

SESSION 7

Eternal Life

MATTHEW 19:16-30

JESUS'S GIFT OF SALVATION DEMANDS HUMILITY AND SURRENDER.



An ideology once prevalent in America is something called the “Protestant work ethic.” In its genuine expression, a strong work ethic is a logical progression from one’s relationship with God. It is an abuse of this tradition, however, to think that work is the means of a right relationship with God rather than an expression of it. The reasoning of some people is, the harder you work, the better chance of earning God’s favor.

DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE THAT NOTHING IS FREE AND EVERYTHING WORTH HAVING MUST BE WORKED FOR? EXPLAIN.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Leaving the region of Galilee, Jesus and His followers made their way down the east bank of the Jordan River to the region of Judea (Matt. 19:1). Jesus apparently spent several weeks in this region approximately twenty to thirty miles from Jerusalem. This is the first mention in Matthew of Jesus traveling to the region of Judea. While John’s Gospel indicates Jesus traveled there frequently for various Jewish festivals, Matthew, Mark, and Luke do not mention any other visits to Jerusalem before these final weeks leading up to His crucifixion. Matthew focused solely on the Galilean ministry of Jesus until the narrative moved toward the crucifixion.

During this time, Jesus was again confronted by the Pharisees with a question designed to trap and accuse Him (v. 3). Their question concerned a law in Deuteronomy 24:1-4 and the legitimacy of divorce. Jesus responded by stating that God’s design from the beginning was for marriage to be a permanent relationship between a man and a woman (vv. 4-6). To this response, the Pharisees called attention to

the law of Moses, where divorce was permitted for indecency (v. 7). The definition of this indecency was an ongoing debate at that time between two leading rabbis of Judaism.

Jesus replied by pointing to the ideal—no divorce. Then He pointed to the reality—sin had hardened the heart and violated God’s perfect design. Divorce was the result, which was permissible only in cases of adultery. Jesus’s reply caused the disciples to question the feasibility of marriage. In response, He pointed out that for a select few, God’s design for them was to not marry (vv. 8-10).

Next came some parents bringing their children so that Jesus might pronounce a typical Jewish blessing on them by laying hands on them in prayer. Jesus spoke of the dependence of children as an example of the childlike humility needed by all to be a part of the kingdom of God (vv. 13-15). This thought links this humility with the proper way to enter eternal life as explained in the next verses in this chapter.



16 Just then **someone** **A** came up and asked him, “**Teacher**, **B** what good must I do to have eternal life?” **17** “Why do you ask me about what is good?” he said to him. “There is only one who is good. If you want to enter into life, keep **the commandments**.” **C** **18** “Which ones?” he asked him. Jesus answered: Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not bear false witness; **19** honor your father and your mother; and love your neighbor as yourself. **20** “I have kept all these,” the young man told him. “What do I still lack?” **21** “If you want to be **perfect**,” **D** Jesus said to him, “go, **sell your belongings** **E** and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” **22** When the young man heard that, he went away **grieving**, **F** because he had many possessions. **23** Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, **it will be hard** **G** for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** 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.” **25** When the disciples heard this, they were utterly astonished and asked, “Then who can be saved?” **26** Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but **with God** **H** all things are possible.” **27** Then Peter responded to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you. So what will there be for us?” **28** Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, in **the renewal of all things**, **I** 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. **29** And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields because of my name will receive a hundred times more and will inherit eternal life. **30** But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

A. Matthew said he was “young” (v. 20). Luke called him a “ruler” (Luke 18:18), possibly in the synagogue. All three Synoptic Gospels note his wealth (Matt. 19:22; Mark 10:22; Luke 18:23).

B. A term of respect. Unlike the religious leaders, this man’s questions don’t appear malicious.

C. Jesus listed five commands that focus on human relationships (Ex. 20:12-16). Jesus knew the man’s true problem was with the commands that related to honoring God.

D. “Complete” (NASB). Not without sin, but mature and spiritually whole. See Matthew 5:48.

E. Not a universal command. This was a specific test of discipleship for this young man.

F. The man’s response reveals the grip that his “many possessions” had on his heart.

G. Jewish culture saw wealth as a sign of God’s blessing. As such, it was difficult to imagine the wealthy being left outside the kingdom.

H. God is the only hope for salvation, including for the wealthy.

I. The final judgment, when Jesus reigns and all things are made new (Rev. 21:1).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Unwilling

(Matt. 19:16-22)

We can affirm that eternal life cannot be achieved by human achievement.

- **What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus?**
- **What are some common views on how to receive eternal life?**

2. Possible

(Matt. 19:23-26)

We can be encouraged knowing salvation is received as a gift from God.

- **Why were the disciples “utterly astonished” (v. 25)?**
- **Why was Jesus so hard on rich people?**

3. Reward

(Matt. 19:27-30)

We can know that following Jesus is worth it, no matter what it costs—the greatest reward being eternal life.

- **How would you characterize Peter’s tone with Jesus? Why?**
- **What have you left behind to follow Jesus? Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus?**

Apply the Text

Discuss as a group the concept that everything worth having must be worked for. Consider how this may impact our approach to Christianity.

- **How might your group help others to correct their understanding of salvation by grace and not by works?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Salvation

There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. (See John 14:6; Acts 4:12.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Dig deeper into a doctrine or biblical teaching.

Compare Jesus’s teachings in Matthew 19:16-22 to Matthew 6:19-24. Identify Jesus’s statements in chapter 6 that are represented in the life of the would-be disciple in chapter 19. Reflect on the following: How might possessions become detrimental to a believers’ commitment to follow Jesus? What are some things that God might be calling you to surrender in order to follow Him?



