

# Jesus Teaches How to Have Eternal Life (“Follow me”)

Matthew 19:16-30  
Key Verse: 19:21

**“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.”**

Today’s passage is about eternal life. Some of you might have John 3:16 or Romans 6:23 in your minds. But sorry, I won’t address all these verses. Instead, let us first follow Jesus’ conversations about eternal life with a rich young man and then with his disciples. Through this message, may Jesus teach us how to have eternal life, both now and in the future.

## **I. Jesus’ conversation with a man about eternal life (16-22)**

Look at verse 16. **“Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’”** This passage informs us that this man was rich, young and very religious from his young age. Luke 18:18 says that he was a ruler as well, a magistrate in a Jewish religious court. Wow! He seemed to have every possible blessing from God: wealth that was regarded as God’s blessing in Proverbs 10:22, youth, piety, authority and wisdom. There was more about this man! Notice the way he approached Jesus. He ran up to Jesus and knelt before him (Mk 10:17). In both Mark and Luke’s gospels, he called Jesus, “Good teacher” or “Good Master.” This man was humble, ready to learn from Jesus. And he asked about eternal life because he was concerned about his soul’s eternal happiness. Do you want to have such a Bible student? In Mark’s gospel, **“Jesus looked at him and loved him”** (Mk 10:21). He seemed to be the most likely to go to heaven!

When we read his conversation with the man very carefully, however, Jesus stripped him of what he or others believed as the basis for eternal life. I chose the word “strip,” which sounds harsh. However, Jesus did it gently at the beginning but in a very challenging way at the end. He did it in four ways.

**Firstly, Jesus said, “There is only One who is good.”** As the rich young man asked, **“Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”** Jesus replied in 17a. **“Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good.”** Jesus could have argued with or corrected him saying, “Do you think you can do something good and earn eternal life? No! There is no one righteous. Eternal life is gift from God. Your theology is all wrong!” Instead, Jesus

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picked up the word “good” from this man’s question so that this man could think about whether he was truly good or not.

We live in the relativistic world where we seek to have something good, improve ourselves to be good at something, and desire to become good persons. By the way, what is good? Who is good? “Are you good?” According to the Bible, the confusion of “what is good?” or “who is good?” began long ago from Genesis 3 when our ancestors took the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil disobeying God the Creator. Their sin was that they dethroned God and began to exercise self-autonomy: “I know what is good for me!”

Jesus says, **“There is only One who is good.”** It implies that the rich young man was not good. Who is the One that is good? Haven’t you read Genesis 1? God is good. God is good all the time. He is the absolute good. Ps 107:1 says, **“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”** Moreover, everything that comes from God is good as well. James 1:17 says, **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”** Therefore, there is only one way to measure goodness; by God all goodness is to be measured. That which is like Him, and agreeable to his mind and his perfect will, is good. The Bible says that Jesus is the exact image of God and the Word of God. Therefore, Jesus is worthy to be called good.

The rich young man must have thought that he was good enough to do something good to get eternal life. Everybody around him also said that he was not just good, but superb! However, here Jesus was stripping him of his dirty clothes of self-autonomy and self-dependence indirectly by saying **“There is only One who is good.”**

**Secondly, Jesus said, “If you want to enter life, keep the commandments.”**

While the man asked about eternal life, here Jesus talked about “life.” The rich young man must have thought he had led a decent and good life thus far and wanted to make his life better and secure by getting eternal life. He wanted eternal life insurance or fire insurance from hell. Jesus, however, was saying that the man had not yet even entered life. According to Jesus, the present life he was living scarcely deserved the name of life, for in the midst of life he was in death experiencing all kinds of elements of death, despair, hopelessness, brokenness and disease. Only eternal life can be called life. Do you want to enter life? Do you want to leave the life of death in the wilderness and enter God’s rest? (Heb 4:11)

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If you want to enter life, Jesus says, **“Keep the commandments.”** Jesus didn’t say he should study or memorize them, rather observe them. If you combine Jesus’ two statements together, what Jesus said was piercing like a double edged sword. “God is good” + “Keep the commandments” = Keep the commandments according to God’s goodness, which is God’s standard. At this point, the rich young man should have said, “Jesus, I admit that I haven’t kept all of them. Who can meet God’s standard?” But his answer was:

Look at verse 18a. **“Which ones?”** He sounded very confident: Jesus, name it. I am absolutely sure I have kept it. Look at verse 18b. **“Jesus replied, ‘You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”**

What was the answer from the man? Look at verse 20. **“‘All these I have kept,’** the young man said. **‘What do I still lack?’”** In Mark’s gospel, he declared saying, **“All these I have kept since I was a boy.”** He was very prideful and confident. Jesus could have said, “How dare you lie to me! You, a self-righteous sinner! You need to study my sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.” Mark 10:21a, however, says, **“Jesus looked at him and loved him.”** Jesus didn’t criticize him for his prideful words. Instead he loved him like a mother even if his son was dressed in dirty clothes.

