

Matthew 19:16-30

"Earthly Riches Or Eternal Rewards"

All you need to be happy; is just a little bit more... Have you ever thought that? That true contentment was practically w/in reach if you could only make a little more money? Or if you just had a nicer vehicle, or a bigger house, a better boat, *then* you'd be happy. *Then* you'd be satisfied.

It's become an anthem of sorts of the Rolling Stones hasn't it? Straight from the lips of one who has more money than most could dream of, has been all over the world & has at his fingertips is virtually anything money could buy. Yet he writes, "I can't get no satisfaction, cause I try & I try & I try & I try, I can't get no, oh no no no." Why? Because the flesh is never satisfied.

According to a 2013 article (The Psychology of Materialism & Why It's Making You Unhappy), "Americans today, compared to 55 years ago, own twice as many cars and eat out twice as much per person, but we don't seem to be any happier because of it."

The American Psychological Association reports that the overall well-being of Americans has, if anything, *declined* since the 1950s, while our consumption has only *increased*...

Author David G. Myers (The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty) observes, "Compared with their grandparents, today's young adults have grown up with much more affluence, slightly less happiness and much greater risk of depression and assorted social pathology. Our becoming much better off over the last four decades has not been accompanied by one iota of increased subjective well-being"

Yet somehow & for some reason we're so easily led to believe that (despite the evidence), true peace, true contentment, true satisfaction can be found in the material. The problem is that it's like a carrot dangling in front of our nose, there w/in our sights but just slightly out of reach. We refuse to concede that our flesh will never be satisfied... But I'm here to tell you that what you're really looking for isn't material at all, it's spiritual. Your heart will never be full w/the things of this world. This world will always leave you lacking, only J.C. truly satisfies... Let's look together.

Vs 16-22

This is the encounter of the one we've come to call, "The Rich Young Ruler" w/Christ. Matt, Mark & Luke all tell us this man was rich. Matt tells us he was young & Luke tells us he was a ruler, more than likely the ruler of a local synagogue.

Isn't it interesting when you start talking about money how relative riches can be?

Our own affluence always seems to escape us. It's always the other guy who is rich. But I'm just going to tell you that there are luxuries that you experience *every day* that this man *could never even dream of*.

But concerning his culture, he seemed to have it all. He was rich, he was young, he was religious (even being noted as the ruler [the authority] of the local synagogue). That speaks to his integrity, his sincerity, his influence in society, that he was a man entrusted w/great responsibility, he'd made it to the top occupationally, if you were a Jewish parent this is the guy you'd want your daughter to marry.

& He comes to Jesus there in Vs 16 & says, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Understand that there was an ongoing dialog/debate between the religious Jews about the Law of Moses. It contained some 613 commands & they were always trying to determine which commands (or which *command*) was the greatest. **So this young man approaches Jesus in the context of a rabbi & he's seeking to solicit His opinion as to which commandment is the greatest. What is it that he *needs to do* that he might have eternal life?**

It's a great question (an undoubtedly very sincere question). The problem is that it stems from a fundamentally flawed position to begin with. I'm not saying that it's an *unusual* position, to the contrary it's very common. This man, like *all people* by nature had an orientation toward *earning* eternal life. He wanted to know what good work, what *noble deed* could he do that would ensure eternal life.

However; the scriptures make it very clear (Paul the apostle would go to great lengths, spending the majority of his life in ministry demonstrating) that perfect righteousness is obtained *not by us doing something for God. But rather it's found by entering in to what God has done for us by faith.* In the book of Romans he points out that even preceding the law (or any kind of works righteousness approach) Abraham achieved righteousness not by *working*, but by *believing* the word of God. He wrote in Rom Ch 4 **"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.'" Romans 4:3** In the book of Galatians he went on to amplify/underscore the truth of this principle & how it's woven throughout the scriptures in quoting Hab...

We read, **"But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for 'the just (those who stand justified in the sight of God) shall live by (works? No!) faith." Gal 3:11** But this guy is standing where so many of us were (or perhaps *are*).

