

The Church's Reward

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good evening everyone. If you are visiting with us this evening, my name is Aaron Roberts. I'm the minister that looks after the service. And we are basically slowly working our way through Matthew's gospel. So here we are, Matthew 19, 16 to 30. Let's get straight into it.

So we have a guy who walks up to Jesus and says, Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? And it's a genuine question.

As we keep reading, we'll see he's actually a decent guy. You'd call him, I think, the super nice materialist. He's wealthy. And he's wealthy in two different ways. He's wealthy morally, and he's wealthy financially. Loves his wife. He doesn't cheat on his taxes. He looks after his mom and dad. He gets on well with his neighbors. And he's pretty young. He's got lots of money.

He's got nice stuff. And he's not a jerk. He's earnest. Like he's sought out Jesus. And he recognizes that something's missing and he wants to speak to Jesus. And he humbly calls Jesus, teacher. He says, Jesus, what must I do? What must I do? The disciples must have been thinking, this guy is awesome. Like we need him to join the team. Sign him up.

So it's a great shock when Jesus sort of, you know, shuts that whole thing down. Particularly when you think about what happened immediately before this, immediately before this, Jesus had welcomed children, children who weren't really sort of that valued in that culture.

[1 : 4 8] Jesus welcomed these children, these snotty, dusty, no status kids. Jesus welcomes them. He's putting them on his lap. He's praying for them. And he says, the kingdom of God belongs to these little ones.

And then straight after that, this guy comes along and Jesus says, actually, it's easier for you, it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it would be for you to get into the kingdom of God. Like it seems like madness. What's going on here? The disciples, it says in verse 25, were actually astonished by this. They're thinking, why? What, what? This doesn't make any sense. This guy sounds amazing. And it was partly because they believed, well, way back in the days, still a little bit today, but way back in the days, society believed in general that wealth was a sign of, of God's approval. So if you're rich, then clearly God is really into you. And here Jesus is saying, actually, no, what you believe about money is completely wrong. It can actually be an impediment to salvation. Right. Okay. Let's go back to right to the start again, because I've gone away with myself here. So verse 16. Behold, a man came up to him saying, teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life? So what's going on in this guy's mind? It's like he thinks he's nearly at the top of the mountain. Like he's almost there. And he just, it's just that final thing, just that final extra special donation or activity or something. And if he can just do that, he would have eternal life. Using his words, he would have it. That's the word he uses. Like it's a possession, like, like eternal life is this acquisition. I want to remind you of later on in the passage, when Jesus talks about eternal life in verse 29, listen to the difference in how Jesus talks about eternal life. He talks about people inheriting eternal life. In other words, it's a thing that's given to you. It's gifted to you.

Salvation is not something you do using the rich young ruler's words. It's something you receive, but this man wants to just to grab a hold of it, to have it. So our rich young ruler, as impressive as he seems, he does not have a clue about God's kingdom or how it works. But Jesus loves him. And in Mark's gospel, it relays the same story. It says Jesus turned, looked at him and loved him.

And he wants to help him. And it's quite interesting how he does this. He says to him, why do you ask me about what is good? These are Jesus' words. Why do you ask me about what is good?

There is only one who is good. What's going on there? This word good. So this is what the man uses. He says, what good must I do? Jesus really wants them to think about this word good.

[5 : 12] And Jesus says, look, God, it's only God is really, really good. Now, I remember this rich young man. He was very wealthy. And in that culture, people would have been pandering to him, telling him how smart he is, how nice he is all the time. And he probably thinks he's mostly really good, just missing a bit. And Jesus says, well, brother, there's your level of goodness. And then there is God's level of goodness. And you need to think about that. We could say it like this. The rich young ruler has like this plumb line of how he thinks he is doing in God's world.

And Jesus says, compared to the standards of God, you're bankrupt. And Christ isn't trying to be mean or discouraging to him. Christ is trying to puncture the man's confidence in his own works, in his own righteousness by saying, no one is good except God. This guy thinks he's so morally successful and he's done a lot of great stuff and he wants to add eternal life to his list of achievements. And Christ says, you are utterly lost. Christ wants him to see this.

