

Riches and the kingdom

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[0 : 00] Okay, so we're looking at Matthew 19 and we've got the case of the rich young ruler. I give thanks to God because my graphics tablet at home for me to do my illustrations is actually broken until a couple of days ago and managed to somehow fix it.

So we've got some wonderful graphics for you tonight as well. Okay, so. So, chapter 19 opens by placing Jesus and his disciples on the other side, that is the east side of the Jordan River, which would have been somewhere around this area I've highlighted on the screen of Perea.

And this is where Jesus was healing large crowds. That's verse 1 to 2 of Matthew 19. Here, Jesus was challenged by the Pharisees on the subject of divorce.

And as we heard last week from David, Jesus is prompted to give a teaching on and about little children. We see that he put his hands on those children and blessed them as well.

Jesus and his disciples were just about to leave this place. Jesus and this rich young ruler comes up to Jesus.

[1 : 19] And what follows is a conversation about eternal life. And it prompts the young man to leave feeling sad. The event is also recounted in Mark and Luke's Gospels.

And we'll be dipping into those as we go through the text. So, our text tonight, I believe, is separated into three sections. We have part one.

This is verses 16 to 22, which tell us of the incident of the rich young ruler. They tell us all about this conversation that the rich young ruler had with Jesus. The second section is Jesus, as he relays this incident in teaching form to his disciples and some onlookers.

That's verses 23 to 26. And we have part three, which gives us a short view of the future and this time called the renewal of all things.

This is a time where Jesus will return. And I've just noticed that the text that I have in front of me, my script, doesn't actually match up to my slides.

[2 : 31] I'm wondering which version I've got. We'll carry on anyway. So, we've got... We'll fly over the text and we'll get a timeline and a picture of what we're dealing with tonight.

So, verse 16, we have a question of the young man acquiring eternal life. That's the question on the table. The subject of being good is raised and we have some rules which are laid out by Jesus.

That's verses 17 to 21. The young man goes away sad. Verse 22. Jesus teaches his disciples about the problem of riches.

It's 23 to 26. And Jesus then draws out some facts about the eternal life to come. Those are verses 27 to 30. So, we have a good timeline of events there.

Okay. Okay. So, verse 16. The rich young ruler. This man approaches Jesus. And we...

[3 : 31] It's a famous story. We tend to call him the rich young ruler. It's in a lot of the Bibles. At the top is the heading, the rich young ruler. But it prompts us to ask the question, what do we actually know about this man?

I watched one sermon that seemed to be claiming that this young man was being obnoxious and arrogant. Maybe even a bit sarcastic in the way that he was approaching Jesus.

Which puts over a very specific character, doesn't it? If you tell somebody that a person is obnoxious. I would politely disagree with that view.

And I'll put it across to you tonight why I believe that. And we'll do a little character study of this rich young ruler. So, actually, the truth is not very much is said about the man.

It's a very short amount. But I think out of those things that can be... That are said, I think we have a very... Pardon the pun. A very rich picture of who he is. And I think we can deduce something of his character.

[4 : 33] So, let's investigate. So, verse 22 of our text tonight tells us that he has great wealth. And that he was young. Luke 18 refers to him as a ruler.

That would have been a ruler in the Jewish religious community. So, we know straight away where that title comes from. Rich young ruler. We know those things are true. And he would have come with a fairly high status.

So, people in a community would have recognized him as a ruler. As rich. And there would probably have been something apparently quite dignified in the way that he carried himself.

So, you know, he's rich, young, and a ruler. Verse 16 tells us that the young man referred to Jesus as teacher.

Which I believe holds some marks of respect. That same word would also be known as master. And I think if someone was arrogant or not very nice, they wouldn't come up to someone in a nice way and represent them with such a greeting.

[5 : 48] So, I think we can add that to the list. So, I think this young man was respectful. Mark's gospel tells us that the young man ran up to Jesus and fell on his knees before him.

Maybe not as dignified as the image we just had. But that would have been quite something for a rich young ruler to do. To be running up and chucking himself on his knees in front of Jesus.

Particularly in front of others. Other people would have seen this. So, I think we can add keen and genuine to those lists of characteristics.