Thinking that salvation centers around something he must *do*. His approach *to* God, his gaining acceptance in the sight *of* God is based upon what he'd consider to be a work of righteousness, not faith. But what do we see? That despite his position in society, his morality, his religious sincerity, there was still an uncertainty, something lacking in his life & he was struggling to put his finger on it. So he asks Jesus, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Now look at how Jesus responds.

He says to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One... God." I love this. It's a leading question. It was (& still is today) a way that rabbis would teach their students. They would make them probe into a matter more by asking *them* questions. A couple weeks ago in our study of the proverbs on Wed evenings we read, "*Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water, But a man of understanding will draw it out.*" Prov 20:5 That is, oftentimes people don't really realize what they've said, or why they've said it. But a man of understanding knows the right questions to ask to help them search deeper & draw those answers out of them.

A few hundred feet away from the wailing wall in Israel is a public restroom. When I went in there, at the sinks were 2 small pitchers chained to each sink. Our guide went in about the same time & he asked me, "Why are those vessels chained to the sink?" I hadn't given it much thought, but he got me thinking. I said, "For the orthodox Jew." He said, "Keep going." I said, "Well, after they use the restroom their hands are unclean, so they fill one pitcher & rinse off the one hand, then w/their clean hand they fill the other pitcher & rinse off the remaining hand so that both hands are completely clean." He said, "Very good." But he was asking me questions so that I would search the matter out.

This young man asked Jesus a question. He said, "Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" Jesus responds, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One... God." The bible is abundantly clear isn't it? "*The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.*" Ps 14:2-3 We could sight several scriptures that point out the total depravity of man, time forbids (I'll give you one more). Isaiah 64:6-7a, "*But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away. And there is no one who calls on Your name, Who stirs himself up to take hold of You;*" There's not so much as a single exception to the entire human race since the fall of man.

No one is good (that is intrinsically, inherently good) w/the exception of One, & that is God. Paul said that in me, that is in my flesh there is *no good thing* that dwells.

So Jesus stopping this young man in his tracks. “What caused you to call Me good? There’s something in Me that you see that’s different than what you’ve seen in anyone else.” He’s in essence asking him the same thing He asked His disciples, the same thing He asks every one of us, “Who do you say that I am?” Jesus is leading him to 1 of 2 conclusions. Either He’s no good... or He’s God, “Who do you say that I am?”

You see, Jesus can’t simply be a well-meaning teacher. His claims were too radical. He claimed to be God in human flesh. So He was either a liar (& should be discredited as anyone else who would claim to be God), or He genuinely believed it & was completely insane (a lunatic), or He was exactly who He claimed to be... Lord. & If He’s the Lord (which He validated via the resurrection) than we do well to heed what He says...

& Here’s what He says, “If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” Wait, was He suggesting that man could be saved if he kept the law perfectly, in its entirety? That’s the way I read it 😊. The problem is that we can’t keep the law perfectly in its entirety because the law is perfect & we come flawed from the factory. Our sin nature is in full force from the moment of conception. “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” Ps 51:5 He’s not saying his mother was in sin when he was conceived, but that sin was present upon conception.

So we have a problem. From conception I’m less than perfect, how therefore can I possibly hope to uphold that *which is* perfect? Exactly. By the law isn’t the pathway to salvation but rather the knowledge of *sin*... The law (properly understood) teaches me that I have sinned & fall short of the glory (the perfect righteousness) of God. Jesus is going to show this young man exactly that.

Vs 18-20

Now let’s not perceive this young man as boastful or arrogant. Let’s realize that he’s sincere in what he’s saying (though sincerely wrong). But Jesus turns his attention to the 2nd table of the Law. The 1st table dealt w/a man’s relationship to God (& Jesus will get to that). The 2nd table dealt w/man’s relationship to man, Jesus starts there. He says, “Don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal or bear false witness, honor your father & your mother & love your neighbor as yourself.” This last one Jesus interjects as a summary statement but He leaves out, “You shall not covet” (& we’ll see why).

But this guy looks as Jesus & says, “I’ve kept all these things from my youth...”

