

What Is Required?
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Matthew 19:16-26

Opening: **Have you ever gone on a trip only to discover you left behind something important? Any examples? What routine do you use to make sure this doesn't happen to you?**

Thinking you have everything only to discover you lack something important can mess up a good vacation! Being wrong about what is required to get to heaven has eternal ramifications. Today's text is the familiar story of a sincere young man who came to Jesus seeking assurance of eternal life. He wondered, "*What more can I DO, what do I lack?*" Jesus taught him two big lessons.

Big Idea: Eternal life is not about what WE do; it's about what Jesus did FOR US.

Big Idea #2: Life with Jesus is about surrendering everything to Him as Lord.

The Rich Young Man

¹⁶ And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." ¹⁸ 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, ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 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; and come, follow me." ²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person 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 greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be

saved?”²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- **What do we know about this young man?** (vv. 20, 22, 23)
- Both Mark and Luke also record this account and add some more detail. (Mk 10:17–27; Lk 18:18–27) Luke 18:18 calls him “a ruler.”
- **Was he sincerely seeking or seeking affirmation for good deeds? What does v.20 imply? What about Mark 10:17, 20, 21?**
- Mark 10:21 indicates Jesus looked on him with compassion. “He seemed to have no ulterior motive and was willing to listen and learn.”¹
- Anyone interested in heaven starts by looking for a “formula.” What good deed can I do? What donation must I make? How good to I have to be?
- Illustration: Pevnar 13 TV commercial – “What if, just one...?”
- Verse 17: **What did Jesus say about “good?”**
- In the King James: “*No one is good but One, that is, God.*”²
- Also in verse 17, Jesus told him to “keep the commandments.”
- **Was Jesus saying that good works get you into heaven? Why?**
- **If not, why did Jesus say you must keep the commandments?**
- Interesting: Jesus did not mention the 10th commandment (Ex. 20:17) concerning coveting³
- **If it’s not about “works,” explain Jesus meaning in verse 20?**
- **Verse 22: Why did the young man go away sad?**
- In verses 23–26 we are a “fly on the wall” as Jesus responds to the questions of the astonished disciples. “*Did Jesus say rich people can’t get into heaven?*” “*Then who CAN?*” **Why would Jews be astonished? What did the Old Testament teach the Jews about wealth?**

Warren Wiersbe writes:

The Jewish people of that day believed that riches were an evidence of God’s blessing. They based this on the promises God gave the Jewish nation at the beginning of their history. It is true that God did promise material blessing if they obeyed, and material loss if they

disobeyed (see Deut. 26–28). But in the infancy of the race, the only way God could teach them was through rewards and punishments. We teach young children in the same manner. However, the highest kind of obedience is not based on a desire for reward or the fear of punishment. It is motivated by love. In His life and His teaching, Jesus tried to show the people that the inner spiritual blessings are far more important than the material gains.⁴

- Truth: A growing bank account is no indication of an obedient life.
- Back to the disciples' question in verse 25: *"Who can be saved?"*
- Jesus: *"With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*
- We're fond of saying: *"Living the Christian life isn't hard, it's impossible!"*
- *"What must I DO?"* the man asked. Jesus basically responded, *"What have you tried? How is that working for you? See it's IMPOSSIBLE!"*
- The young man sensed he had not done enough. That's because earning eternal life is IMPOSSIBLE for us; but with God NOTHING is impossible.
- Another rich man asked Jesus what to do. Jesus answered with what we know as John 3:16 – BELIEVE in Jesus as the Son of God and you'll have eternal life. By the way, Jesus DIDN'T tell Nicodemus to sell his stuff!
- **So, why did he tell this sincere, young, rich ruler to sell HIS stuff?**
- Clearly this young man was both religious and zealous. So was the Apostle Paul before Jesus radically changed him. Let's compare them.

Paul wrote in Philippians 3:4–9 (ESV)

⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

- The difference between Paul and the young ruler shows up in verse 7:

⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish*, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

* Note: Paul was being nice – the word “rubbish” also means “dung.”

- When Jesus captured Paul’s heart, Paul’s priorities shifted.
- Paul said, *“Take the whole world, just give me Jesus!”*⁵
- