to live in this world forever luxuriously with what they have. If we compare this person with the famous

Sanhedrin member Nicodemus, we can understand his problem. In John chapter 3, Nicodemus the Sanhedrin member came to Jesus at night secretly for help with his inner problem. In all likelihood he must have been Nicodemus. But it is only our guess. We must ask Matthew who he was. Anyway, this young man is more direct in asking how to get eternal life in character.

In order to understand this rich young man we can think about some exemplary people who are similar to him. There is a world famous violinist. When she was eight years old, she had a violin concert in her country playing Mendelssohn's violin concerto. After the concert she began to have a bright hope to become a world famous violinist. At the age of twelve she came to Manhattan, New York, and for two years she studied in a beginner's music school. After that she was accepted to the violin department of Juilliard---the world famous school of music. After one year she participated in a violin contest at Carnegie Hall. She won first place, together with a Jewish boy. From that time on invitations flooded into her mailbox. So from age fourteen she began to have violin concerts in many places with the world famous conductors. She had a violin concert with the conductor Sir George Solti. At age eighteen she performed Bach's music in Koln, Germany with the conductor Leonard Bernstein. She became so famous that she had on average 120 violin concerts each year for twenty years traveling around so many countries. We admire her stamina and spirit as a violinist. She married an English gentleman when she was thirty-six and had two sons, Chin (truth) and Sun (goodness). Her husband was an English jeweler and she was a violinist. Her family life was greatly damaged because of overwhelming invitations to perform. She reduced her performances to 100 times a year, but the family situation did not improve. So she divorced for the sake of her career. She gave her life to violin study. According to her testimony on TV she practiced fourteen hours every day when she was a student. When she traveled around for the violin concerts she experienced many times the feeling of sudden death because of exhaustion and tension and the nervousness of performance.

When she became fifty she began to think about who she was. In the past she thought of herself as a world famous violinist going around to many countries, and she lived with the fame of being a world famous woman violinist. But when she became fifty she could not meet the demand of countless invitations because of the limitation of her physical strength. She began to despair about herself. People's admiration was no more a joy to her. One day she was in Nigeria to give a performance. After the performance she missed her two sons in New York. She cried almost all night. Then she seriously thought about her life. She found she was nothing but one grain of sand on the seashore. She felt that she lost the meaning of her life. Being a violinist she felt so small and meaningless. So she wanted to go back to her own country and raise many violinists to be world famous violinists. Even though she lived a sacrificial life, the meaning of her life did not get better. Through the care of her 87-year-old mother she was barely surviving. This might have been Ernest Hemingway's situation. All the more, it might be the rich young man's situation. The young Jewish man had wealth and fame. But when he had tried to be a better person all the more, he lost the meaning of his existence. He might have attempted suicide. He had no desire due to his despair. Poor and sick people's admiration of him made him happy at the beginning. But now their

admiration made him feel like funeral songs.

This might be his reason for thinking about his life. His life on earth was nothing. Rather, he envied poor people who were fighting to survive and were full of patriotic spirit. But in order to protect his wealth and fame he was lukewarm toward the oppressive Romans. Then demons channeled through his despair and he almost became a mental patient. To ordinary people wealth and fame are very precious. But to him wealth and fame brought him to a boundary situation: a meaningless life or suicidal attempts---the thought of which bothered him terribly. So he came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus knew about his problem so well. But Jesus asked him, "Why do you ask me about what is good?" (17) Jesus questioned him, "Why do you say, What good thing must I do to get eternal life?" When we synthesize the four gospels, "What good thing must I do to get eternal life" can be paraphrased as "In order to get eternal life, what can I do for a good God?" In Jesus' time the concept of good and evil was very sophisticated. Many thoughtful men defined good as power. Some people defined good as courage. And still other people thought that good was political authority. When Greece was once a world power nation, the world conquest was known as good. At that time Socrates defined good as high moral standards. So he was made to drink poison to death.

Jesus wanted to teach the rich young man that only God is good. In order to teach him that God is good, Jesus asked him, "Why do you ask me about what is good?" The other gospels say directly that only God is good (Mk 10:18; Lk 18:19). But Matthew's Gospel is written in Matthew's style. He says, "There is only One who is good." Here Jesus is saying precisely that only God is good. In this way Jesus wanted to tell him that Jesus is the Son of God; he is the only one who is good. Jesus had a broken shepherd heart for this rich young man, and he wanted to introduce himself to this young man so that he may come to him and receive eternal life. So in the last part of verse 17 Jesus crystal clearly answers the rich young man's question as follows: "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

"If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." To Jesus' eyes the rich young man was the walking dead. He had great wealth and fame and he pretended to be somebody. But to Jesus' eyes he was a selfish man. Jesus did not say, "If you want to have eternal life...." Instead, he said, "If you want to enter life...." This tells us that there are two kinds of lives. First is those who live in this world but do not have real life, that is a spiritual life, more to the point, eternal life. In short, they are like trees and vegetables. Second is those who live with God's eternal life, even in this world.

In order to test him to see if he was a man who has life, Jesus said, "If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." Then the man spontaneously defended himself, "Which ones?" He asked Jesus as if he kept all the commandments. 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.'" The rich young man

was very sure that he had kept all the law of Moses. He was in a high mood, thinking that he passed Jesus' test. "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" (20)

In 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." This verse tells him two things. First, he must put what he knows into practice. In other words he had to overcome his selfishness which made him dead spiritually. After that, he must come and learn of Jesus from the beginning. "Follow me" means he must learn Jesus, beginning from the elementary level to a community college level, to the level he can sell all his possessions and give to the poor to express God's compassion.

Look at verse 22. "When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth." He went away sad because he was not prepared to learn of Jesus. In other words he was not ready to put what he knew into practice. He was a Jew who was like a totally useless old wineskin.