“What do I still lack?” Now, truth be told it’s fair to ask if he’d really done all these things. “You shall not bear false witness.” “Really, you’ve never told a lie?” ☺

Now it’s possible that he really did keep these commands as far as the outward appearance was concerned. In a way that they were fulfilled in the eyes of man. Paul the apostle made this same claim according to the flesh. He said in Philippians Ch 3 that as far as the law was concerned (speaking of his time as a Pharisee) he was blameless... But that’s because he saw the law as governing the outward physical man rather than the inward intent of the heart. & Once he realized the law was *spiritual* rather than *physical* he was instantly guilty before God.

So by all outward appearances this guy may’ve thought he was blameless. **But should he realize (as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount) that lust inwardly was the moral equivalent of adultery before God, that ungodly anger inwardly was the moral equivalency of murder (cutting someone off in your heart).** The whole world stands guilty of these things (& that’s just 2, we’ve broke them all!) But this guy isn’t there, he’s thinking on the physical plane & that’s why he’s so confused.

He’s doing the math, it’s not adding up. He’s lived a life that’s upright morally, that’s followed a path of basic integrity, he’s set financially & yet he’s still empty & lacking in his life. There’s still something missing, there’s still an emptiness & discontentment in life.

Why? It’s not because he lacks religion, he’s got plenty of that. What’s missing is a relationship w/the Living God through faith in J.C. & Jesus is getting ready to show him that.

Vs 21-22

What’s happening here? Jesus is seeking to lead him to follow Him *by faith*. To trust in His (Jesus’) sufficiency for him before God. He says, “If you want to be perfect (that is complete, fulfilled & made right in the sight of God), come follow Me.” That’s the heart of what Jesus is saying.

When Jesus says, “Go, sell what you have & give to the poor, & you will have treasure in heaven” that’s a personal parenthetical statement to him. He was placing His finger on that which was lacking in this young man’s life. He was trusting in riches, rather than in the Living God. Jesus is saying, “Whatever it is that’s keeping you from following Me wholeheartedly, it’s got to go.”

For this man it was his money. Remember that 1st table of the law we were talking about, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” This man was guilty of idolatry.

Mammon, money was his god. & Jesus made it real clear (Matt 6:24), you cannot serve 2 masters, you can't serve God & money.

Actually this man was guilty of breaking both tables of the law. He didn't love his neighbor as himself because he wasn't willing to sell his possessions & give to the poor. & He didn't have God on the throne of his heart because his earthly riches were of greater priority to him than was a relationship w/God & treasure in heaven.

Now I want to say that nowhere in the bible are we taught that a sinner is saved by selling his goods & giving his money away. Jesus didn't tell Nicodemus/Zacchaeus to do this (or anyone else for that matter) Job was rich, Abraham was rich, David was rich, Solomon was rich, there a many rich men brought to our attention in the bible. **But this man had a personal problem w/covetousness. He loved material wealth. When Jesus challenged him to sell his goods, He was forcing him to examine his heart & determine his priority; earthly riches or eternal rewards.**

Isn't it interesting that for all he had (financial stability, social status) he left Christ full of sorrow, those things didn't satisfy. Apart from Christ, even the greatest of material possessions give no lasting joy or pleasure. Who cares if you wind up one of the richest men in the cemetery? What does it profit to gain the whole world & lose your own soul?

He was given the opportunity to follow Christ, but chose the things of this world... Now for you it may not be money (though it may be) but I can assure you that whatever it is that keeps you from following Christ, Jesus says it's got to go. You've got to love Him more. That's what John meant when he wrote that we were to keep ourselves from idols, things that take priority over Jesus.

Most of us feel pretty good about thinking money isn't an issue for us, but let me throw this out at you. (Brace yourself because this might sting a little). This comes out of an article found in the March 2016 issue of Relevant magazine. **It says this, "The church today is not great at giving; Tithers make up only 10-25% of a normal congregation. Only 5 percent of the US tithes, with 80% of Americans only giving 2% of their income. Christians are only giving at 2.5% per capita, while during the Great Depression they gave at a 3.3% rate.** What would happen if believers were to increase their giving to a minimum of, let's say, 10%? There would be an additional \$165 billion for churches to use and distribute. The global impact would be phenomenal. Here's just a few things the Church could do with the kind of money: \$25 billion could relieve global hunger, starvation and deaths from preventable diseases in five years.