This guy has no sense of the infinite distance between him, self, and God. And if he did, he would fall on his knees and say, Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy on me. Moving on. Jesus says, you want life?

You want eternal life? Keep the commandments. And the man says, quite confidently, which ones? Thinking he's in pretty good shape. Jesus says, you should not murder, you should not commit adultery, you should not steal, you should not be a false witness. Honor your father and mother and love your neighbor as yourself. Now, if you know anything about the Bible, if you've been around Christian stuff for a while, you know that, how many commandments are there?

It's like 10. How many does Jesus mention? Five. One, two, three, four, five. And he just mentions the ones that relate, like the kind of like the horizontal ones, about how we get on with each other.

[7 : 34] All the commandments that are quite observable commandments. You can see it in other people. Because this guy is looking at other people and thinking, I'm in pretty good shape, because I sort of get on with people, I'm respectful, and you know, maybe you've done this.

Jesus doesn't mention the first four commandments, how we relate to God, the vertical ones. And he doesn't mention the last one, do not covet. But of the ones that Jesus does mention, the guy's like, yeah, yep, I'm in good shape.

Good shape, done that. You can tick those boxes. Jesus is, in a sense, I think, sort of setting them up. Christ is now going to ask him a question that's very exposing.

So he wants the rich young ruler to see that, yes, he has broken some commandments, and he's broken some really big ones. He's broken the last one, do not covet, which means he's actually broken the first one, have no other gods before me.

So Jesus says to him, if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come follow me, this word perfect.

[8 : 44] In English, it's like, when we think perfect, we have a sort of a, the Greek word is teleos, but in English, it's like got a mathematical tinge to it, in English.

In the original language, it's more, it's not so much mathematical perfection, and it goes beyond moral perfection. It's a word that means being totally integrated with God's will.

So Jesus is saying to this guy, there's no like, extra little thing you have to do, no extra donation, no extra special work.

He goes, you're not, you're not missing that last little bit. If you want eternal life, you want to be in the kingdom of God, it's going to mean for you, a total revolution of your life. It's going to mean selling all your stuff, and giving that money to the poor and following me.

Now do you see there, Jesus asks two things of this man. There's the selling and the giving to the poor, and there's the following of Jesus. Two separate things, but we don't, we don't, we don't separate these things.

[9 : 55] But we will say this about them. Charity alone, charity was not the thing the guy was missing. It wasn't like really good guy, but probably could give away a bit more money.

Charity was not the last thing that just tipped him in to the kingdom. No, it's the following of Jesus that does that. It's committing your life to Jesus, to throwing your lot in with Jesus.

The charity part shows you that that commitment is real, because Christ's goal for that guy was not poverty. Christ's goal for the guy was following him, and his money and his stuff stood in the way.

He wanted to be that guy's great treasure. And he looked in his heart, and he knew that it was money that was his great treasure. Verse 22, when the young man heard this, he went away very sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

I think he's the only person Jesus called to follow him in the Bible who did not. Jesus offered him a whole new way of being in the world, and he could not do it because his possessions were too important to him.

[11 : 19] He was in the grip of this great spiritual monster that would take him down, and it's such a sad story. I hope you hear how sad this is.

The guy had everything. He even had religion, but he wasn't free. And in a real sense, he didn't even have his money. His money had a hold of him.

And in the end, he lost both eternal life and he lost the adventure of a lifetime. You might be thinking, yeah, but that's such a big call of Jesus, right?

Getting this guy to just give everything up, like give it all away. That's so hard, isn't it? How could he ask him to do that just on the spot? What should have this guy done?

What should he have done, the rich young ruler? Well, he could have said, Jesus, and this would have been acceptable. He said, Jesus, I want to, I want to. I can't. Forgive me.

