

Matthew 19:13-26

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[0:00] O Lord our God, in these quiet moments, in the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, O Lord, our rock, and our Redeemer. Amen.

When you turn on the TV, and there's nothing good on, and you're just flipping through, and you land on an old movie, what's different? About the blockbusters you're seeing in the theaters now, and the old movie that's, you know, I'm not even talking about that old, right?

Just a couple decades ago. I'm not talking like black and white golden age of cinema. I'm talking, you know, 70s, 80s, 90s. What's different? The effects are better, and, you know, etc.

But, like, the thing that strikes me the most, the most important thing about old movies is the pace, right? For modern audiences, the pacing of older movies is excruciatingly slow, right?

Modern dramas are faster paced than even action movies from the 1980s, right? To a modern viewer, to younger viewers, especially those who've come of age in, you know, the 2000s and beyond, you know, it doesn't even make sense why a movie would be paced that slow.

[1:34] Were people just slow in the head back then? We don't get that, right? It doesn't mean those older movies are bad. They're just different. In fact, those who came of age in the 70s probably think that, right, that today's films are frenetic, overstimulating nonsense for people with no self-discipline and no attention span, right?

Which is right. Well, neither, or maybe both, but the thing is, the conventions, the style has changed. There's nothing wrong with older movies.

They were just made in a different style. And the style of, I promise this is going somewhere, the style of biography has also changed.

Today, if you walk into a bookstore and pick up a biography, you'll expect it to tell the story of a person's life in order. One thing, then the other, then the other, then the other, right? Of course, right?

You've come to expect that, but of course, how else would we do it, right? How else would you write a biography? But you may not realize that you have come to expect a completely linear biography in the same way that you have come to expect fast-paced movies.

[2:56] That's the style you're used to, but it's not the only style of biography. First-century biographers like Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote in a different style because it was a different convention in those days.

The overall narrative is arranged chronologically in the order of events, but the smaller events, the details, they often arranged them by theme. Today's biographies, you know, if someone today was writing a biography of Jesus, they would probably be like, April 29th, Jesus went to Capernaum, he taught this message, and spoke to that person.

April 30th, Jesus went to Chorazim and preached this slightly different message and healed this person. And then, May 1st, right, Jesus taught this message to his disciples, and then he got on a boat and crossed the Galilee.

But ancient biographies, like Matthew, were arranged a little more like this. In that period of his life, Jesus taught some things.

Here are some of them. In this period of his life, he also spoke to some people. Here are some of those conversations. In this period of Jesus' life, he did some amazing things.

[4:16] Here are some of them. Now, the overall narrative of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, it's the same narrative, right? The same

overarching story. His birth and his early life, his baptism and the beginning of his public ministry, his Galilean ministry, the developing tension with the Pharisees, all in order, right?

He's setting his eyes on Jerusalem, the phase of the gospel that we're in right now, his week, his last week in Jerusalem and all the things he did there. Then his arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial, followed by his resurrection, followed by the Great Commission and his ascension into heaven where he rules and reigns, right?

And since Matthew lived in the first century as a biographer, his style was to take that major outline and fill in details, not sequentially like the calendar, but by theme, which is why, as we've walked through the book of Matthew, we've seen sections where Jesus is just teaching, and then he's just interacting with people, and then he's just healing and doing works of wonder, and they're all grouped together.

And all the other gospel writers did similar things. They grouped by theme, which is why the events of the gospels sometimes appear out of order to us as a modern reader because we're expecting a completely linear style.

That doesn't mean the gospels are unreliable. It just means that we're not used to that style of biography, and we need to learn to read them as they were written, to understand what the authors are doing.

[5:49] And when we do that, we come to see something very interesting about this passage. All of the gospel writers are writing in a first-century convention.

They arrange their material a little differently than we do, thematically typically. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke all include both of these conversations.

They let the children come to me narrative and then the rich young ruler. We see it in Matthew 19, Mark chapter 10, and Luke chapter 18. They all keep them in the same order.

They all keep them together as if they're a single unit. Right? But based on the style of first-century biographies, we would not expect that.

We don't expect this to happen. But when three biographies include exactly the same events, in exactly the same order, it's as if they knew it was important for us to read them all together.