\$12 billion could eliminate illiteracy in five years. \$15 billion could solve the world's water and sanitation issues, specifically at places in the world where 1 billion people live on less than \$1 per day. \$1 billion could fully fund all overseas mission work. \$100 – \$110 billion would still be left over for additional ministry expansion.”

Unlike this young man, God probably isn't asking you to divest all of your resources. But if you're one who gives nothing (or right next to nothing), it could be that like this young man your possessions possess you, not the other way around.

Again, it's not something we talk about a lot around here, but let's not shy away from the hard truth when it's in front of us. Did this man ever repent? We don't know. But he walks off the pages of scripture defined by *1 Timothy 6:10, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

Vs 23-26

It's hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven... This blew the disciples minds because they perceived riches as God's blessing. Jesus says they can very much be a burden. Why? Because riches tend to tie us to this world rather than longing for the age to come. They can create a sense of independence *from* God rather than a desperate need *for* God. Who needs God to move when I can slap down enough "Benjamins" & do it myself?

Riches can give a false sense of assurance to me, "Look how God's blessing me?" Jesus is shooting down the prosperity theology. Riches don't necessarily help you, but they may very well hinder you! Now again, riches in & of themselves aren't the problem. Riches can be used for tremendous good in God's kingdom. The problem is presented when we begin to *trust* in riches.

Jesus says, "It's easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven." Translation, there's no way it can happen. That's exactly how the disciples interpreted it. They say, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus' next words are of critical importance, "W/men this *is impossible*." Salvation/regeneration is *impossible w/men*. There is nothing you can do to save yourself.

But I've got some good news for you. Man's impossibilities are God's opportunities. "W/God all things are possible." W/God anyone can be saved, even me, even you... What's the criteria?

Believe on the Lord J.C. follow Him by faith, receive His righteousness & you'll be justified in the sight of God.

Vs 27-30

You've got to love Peter... He says what we're all thinking ☺. "Hey Lord, we've left all & followed You, what will we get?" Jesus promises them a privileged place in His millennial administration, ruling & reigning on thrones alongside Him.

& He says, "Not only you, but everyone who's given up anything for Me will receive 100 fold & inherit eternal life." If your family rejects you because of your decision to follow Christ, you have a family in the body of Christ that's 100 fold.

& We could talk more about the implications here but the bottom line here is that Jesus is saying that you will never out give God. What we consider sacrifices are from God's perspective in reality eternal investments. It'll be returned to 100 fold (not all on this earth) (you will have treasure in heaven). **Though there are some things that God will & does return to you here & now. But should you lose something for this lifetime for Jesus' sake (maybe 70-80 yrs) you'll receive 100xs that for all eternity... God will never be a debtor to you or me.**

But there *will be* a few surprises in the final assessment. Those (like the wealthy) who seem to be 1st, may be last. & Those humble & contrite who appear to be last will be 1st. God doesn't see as man sees, man looks to the outward appearance but God is searching the heart. & May He find in us a heart that places eternity over the earthly & may we follow Jesus wholeheartedly. Amen? Amen.

Prayer Points:

Jesus we've spent considerable time talking about sacrifices we may make for You. But we want to be careful to thank You for the sacrifice that You made for us. We thank You for the cross, that You would shed Your blood & lay down Your life that we might have *eternal* life. Something impossible for us, but You have made a way where there is no way & we give You praise. You are the *good* Teacher, the *good* Shepherd, You have called us by name, may we hear Your voice & follow You.

What's between you & Jesus? Cast it aside & follow Him, don't walk away sorrowful clinging to the things of this world. Choose eternity, forsake the earthly, you may be in the world but Jesus is calling you out of the world, turn from your sin, trust in Him.