We see that he had some level of concern for the law. And he claimed to have kept the commandments that Jesus was talking about. So, we could say he had something of a conscience. So, he's conscientious. And was likely to be quite intelligent as well. If he understood these things. If he thought he understood these things.

[6 : 51] So, we can put intelligent. So, I think the image that we're getting of this man is the opposite to what we spoke about, wasn't it?

He's not. I don't think this man is obnoxious. I think he's a man who is quite lively. I think he's a man who's genuinely seeking something. And, yeah.

I think in modern day language, we could say that he was a rather agreeable young man. Maybe not modern day. Sorry. I'll admit, I've been watching Downton Abbey.

And it's got the better of me. So, I don't think this young man comes across as arrogant at all. I think he would have been found as quite a nice guy.

That's probably how we would say it more these days. This guy's a nice guy. Which moves us on to the actual conversation. What is good? So, we're looking at verses 16 to 17.

[7 : 50] Now, the young man asked this question. He says, and this is how it's rendered in the book of Matthew. What good thing must I do to get eternal life?

Now, the same question in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. Attach the word good to Jesus rather than to the activity the young man is talking about. And so, it's rendered slightly differently.

It says, good teacher, he asked. What must I do to inherit eternal life? Some people in the interwebs have said, oh, this is a contradiction.

It shows that the Bible can't be true because it's contradicting itself. Actually, it's not. If you look at it, you see that in both cases, the question and the answer are still more or less the same.

It's only the form that's been recorded slightly differently. Matthew records Jesus' response to this question as, Mark and Luke both record Jesus' responses.

[8 : 59] Why do you call me good? Jesus answered, no one is good except God alone. So, both more or less the same kind of answers, aren't they? I want us to note very carefully that in the Gospels of Mark and Luke, Jesus does not say that he isn't good.

He doesn't say that. In all accounts, what he's doing is simply getting straight to the point. And he's telling the young man, why are you saying good?

He's saying that your concept of good is flawed. That's what he's saying. He's not saying that he isn't good. So, we have the same questions and the same answers.

We've established that. We know from verses 18 and 20 that the young man is familiar with the commandments that Jesus lays out. So, his idea of being good, being a good person, probably wouldn't have differed that much from, say, the Pharisees of the day.

Now, the young man has linked these doing good things with obtaining eternal life when he asks, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?

[10:14] Jesus saw this error. And this is where we see him begin to correct the young man, saying that actually, good deeds do not equal eternal life.

The structure of verse 17 could be paraphrased this way. Why are you talking about being good when only God is good? Now, keep that in mind and we'll now talk about eternal life.

It's interesting how this young man reacted to Jesus telling him that no one is good. On the surface, he seemed to accept it, didn't he? There was no him coming back at them and saying, oh, actually, no, I'm a good person.

There wasn't any of that. He seemed to accept what Jesus was telling him. I think there was more evidence that this man was a listening man. He was careful about how he listened to Jesus.

At least on the surface. If you said that to people these days, you'd get quite a strong reaction, wouldn't you? Particularly in Brighton. It's completely countercultural. Everybody thinks they're an objectively good person for a variety of reasons.

[11:29] What's interesting is if you ask someone if they are a good person, nine times out of ten, they'll say absolutely. It's interesting if you then ask them if they believe in absolute truth.

You can get quite a good conversation out of that. Just an observation. Usually people believe they are objectively good for reasons like I don't break the law.

I don't hurt people. And I do good things. And those can usually be disputed pretty quickly, can't they? Most people have broken the law at some point.

Most people probably hurt somebody at some point. And even the most vile of people have done good things in their time. There's no evidence to say that a person is a good person.

The Bible makes a massive distinction between doing good things and being a good person. As Jesus declared, no one is good except God alone. Psalm 14 verses 2 to 3 says this.

[12:34] The Lord looks down from heaven upon the sons of men to see if any understand, if any seek God. All have turned away. They have together become corrupt.

There is no one who does good, not even one. This isn't a new thing. Paul recounts a psalm in Romans 3 where he says that for Jews and Gentiles, we are all alike under sin.

We all fail to make that grade. Jesus, if we're to encapsulate this, is making it very, very clear to the young man, no one is good. Doing good deeds do not equal eternal life.