Even more, Jesus could hear the hidden despair and fear, as if he were saying, “I was sure that I was a good person and I did my best to keep the commandments. What do I still lack? Why do I have no assurance of eternal life? ”

Even if he had youth, wealth, ruling authority and wisdom, even if he did keep the commandments, he still felt something was lacking. To make the matter worse, he didn’t know what other good thing he had to do. While conversing with Jesus, the man felt as if he looked at himself in a mirror and saw two persons; the first one was dressed like a prince, but the second one like a hungry beggar searching for something that was lacking in his life.

Have you ever felt like the man in this passage? After having great success and getting what others around you want, you still feel something is lacking. Even after you attend many Bible studies and church meetings, and do almost everything better than your friends, you still feel something is missing. To make the matter

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worse, you do not know exactly what you are lacking? This kind of feeling is known as “destination disease” according to a famous author, John Maxwell,

At one time, I viewed success as a place where I would arrive. I defined it as the progressive realization of a predetermined, worthwhile goal. But over time, I realized that the definition falls short of the mark. It leads to “destination disease” -- the belief that if we just arrive somewhere (e. g. attain a position, accomplish a goal, have a relationship with the right person), we will be successful.<sup>1</sup>

“What do I still lack?” This sounds very sad, doesn’t it? However, **this kind of self-realization is redemptive because it helps us turn from ourselves and this world to the One who is good.**

**Thirdly, Jesus said, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions...”**

Let’s read verse 21 together. **“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’ command is challenging and radical. But we need to remember that his command comes from his deep desire to give “eternal life” to the man.

**Jesus wanted to strip the man of his false righteousness and of the idol of his earthly wealth.** Jesus could have argued with him saying, “No! You haven’t kept them all. In fact, you have violated every single one. I can prove it.” Instead, Jesus said, **“If you want to be perfect...”** while the man had said, **“What do I still lack?”** The man thought that he truly kept the commandments, but the only One who is good says, **“If you want to be perfect.”** In other words, this man was not perfect in keeping the commandments. What was worse, he deceived himself as if he did it perfectly.

Here comes Jesus’ surgically life-saving, life-entering command; **“Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.”** Here “your possessions” are something you absolutely believe you earned. “I worked hard investing everything to get it. Therefore it is mine! My money, my children, my achievement, my fellowship!” But the reality is we were born naked and will go to a grave-yard empty handed. What can be mine? We are nothing but stewards for all we have now. “Your possessions” can also be known as

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/what-i-believe-about-success>

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“counterfeit gods” or “idols” that offer people false promises; self-worth, security, pleasure, acceptance or approval from others, respect and love, etc. The rich young man had believed that his wealth was his future security. He could not live without it. But Jesus was telling him to let it go, let it go and use it for others. Love them as yourself by using what you have. Jesus was telling him to value heavenly things and use earthly wealth to have treasure in heaven. The more he clung to his wealth and his idols, the more he could never receive eternal life from Jesus. Jesus was telling him not to become like a stupid monkey that was holding a banana in a trap until the hunter came to catch him. Let it go! Empty your hands of what has not given you eternal life! Don’t become like Lot’s wife who couldn’t let go of her love of Sodom and was destroyed.

**Fourthly, Jesus said, “Then come, follow me.”** This man had followed himself, his culture, tradition and religion, which couldn’t give him a life to the full. Jesus asked him to realize all of them were dirty clothes. “Take them off! **Then come, follow me!**” This is the very answer to the man’s question, “What good thing must I do to get eternal life?” **Following Jesus is the way to eternal life!**

**How, then, is “following Jesus” the way to eternal life?**

**In the first place, it is because Jesus is the only One who is good.** Therefore, when we keep actively following him denying ourselves and when we keep remaining in Him by trusting in Him, he leads us to eternal life because that was why God sent him on earth (Jn 3:16).

**In the second place, following Jesus is the way to eternal life because he would fulfill the laws/commandments for us.** If this man and his disciples keep following Jesus, where would they end up? At the cross! Why did Jesus have to be crucified? It is because the wages of sin is death but Jesus paid the full price of our sins in our places. When we keep following Jesus, especially believing that his death and resurrection is ours, then a new life that deserves the name of Life will begin. Romans 6:4 says, **“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.”** In our new life, out of our deep love for Jesus, we love to keep Jesus’ law/commandments written on our hearts and we are enabled to do it by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Following Jesus is not a one-time decision. It is a life-long constant following Him. Once we begin a new life through his death and resurrection, Jesus again tells us, **“Follow me!”** Apostle Paul might be the best example of following

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Jesus. This is the eternal life we can have and enjoy now on earth. In Philippians 3:7-14, he said,

**“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”**

When we follow Jesus, there is no “destination disease.” When we follow Jesus, we can live a new life now, each day. This is what eternal life looks like on earth. If you do not have an assurance of having “eternal life,” please converse with Jesus very personally!