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide

Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Matthew 19:16-17

Think about the assumptions implied in the man's question.

Using the words “just then,” Matthew linked the visit of a young ruler to the blessing of the children. As Jesus was engaged with the children and their parents, this man ran up and knelt at Jesus's feet (see Mark 10:17). From verses 20 and 22 we learn he was young and rich.

His question was, “What good must I do to have eternal life?” From every indication this inquiry was sincere. He knew something was missing from his life.

Jesus used the occasion to point the young ruler to the only one who is good, an obvious reference to God the Father. If this young man was wondering about what good he must do to obtain eternal life, then He needed to meet the benchmark of what good really is—the standard of the holiness of God. Attempting to earn eternal life through doing good will always fall short of the One who is ultimately good.

Jesus continued to challenge this man's notion: if he wanted to measure up to God's standard, he must “keep the commandments.” Jesus was not teaching salvation by works. Instead, He wanted the young man to recognize his sinfulness. The commandments were ultimately given to show us our sinfulness.

What appears to be the man's understanding of how to receive eternal life?



Day 2: Matthew 19:18-22

Consider why Jesus told this man to sell his belongings.

Jesus's answer was not what the young man expected. Perhaps with some puzzlement, he asked Jesus, “Which ones?” For this young man, his reply was, *which ones am I not keeping?* He felt secure in his adherence to the law. Jesus responded by listing the commandments that dealt with the horizontal relationships of life—family, neighbors, and other people. These would be commandments that could be observed externally. Keeping these commandments would be very demonstrable.

The ruler replied, “I have kept all these. . . . What do I still lack?” Jesus then pinpointed the problem facing the rich young ruler. He had violated the first commandment by putting his riches first in his life. “Go, sell your belongings.” Get rid of that which stands between you and God. When he did that, He could then follow Jesus as His disciple. Only then would he have “treasure in heaven”—that is, the eternal life he sought.

The words of Jesus cut deeply into the young man, attacking him at the very core of his being. “He went away grieving,” being unwilling to part with his idol of wealth and possessions. We must willingly give up whatever stands in the way of our surrender to Jesus.

What are some reasons people choose to not follow Jesus today?



Day 3: Matthew 19:23-24

Consider the reasons rich people would find it harder to follow Jesus.

The idea that riches could be a barrier to entering the “kingdom of heaven” flew in the face of the beliefs of the Jews in Jesus’s day. They looked on the rich as closer to God because of His obvious blessing on them. To say, as Jesus did, that the poor are closer to the kingdom than the wealthy was most surprising. That startlement will be seen in the disciple’s reaction in verse 25.

Jesus reinforced His statement with a hyperbole, speaking of a camel passing through the “eye of a needle.” The camel, of course, was the largest animal seen by the Jewish people in that day. The eye of a needle would reflect perhaps the smallest opening present in that day. The picture of the camel trying to fit through the tiny opening of a needle would have produced laughter among Jesus’s hearers. Impossible, they thought. That would be the precise reaction Jesus desired. It would also be impossible for someone who substituted wealth for a relationship with God “to enter the kingdom of God.”

Why is it harder for rich people to follow Jesus?



Day 4: Matthew 19:25-26

Identify the reason for the disciples’ astonishment.

The disciples “were utterly astonished” because Jesus’s statement here was in direct contradiction to the traditions of Judaism that intimated that a person’s wealth gave evidence of God’s favor. Wealthy Jews often thought they could purchase a more favored position with God through their gifts to the temple or through the giving of alms to the poor. Jesus, however, taught something very different.

Based on Jesus’s statement that the rich would not enter the kingdom of heaven, it would appear that no one could be saved. If the rich who were blessed with God’s favor could scarcely be saved, what hope was there for the rest of humanity?

In His answer to the question from the disciples, Jesus implied that the disciples were right: there is no way for anyone to be saved on their own effort. “With man this is impossible.” Wealth or poverty didn’t matter. Only God can bring salvation to a person, for with Him “all things are possible.” Salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God is dependent on God and God alone.

How would you answer the disciples’ question, “Then who can be saved?”



Day 5: Matthew 19:27-30

Meditate on the meaning of verse 30.

Jesus had told the rich young man that he would have treasures in heaven if he abandoned his earthly riches. Speaking on behalf of the other disciples, Peter wanted to know if that promise applied to them. They had “left everything” to follow Jesus. “So what [reward] will there be for us?”

Peter’s question in verse 27 may seem crass and greedy. But coupled with the previous question (v. 25), it suggests not a sense of entitlement but rather a concern over what would or would not await them in eternity. Certainly, Jesus did not chastise Peter for asking. Instead, He spoke concerning the coming age of glory when God makes all things new (Rev. 21:5). It will also be a day when Jesus will sit “on his glorious throne.” Jesus answered Peter’s question by pointing to His promise that they will be honored and rewarded because they left everything to follow Him.

Jesus next included all those who make Him their priority. They, too, will be rewarded. Everyone who forsakes everything and everyone “because of my name” will be rewarded “a hundred times more.” The reward of a hundred times more speaks of a reward that is out of proportion to what is sacrificed. It will be much more than is expected. This reward may be referring to rewards both now and in eternity. Those who give up houses and lands, relationships and riches, for His sake will receive more than they give up.

Is there anything that hinders you from following Jesus? If so, are you willing to leave it behind?

APPLY THE TEXT

Write a brief paragraph outlining the things you have given up to follow Jesus. How do you think Jesus would evaluate that paragraph?

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