Having the same problem you had earlier, Phil. That should have popped up separately. It doesn't matter. So, we enter this subject of eternal life.

Jesus goes on to answer the young man's question, which was, what good deed must I do to get eternal life? Jesus says, if you want to enter life, meaning eternal life, keep the commandments.

[13:44] Jesus is now drawing out conversation from this young man and begins by addressing his more academic side. The young man would have been more than familiar with these commandments, I think.

We see that in his response when he says, which ones? This is where Jesus' response is extremely interesting. So, he's quoting the Ten Commandments.

Most people have heard of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. What's interesting is the way that he brings them up, the way that Jesus quotes them. So, when we look at the Ten Commandments, we see that the first four regard the way that we respect God.

And then, the following five to ten regard the way that we respect each other. So, on the screen is a simplified version I found for older kids.

It helped me a great deal, actually. So, Jesus answering this young man's question, he says, keep the commandments. And when he quotes them, he doesn't quote them randomly.

[14:51] Instead, he uses specific commandments to draw out a picture of the root of this young man's problem. So, Jesus starts with the sixth commandment.

You shall not murder. So, we can ask ourselves, why? Why does Jesus start with this? In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, it's the first example that Jesus uses when he teaches that the breaking of the law is not an external thing, but it's an internal thing.

And he begins, in the case of murder, he says, when you are angry, the breaking of this commandment starts in the heart. It's not an external thing, it's an internal thing.

And Jesus continues with the young man and follows on and moves on to the seventh commandment. You should not commit adultery. Again, if we go back to the Sermon on the Mount, we see the same thing.

Jesus' teaching is that adultery begins in the heart. He actually says, Jesus then goes on to quote the eighth, ninth, and then the fifth commandment, which all have similar things in common.

[16:11] You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother. Do you see what Jesus has done there?

He's gone six, seven, eight, nine, and then back to five of the ten commandments. So these are the very commandments.

The ones that Jesus has latched on to are the very commandments that the Jewish religious leaders would have seen as really a purely external matter.

I didn't kill. I didn't touch. I didn't take. I didn't speak. And interestingly, Jesus stops there at the ninth commandment and then goes back to the fifth, which is more or less I behaved respectfully.

Notice that Jesus didn't say anything about coveting, which is the tenth. He waited in challenging the inward things of the young man.

[17:11] He was quiet on that front for a time. Jesus knows this young man's mind and is pulling on this thread from verse 16 of doing good. The young man wanted to know the practical good thing that he could do to obtain eternal life.

And Jesus says, let's start with these. And what Jesus is doing is trying to provoke the young man into looking into his own heart and make a self-assessment.

Sadly, the young man spectacularly misses the point and says, yeah, I kept all of those. No problems. There's no sin there. Mark and Luke's account tell us that the young man claimed he kept all of these since he was a boy.

I'd ask all of you tonight, do we think this is true? No. The young man believed he kept them all since he was a boy.

If you believe that could be true, I'd ask you, have you ever been angry? I think the answer is going to be yes, isn't it? You ever looked at a member of the opposite sex in an inappropriate way?

[18:27] The answer is going to be yes. And this is where we see everything start to break down for the young man. Jesus begins a process of gently correcting him.

When the question arises from the young man, what do I still lack? We're in verse 20. This is where things get a little bit interesting because Mark's account says, Jesus looked at him and loved him.

That's a really unusual combination of words to have. Jesus looked at him and loved him. He goes on in verse 21 to say, If you want to be perfect or complete, go sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and then you will have treasure in heaven.

Then come follow me. In challenging a young man to give up his wealth, Jesus is actually saying to him, you know the thing you lack is me.

We could break down Jesus' sentence this way. Being perfect or complete isn't a matter of having riches.

[19:44] Eternal life isn't obtained by checking boxes, and it can't be added on to your list of possessions. That's not how you get eternal life. You have to make the sacrifice of your heart, giving away all his possessions.

This is what really, really was at the root of him. This is where his heart was. His heart was in his riches. His heart was in the things that he had. Then you will have the treasure in heaven.

You'll lose the things that really have no value, and you'll gain the things that really do have value.

The treasure in heaven, things that will never fade or never spoil.

Jesus says, when you're done that, come follow me. Jesus, the one to be followed, is the one who is the life.