Verse 22 is one of the most disappointing verses in the Bible: **“When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”** He went away sad, because he refused Jesus’ greatest offer to have eternal life by following Him. Instead he chose his wealth, which he knew couldn’t give him eternal life. He went away sad, because he knew that what Jesus said was true, but he couldn’t make that choice, that sacrifice. He went away sad, because he was cowardly and disappointed in himself again.

What is your choice? To follow Jesus or to follow something else you know that can’t give eternal life?

### **II. Jesus’ conversation with his disciples about eternal life (23-30)**

After seeing the rich young man leave him with his head down, Jesus spoke to his disciples, **“Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is 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 someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God”**

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(23-24). When the disciples heard Jesus' words, they were greatly astonished and asked, **“Who then can be saved?”** The disciples thought that that young man was mostly likely to enter heaven. If such a person couldn't go to heaven, who could? They themselves were not sure whether they could be saved. It was because they had a hidden desire to become rich like the man.

Let's read verse 26. **“Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’”** They were Jesus' loving words to his disciples. No person can save himself by his own effort, ability or goodness. No person can save others either. With God, however, all things are possible. God is only One who can save the most unlikely people including his own disciples, sinners like tax collectors, prostitutes and even a robber crucified next to Jesus. In order to make the impossible with man possible, Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, where he would open a narrow gate, a new and living way which will lead to life. God is only One who gives faith in Jesus to his chosen ones and perfects their faith (Heb 12:2). I believe it was not impossible for God to save the rich young man!

While hearing Jesus' conversation with the rich man, Peter told Jesus very honestly what he had in mind. Look at verse 27. **“We have left everything to follow you! What then there be for us?”** Peter had a big mouth! Jesus could have said to him, “Do you feel proud of yourself thinking you did what the rich man couldn't do? Do you have a sense of loss or entitlement?”

Look at verse 28. **“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, 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’”** It is very interesting to see how Jesus viewed his disciples. He did not identify them as those who had left everything. He simply called them **“you who have followed me.”** Jesus was telling them that he was not just a teacher. NO! He is the Son of Man who will sit on the glorious throne at the renewal of all things. At the days of renewal, they will say, “Wow! Thank Jesus! We made a right choice.”

We have a tendency to think about how much I have given up and how much I have sacrificed to serve God and others, and become sorry and bitter. But what truly matters is “following Jesus” trusting in and loving him. We can have eternal life now on earth, which is to know Jesus (Jn 17:3) by learning about his mind and heart and by obeying him. When we focus on knowing Jesus, what we

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have left or given up will look very small and look like garbage, or a rotting banana.

There was more that Jesus promised. His disciples would receive such an amazing honor to judge the twelve tribes of Israel together with Eternal King Jesus simply because they had followed Jesus. Wow! It will be a part of eternal life in the future.

Jesus’ promise of blessings is extended to everyone who has followed him. Let’s read verse 29. **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”**

Some of you might feel sad thinking as if Jesus is commanding you to leave everything and everybody that is very close and important to you. But the key words in this verse are “for my sake.” Instead of thinking about what you think you have to leave and lose, think about Jesus. When you find treasure in heaven in Jesus, when you find eternal life in Jesus, when you truly believe that he is the Son of Man, your relationship with everybody and everything around you should be rearranged/ realigned with Jesus at the center of all.

When I was about to come here as a missionary in 1996, my father was greatly disappointed in me. For more than one month, he got drunk and slept on the street feeling betrayed by me. As a good son (?), my heart was broken as well. But I couldn’t refuse God’s call based on Jeremiah 1:5, **“I appointed you as a prophet to the nations!”** I earnestly prayed that Our Father in heaven could use my obedience to him for my earthly father’s conversion. When I left my father in that way, it only took one and a half years before my father became a Christian, and then a sacrificial missionary who babysat my children and many other UBF children. When I left my earthly father, I gained a Christian father!

For Jesus’ sake, to leave your family means to leave your human and worldly ties and realign your relationship with each of your family members from Jesus’ perspective. If so, you can be a good father, a good husband, a good son, and a good brother or sister. To leave your friends for Jesus’ sake means to leave your worldly friendship ties and realign your friendship from Jesus’ perspective. If so, you will be a good Christian friend. This is how we can experience eternal life in our real life on earth.

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Now let's read verse 29 again. **“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”** Jesus promises that everyone who has left anything for his sake will receive 100 times as much, which is eternal life we can enjoy in this world. What is more, Jesus promises that everyone who has left anything for his sake will inherit eternal life, which is the eternal life we will enjoy in heaven forever.

Those who pursue the things of the world, no matter how successful or noble or religious they look, they will be the last if they do not follow Jesus. On the other hand, those who follow Jesus leaving things of the world because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ, no matter how weak or insignificant and foolish they may look from the eyes of the world, they will be the first in eternity. May God give you eternal life now and forever as you follow Jesus, who is only One who is good.