[12 : 17] Help me. I am completely lost. But I want you. He didn't say that. He didn't do that. Verse 22. He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

He walked away sad, but still thinking about his possessions. And a note here before moving on.

Jesus did not command all his followers to sell their possessions. And if that is a comfort and a relief to you, it could be because your possessions have a grip on you.

Jesus then turns to his disciples and says to them, basically, paraphrasing, let me tell you what happened here. Let me tell you why this panned out like it did.

Verse 23, 24. Truly I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person 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 person to enter the kingdom of God.

[13 : 23] So why great difficulty? It's because wealth has a way of making you forget your spiritual poverty. And if you've got a lot of it, like, look, we're Westerners.

We've got a lot of it, you know. If you're holding on to it and it's supplying all your felt needs and it's affirming you and it's supplying you with an ease of life and great comfort, it makes it really difficult to come to Jesus like little children, recognizing our great need.

That's going to be tough, isn't it? So Jesus says, yes, it's with great difficulty. It's really hard. It would be like trying to thread the largest animal that they knew of in the Middle East, which was the camel, the biggest animal they could think of.

It would be like trying to thread that through the smallest hole imaginable, the eye of a needle. That's going to be really hard. You couldn't even do that with like a blender, right?

I probably didn't have to say that. Did I have to say that? I didn't even write it down, actually. I have a Vitamix blender. Probably that couldn't even do it.

[14 : 29] That's like three horsepower. Couldn't do it. I mean, it's impossible, isn't it, right? Jesus is saying, this is impossible.

But then Jesus says, nothing is impossible for God. So what is that all about? Impossible, impossible, impossible, impossible. Nothing's possible. Like, what was the point of all of that?

Jesus is trying to place salvation, this idea of salvation, what that looks like, in the camp of supernatural, miraculous event. The rich young ruler had salvation in the camp of, just got to do a bit more.

Now, wouldn't it have been awesome if this rich young ruler had just stuck around to hear this? But he's gone, thinking about his money. Wouldn't it have been awesome if the rich young ruler had stuck around and heard that God is in the business of taking someone whose life is completely poisoned by an idol?

Money or sex or power, whatever it is, family, whatever it is. Take a person whose life has been poisoned by making this thing that is not God, the God of their life, taking that person and making them a brand new person by his Holy Spirit.

[15 : 48] But he never gets to hear it. The story keeps going. Peter then, always happy to speak up, and it's kind of a semi-funny line.

He says, See? See? We have left everything and followed you. What then will we have? It's a great line.

We're all thinking it. We're all thinking it. It feels a bit self-centered, isn't it? We're left to everything. I think things must be going to pan out pretty good for us then, right?

It's what he's thinking. It's a surprise that Jesus doesn't tell him to calm down and get to the back of the line here, but he doesn't. Jesus says, You are right. You're right. There is great reward for the followers of God.

And listen to these words carefully here. Some of them are quite hard to understand, and I'm kind of almost finished here. Jesus says, Truly I say to you, in the new world, the world that God will recreate, when the Son of Man will then sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

[16 : 56] Can I just stop here? Jesus is saying, somehow these folks are going to share in his authority. We don't really know what that means or looks like. So we'll keep going here.

And everyone who has left houses, or brothers, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands, for my sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.

But many who are first will be last, and the last first. If you follow Jesus, and you experience real suffering and sacrifice as a result, following Jesus through this, in the new world that God creates, in that world, there will be no regrets.

Forever and ever, there will be no regrets. Jesus will be on the throne, he will do away with evil, and you will enjoy abundant life that never ceases.

And whatever you lost in this life, because of your faith, will be paid back a hundredfold. I find this tremendously encouraging. Because the cost of following Jesus is sometimes very high, but Jesus promises us, there will be no regrets.

[18 : 05] It will all be worth it. So let me finish with two sentences. Whatever is coming between you and Jesus, release it.

And know that what you receive from God will make that look like nothing in eternity. Amen. Amen. Amen.