[6:54] And indeed, it is important that we do so. Because these aren't just two conversations unrelated to each other that Jesus has in sequence on his way to Jerusalem.

The apostles believed it's important to understand these two events side by side. They want us to contrast them. They want that contrast then to confront us.

And they want it to shape the way we read the text and what we understand from it. It would be like a modern filmmaker with that frenetic energy suddenly slowing down.

You'd take notice. Right? We'd understand that something important is happening here. Well, something important is happening here. Let's see what the gospel writers want us to see as they highlight the contrast between these two conversations.

The contrast between the people who come to Christ. The contrast between their requests. And the contrast between their results. We must see, we must learn these ideas so that we don't walk away from Christ like the rich young ruler grieving.

[8:16] So let's ask, who are they? The first thing we notice is the contrast between the two parties that come to Jesus. And we see that in verse 13 and verse 16.

The first are children. They're not impressive, cute, but not self-sufficient. And by the reception they receive, we can tell what the first century attitude towards children was.

Right? They didn't have a children are the future attitude. Right? How are they received by the disciples? A rebuke, right?

And in fact, probably rebuking the parents for bringing babies to Jesus for blessing. So either children are beneath Christ's dignity as the great teacher, or they're an obstacle, an annoyance, hindering him and delaying him on his way to Jerusalem.

That's how the disciples are seeing this, right? Either way, the disciples are saying that children don't hold a high status in the ancient world.

[9:21] You wouldn't find a politician kissing babies to improve his poll numbers, right? On the other side, verse 16, what do we see? We have a rich, young ruler.

Matthew tells us in this passage that he is rich and that he is young. Luke tells us that he is a ruler. Probably what that means is that not only part of the Roman establishment, but probably part of the synagogue.

He seems to be an upstanding guy. Perhaps a bit cocky, right? But people like a little confidence, right? And it's not as if he's like a jerk, right? He openly admits that in some way he doesn't have it all together, right?

This is the young man you want your daughter bringing home, right? He's successful, he's respectable. The world is his oyster. He's a cadet, maybe. So that's the contrast, right?

Where children run into gatekeepers, where they run into no, this man receives no rebuke, no delay, he walks right up to Christ.

[10:27] There's no barrier, no objection to him. So two parties come to Jesus. They're at opposite ends of the social status spectrum.

But who leaves satisfied? Is it the well-qualified one? And who leaves grieving?

Is it the group with nothing to offer? It's the very opposite of what the world would expect. The well-qualified one leaves unsatisfied.

And those with nothing leave with blessing. What does that contrast teach us? Do you need to be impressive in the world's eyes, in your own eyes, to receive God's blessing?

If people think you're nothing, if you think you're nothing, if you think you're unlovable or unnoticed or not worth noticing, what does Jesus' response to the children tell you?

[11:50] Can you see his heart? Does it show you his care and concern? Does it show you that you don't need this world's esteem or even your own? To be welcomed and received and loved by Christ.

And, if you think you're something, something special, and the world around you thinks you're something, if you have it all together, what does Jesus' response to the rich young ruler tell you? He doesn't cast him away, you know, he doesn't, like, overcorrect or something like that, but he doesn't get any extra special access because of that. Jesus shows no partiality.

That respectability is not what gains you blessing. Absolutely, he'll receive you, but he won't receive you because you're something.

Jesus receives the children. He receives the rich young ruler. He turns neither of them away. Respectable or not. Beautiful or not.

[12:57] Young or old. Rich or poor. Genius or dunce. Popular or outcast. Jesus will receive every person that he made in his own image.

Just a side note. Who are we, then, to show partiality? Now, what this first contrast teaches us, the contrast between the two parties that come to Jesus is this.

It doesn't matter who you are, high status or low. Jesus doesn't evaluate you, and your results with Jesus do not depend on the world's standards.

What do they depend on? We see that in the next, the second contrast. When we ask, what do they want? What are the children and their parents asking for?

What is the rich young ruler asking for? And friends, the answer to this question is absolutely critical. This is the difference between Christianity and every other religion and philosophy in the whole world.

[14:21] This is the difference between eternal life and eternal death. When we come to God, what do we ask for?

The children ask for God's kindness, for His grace. The rich young man asks for advice. One asks, will you put your hand of blessing on me?