Second, with God all things are possible (23-26). Look at verse 23. "Then Jesus said to his disciples, I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." What Jesus says is for the rich people to enter the kingdom of heaven is, in all probability, impossible. Almost all people try to survive in this world. In order to survive, they make money. Some make money so skillfully that they become very rich. These people must love God more than money. But for those rich people to love God more than money is unthinkable. They worked so hard to become rich. So naturally they think about money day and night: how to preserve it and how to make more money with the money they have. As a result, they have no time to live for the glory of God. Jesus knew money-oriented people so well. So Jesus said in verse 24, "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." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" (25) Jesus' comment was indeed astonishing to the disciples. To the disciples, Jesus' saying was indeed ironic, impractical and totally unbelievable to the people of this world. Because of his love of money, it seemed to be impossible for the rich young man to enter the kingdom of God. To the disciples Jesus' comment on the rich young man was right. 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. There are many people for whom it seems easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for them to enter the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 26. "Jesus looked at them and said, With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'" There was a very artistic and romantic young man. His school sent him to Russia for three months to study Russian. So we also appointed him as a short-term missionary to Moscow. But to our dismay, he became an American Romeo and brought a Russian Juliet who was mentally abnormal. All of us were so surprised. But all of us helped him and prayed for him. Then, something great happened: He was completely changed in Jesus and began to feed sheep. He was accepted to a Ph.D. program in physics and at the same time he became a key member of one fellowship. It was impossible for this man to enter the kingdom of God. But it was

possible for God to change him and use him as a faithful servant of God and qualify him to enter the kingdom of God. There is a young man who has lived in Chicago UBF for the last 16 years. But he is the same yesterday and today and seemingly forever in his wretchedness. He attends all the meetings, but he never changes spiritually. Still, God cares for him and who knows? Through our prayers, he may be changed in Jesus and become as great as St. Paul. There are so many impossible people. The absolute majority of people are totally impossible to enter the kingdom of God. But to Jesus they are all absolutely possible to become great servants of God and to enter the kingdom of God. This is the reason Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Amen.

Third, we reign with Jesus forever (27-30). Look at verse 27. "Peter answered him, We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" To Peter, Jesus' comment on the rich young man was unacceptable. And Peter's question to Jesus was a little bit thorny. Here Peter urged that they had left everything to follow Jesus. But they had not received anything. Jesus' disciples had a sense of loss and they had a kind of expectation like the rich young man. So Peter complained, saying that they had left everything to follow Jesus, but it seems that they had no reward.

Jesus fully understood the agony of the disciples. Missing his wife one night would be difficult for a disciple. But the disciples left everything and followed Jesus. For example, Peter had a good fishing business and he had a mother-in-law. So obviously he had a wife. Probably he had a Little Peter, too. But he left them all and followed Jesus. When the disciples heard about the rich young man, they became very negative about their futures, too. So the disciples complained that they left everything and followed Jesus, but now what was in their hands?

Then Jesus told them that when the world salvation plan was completed, and the time of renewal of all things comes, the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne and they who have followed him will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This Bible thought is also recorded in 2 Timothy 2:11-13. It says, "Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself."

There was a woman who graduated from a noble university. She was a feminist. She became a feminist, not because she wanted to act like a man, but because she wanted to become the President of the United States of America. Not only the woman, but also most young men dream many dreams of delivering inauguration speeches as President. Actually, as a young man one who does not have ambition to become the president of his country is no man. All men have a great desire to become a ruler of a nation. There is a young man who dreamt ten times that he became the president of his nation. However, worldly political presidents are necessary evils. But rulers in the kingdom of God are forever rulers of the kingdom of God. They judge sitting on the twelve thrones together with the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. This is the reason Paul confessed in Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth

comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." Paul suffered, but not for nothing. Paul suffered unto death to preach the gospel, believing that the glory that will be revealed through Jesus is forever. Look at verse 28. "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." Here the phrase in the last part of this verse, "the twelve tribes of Israel" implies the whole world. Biblically, the twelve tribes alludes to the whole world. The twelve tribes came from the twelve sons of Jacob; they were pillars of twelve tribes. Also, they are the symbol of the twelve pearly gates of the kingdom of God. Finally, the number twelve implies the perfect number and the whole world.

Look at verse 29. "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." In order to follow Jesus we have to lose everything. Sometimes one must leave his house like Abraham left his relatives and his father and followed God. This is a very painful condition. Here, leaving one's house means leaving brothers and sisters and father and mother or children. It is easy to leave brothers and sisters and fathers and mothers. But to leave one's own children is indeed painful. This is not a mere story, but spiritual reality. But we lose nothing. God rewards those who sacrificed everything one hundred times as much and they will inherit eternal life. In short, eternal life is our ultimate reward and we cannot expect more than eternal life. Eternal life is everything. As we studied, man is like grass and his glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of God's promise stands forever (1Pe 1:24.25). But in order to receive eternal life we must fight the good fight, run the race, and keep the faith. In other words we must be like Jesus. Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." Likewise, we should not take too many vacations in our life of faith or we will become drop-outs. So Matthew said, "But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first." The life of faith is like a marathon in the Olympics.

Today we learned that a rich man cannot be happy without Jesus. A man of fame is like a dried up flower in the field. But those who believe in Jesus can get life on earth, and when we go to heaven we have eternal life. We who follow Jesus as his disciples occasionally feel a sense of loss. But we must have a deep faith in the promise of Jesus that we will reign with Jesus forever. To become a president one has to work hard and bow his head to factory workers. But in order to reign with Jesus in the kingdom of God we must love Jesus while living in this world. We must sacrifice our family members and relatives and give everything to God. Then he will reward us with eternal life.