John 14, 6 says, Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. This is the turning point of the story.

[20:55] And if you know Jesus tonight personally, you're saying to yourself, go on, son, do it. Just give in your heart. Give it to Jesus.

And if we based our previous experience with reading about Jesus in the Gospels, you would expect the young man to rejoice and follow the Lord.

He's found Jesus. He's found the way to eternal life. But what happens? He wanders off. When the young man heard this, he went away sad because he had great wealth.

That's quite a letdown, isn't it? That's a very sad letdown. Actually, in this verse, sad is a poorer translation.

I'm sad when I go to Sainsbury's and I don't have any roll mop herrings. But this man was more than sad. He was grieved. He was deeply distressed.

[22 : 00] He didn't go away thinking, oh, well, it's okay. I have something better to do when I get home anyway. He went away deeply disturbed by this encounter with Jesus. And I want us to notice Jesus' response to this young man's failure.

Jesus loved this man. Even though Jesus knew his answer would upset the young man and knew that the young man would reject him, he loved him anyway. That's the end of part one.

And we'll just summarize very quickly. So here's where the encounter of the young man ends. It's quite a break from what we've been hearing.

And as we've said, that when people in the Gospels come and fall at Jesus' feet, usually it ends in a really positive, really vibrant, good way. A positive outcome.

Instead, we see this very sad case of the young man leaving sad and unfulfilled. And why? Why? Is it because he didn't want to give money to the poor?

[23 : 13] Kind of. But that was a symptom. It wasn't the problem. You know, the first sermon I found when I was studying this was a guy that was using the Scripture as a platform to be saying that people should be giving them more money.

It's the right thing to do. Giving is the right thing to do, but it's a symptom. It's not the problem. What Jesus is saying is you can't follow him into the kingdom, into eternal life, if your heart is somewhere else.

In this young man's case, it happened to be riches. Money was more important to him than following Jesus into the kingdom. And that's why he went away sad. Miserable.

Grieved. And then we begin part two of these verses where Jesus teaches his disciples based on these events. So you can just picture the disciples standing by.

There were some other people there as well, going by the other Gospels. Bear in mind that the disciples at this point have witnessed Jesus doing all kinds of, miracles and amazing things and watched as people flocked to him.

[24 : 31] Hundreds of people flocked to Jesus. And then this happened. A man of apparently good character, as we said earlier, an agreeable young man, good standing, rich, a ruler, comes to Jesus, honestly, comes to him and then goes away grieved.

And the disciples are most likely perplexed by this. So Jesus turns to his disciples and he begins to explain the situation with the aid of a very famous image.

First of all, Jesus puts it plainly. He says, truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is directly referring to the young man here.

He's emphasizing riches as one of the biggest pitfalls to man. Why is that? Why is money so special? Why is riches so special?

Oh, riches so special. You ever heard the term gateway drug? Money is a gateway because it can get you anything the world has to offer.

[25 : 44] The more money you have, the more stuff you can have. The more you fulfill this illusion that stuff equals completeness, which is where the young man was going wrong in the first place.

We would have seen that that was an issue for him. 1 Timothy 6 says this, verses 9 to 10, Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. That's quite a famous quote, isn't it? And people that don't know the Bible say, oh, love of money is the root of all evil.

No, it's the root of all kinds of evil. In his explanation, Jesus doesn't stop at it being hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven.

He then goes on to say, verse 24, 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.

[26 : 57] Took me hours to draw that. Never drawn a camel in my life until this moment. Well, that's not just hard, is it?

I mean, in this case, I was speaking to Peter earlier who was telling me that the needle was a physical place, a very, very narrow place. This image works just as well, I think.

I'd say that's pretty much impossible. Wouldn't you? That is not going to happen. The disciples had a strange reaction to this image.

I read in one of the commentaries that this is a very famous term to say, so lots of people would have understood this term and what it meant. But the disciples' reaction was very strange.

See, they said, the text says that they were greatly astonished and asked, well, who then can be saved? This doesn't seem quite the right answer to the question, does it?

[28 : 02] So culturally, the onlookers and the disciples would have associated riches with a sign of spiritual status. So the richer you are, the closer to God you must be.