The other says, tell me what to do. I don't know who coined the phrase, but it's been said many times and it is so true. The gospel is good news, not good advice.

Jesus came and taught, but He isn't mostly a teacher. He healed many people, but He is not mostly a healer. He fed the 5,000, but He is not chiefly a provider and a miracle worker.

He confronted idolatry, but He's not first of profit. He stood against tyrants, but He is not mainly a liberator. From the beginning of Matthew's gospel to its end, Jesus is a Savior.

[15:40] Savior. at the outset, the angel said to Joseph, Joseph, son of David, this is Matthew chapter 1, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. That's the beginning, all the way to the end.

At its conclusion, Matthew 26, Jesus took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Friends, from the beginning of the gospel to the end, it's about a king who came not to give advice but to rescue his people, to give his life as a ransom for many.

So we don't come to Christ first asking for good advice. We don't come to Him first for a moral example.

[16:45] Is His word full of wisdom? Is it filled with good and righteous law? Yes, absolutely. But that is not our greatest need, and it is not the first priority of His ministry, and we will only have the ears to hear.

the eyes to see and the power to obey His good law once He's already saved us and given us spiritual sight and given us the empowerment of His Holy Spirit.

The word gospel literally means good news. The gospel of Jesus is the good news of God's grace. The parents brought children to Jesus looking for that grace.

looking for blessing. The rich young ruler came to Jesus looking for something to do himself, to save himself. But Jesus came because sinners can't do it for themselves.

He came to stand in the gap between the blackness of human evil and the blistering holiness of God. He didn't teach people how to get on the cross themselves and bear divine justice for their own sins.

[18:02] He went there to save us that we might not be destroyed. That's the gospel. That's the good news. That's the message of Jesus. So don't go to Jesus for advice unless you've already gone to Him for grace.

So the first contrast in this passage, who came to Jesus? That tells us that our social status doesn't matter before the King. High status won't give us an advantage and low status won't prevent Him from receiving us.

And the second contrast, what will we ask of Him? That tells us that the gospel is good news, not good advice. And then we look to the third contrast.

What do they receive? When we ask this question, we actually see there's no contrast. Jesus gives them both the same thing, exactly what they asked for.

The children who request blessing, receive blessing, free for the asking. And the rich young ruler, who requests advice, he receives advice, also completely free.

[19:21] But that advice comes in the form of endless crushing law. Now the law is good to be sure, but it is a burden that we cannot, and because of our sin, will not bear.

Right? Jesus says, verse 17, if you would enter life, keep the commandments. He said to him, which ones?

And Jesus said, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now Jesus is not saying do these six things and you'll go to heaven. Right? These are pointing to something bigger. One scholar put it this way. Since the Jewish people believed that the Ten Commandments, and this is a summary of some of the Ten Commandments, embodied the whole law, Jesus is in effect saying the man must keep the whole law.

So, if you, like this guy, are depending on your own righteousness, you need to follow the commandments. All of the commandments. Perfectly.

[20:37] Perpetually. How's that sound to you? How are you doing with that? And we know from Christ's earlier teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew chapter 5, that superficial law keeping is not enough.

You've heard it said to those of old, you shall not murder, and whoever murders will be liable to judgment. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.

Whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council, and whoever says, you fool, will be liable to the hell of fire. I can't keep that. How about you?

What do you think the rich young ruler's chances were? Amen. Again, in Matthew 5, he says, you've heard it said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. How are we doing with that? Perfect and perpetual obedience, friends?

[21:48] When Jesus says, verse 17, keep the commandments, his standard of law keeping looks nothing like ours.

His version of holiness is something we would never dream up, never want to dream up for ourselves, because his ways are so much higher than our own. God is confronted with the crushing weight of the whole law.

What does this rich young ruler say? He didn't come to Jesus asking for grace, but perhaps now that he's seen that this is the advice he gets, perhaps now he'll plead for a Savior.

What does he say? Verse 20, the young man said to him, all these I have kept. What do I still lack? Now there are two incredible things we should see here. First, it's just he thinks he's good. He thinks he's fully satisfied in infinite God's standards of righteousness.

[23:03] And second, he still feels like he lacks something. That's because if you're relying on yourself to stand righteously before God, you will always feel that you lack something, because you do.

Because there's only one perfect person. His name is Jesus, and you need him. If you think you've followed the whole law, you haven't paid attention much to your life or to the law, you haven't certainly heard the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus shows us how he actually views his law. At the end of all your effort, just like this man, you will find lack. But what you won't realize, kind of like him, is just how far you fall short.

Right? We don't have eyes big enough to see the depths of our own sin. So what does Jesus do to point out that lack?

Verse 21, Jesus said to him, if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

[24:24] Come, follow me. The first thing to note is this, he will not have earned his salvation simply by giving away money.

If that were the case, if we could earn heaven by extreme generosity, there would be no reason for Jesus to die on the cross to pay for our sins.

The cross of Christ would be redundant stupidity on the part of God if we could earn our salvation in any other way. But we can't. sin against him.

The high king of heaven. When we sin against him, we incur a debt greater than all the riches of the world.

You don't have enough money to give away to cover even one transgression against the most holy one, let alone a lifetime's worth of sins.

[25:25] No, Jesus is not saying that this man can buy his way to heaven. He's not even saying that we can cultivate a heart of genuine generosity to the point where we will be welcomed into God's family.

Remember, generosity is only one area where this man lacks righteousness. If he's not telling him how to truly be complete, what is he doing? I think he's showing him just how incomplete he is.

This man didn't come asking for blessing. He said, what shall I do? He didn't ask for grace when Jesus told him to follow the whole law. He said, I've done all that. This is the last effort.

Jesus is showing him that in just this one area, never mind the whole rest of the law, he hasn't even come close to fulfilling the commandment of God.

And this is the final moment. When Christ confronts him with his own unending lack, will he finally see his desperate need and cry out for a savior like the children of the very beginning asked for blessing and grace.

[26:37] Verse 22, when the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, for he had great positions. And friends, that's the final contrast.

One party comes to Jesus asking for blessing and leaves blessed. The other comes to Jesus asking for advice and leaves in despair.

what about us? How do we approach? If you come to Jesus asking, like the rich young ruler, how you can impress God, do you think you can actually impress God?

No offense, but a God you can impress isn't very impressive. And that God doesn't impress the God of the Bible, and neither do you.

Self-justification insults the living God, even if we don't mean it to. Why? If we think we can impress God with our performance, with our greatness, we accuse him of being that small God.

[28:08] Self-righteousness diminishes God. But if you hear that question, do you think you can impress God? And rightly think, no, he's too wonderful, I'm too great a sinner, well, friends, you're in luck.

He opens his arms wide to the humble. Isaiah 66, this is the one to whom I will look, he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

So, friends, if you think you have to bring something to God, some sort of status or righteousness or some offering, if you think you have to bring something, let me release you from that.

Let this text release you from that. And if you think you can bring something, let it confront you and know that you cannot.

Don't come to God with your sufficiency. It is insufficient. Come with your poverty and he will fill it.

[29:28] Verse 23, Jesus turned now, because the man is gone, to his disciples. Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven.

And again, I tell you, 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. Just a note, if you're not worried this moment about food security and safe housing, you meet a first century definition of a rich person.

Everyone in this room, our standard of living is higher than Caesar's in the first century. Thought I'd throw that out there. Now, why does Jesus say all this?

Is wealth inherently sinful? And if it is, is it somehow worse than other sins that it's impossible to be saved from?

No, Christ's blood can atone for any sin. I don't believe it's a sin to begin with. There is, however, something about wealth that makes it more difficult to go to what we just read in Isaiah 66.

[30:47] Somewhere it's harder to be humbled. To humble ourselves before God to repent and believe in a Savior from a position of wealth. And that's why Jesus says this.

This is actually incredibly practical. When people have wealth, first, we get used to using it as a tool to solve our problems. We buy access.

We buy solutions. We pay for the right tools. wealth. And so that makes it hard for us to rely on someone else because we can rely on wealth.

And it habituates us to that. And secondly, wealth often, though certainly not always, reflects ability, reflects competence.

Right? If you can work your way to wealth, you think you can solve all your other problems. wealth. Through that same aptitude, through that same competence, through that same perseverance that brought you wealth.

[31:50] The problem of heaven and hell is unlike every other problem. Right? We got ourselves into this mess with sin, but we can't get ourselves out of it with effort.

The rich ruler has already proved that to us. We need salvation.