This is why they would have been astonished by Jesus saying it is impossible to enter into eternal life. By riches, it was completely counter-cultural to them. And this is why they say, well, who then can be saved?

If it doesn't work this way, what way does it work? Jesus responds, and in doing so, closes this conversation on how to gain access into the kingdom.

This is verse 26. He says, with man, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible. So to summarize, Jesus is saying that salvation, the way to heaven, belongs only to God.

The fact is, much like the rich young ruler, nobody has the goodness or righteousness needed to achieve salvation. You cannot do it on your own.

[29 : 09] There are no good deeds that can lead you into eternal life. There is only one way to salvation, and that is to give your hearts over to Jesus and to follow him.

There's no amount of riches, there's no amount of good deeds, there's no amount of lifestyles, correct ones, wrong ones, that will lead you into eternal life, a life with Jesus in glory.

But Jesus gives us his righteousness as a free gift. Jesus says to us, you're not good enough, but I am.

Romans 3, 21 to 24 says this, but now apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

[30 : 25] That's a whole nother sermon on its own, but it backs up everything that Jesus was saying. When we have faith in him, when we give our heart to Jesus, we have the gift of his righteousness, and we are seen by God as justified.

And it's all free, completely free gift. That brings us to part three. The renewal of all things.

I'm only going to touch on this due to time, and I could spend another several hours talking about this last section probably, so we'll just touch on that, and then we'll call it a night.

The renewal of all things. So this question of riches prompts Peter to ask. This is verse 27. We've left everything to follow you. What then will there be for us? Peter probably has in mind an image of what eternity might look like if material things in the world have so comparatively little value.

Peter, I don't know if you've picked up on this vibe, he's concerned for the things that he's given up. Jesus begins with an explanation and with reassurance that what his followers stand to inherit is far more valuable than anything that can be left behind.

[31 : 50] So, like I said, I'm not going to dive right into these verses. I really actually, I think that these tend to speak for themselves, but I'll make an observation or two and just summarize them. Oh, they're already up there.

Good. Okay, so, observation one. This is a sensitive subject, isn't it? So, what I wanted to point out is that when we think of potentially people that are left behind in this, it can be quite stirring emotionally.

Brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, I want to point out to you that the statements that Jesus makes in this verse does not devalue those people. It simply serves to show you how rich the riches of his grace are.

How the value of Jesus and the value of the kingdom, so much richer than anything you can imagine, doesn't devalue the people. We're all made in God's image. Observation number two.

This closing verse points out, again, the character of the rich young ruler, I think, and attaches it to the rewards of eternity.

[33 : 07] And that is the character of being self-seeking. Seeking to be first may not equal the same profit in the kingdom to come. If a follower of Christ remains self-seeking, they may find themselves being last.

I think Jesus might be inviting Peter and the disciples just to look back at their own hearts after this question has come up of what they might gain for themselves.

Let's just make a few conclusions. I think most of what we heard tonight speaks for itself, but we'll just draw some main points that we can take with us into the week. My first point would be to the person who might not know Jesus personally.

If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus, don't be like the rich young ruler. Don't walk away grieving and sad when you have a free gift of this magnitude.

So I would say to you, you can't earn eternal life. You can't find your way there through your own good deeds. It just won't happen.

[34 : 21] As you've heard, no one is good but God alone. There is a price for eternal life.

The price does exist. The price is death. But Jesus, the Son of God and also God paid that for you. That's why he was executed on the cross. That's why he rose again. He defeated death so that you could have his righteousness as a free gift. And all you have to do is believe in him.

Don't choose the riches of the world over this amazing gift because they won't last. Jesus has purchased our salvation with his blood.

My last comment would be, if you do know Jesus and you are following him, praise God for that free gift. Praise God for the work that he's doing with his people.

[35 : 32] But don't get distracted by riches. It's so, so easy to do. You've been given the best gift in the world. One that doesn't spoil or fade as the Lord Jesus Christ as our master.

And we stand to inherit being with him forever. And that is infinitely more valuable than anything you'll find on earth. So keep your eyes on the prize, as they say.

That is an eternity with Jesus. And we'll just close just by reading this scripture. Matthew 6, 19 to, not 201.

I believe it's 20. 21. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, your heart will be also. So... ..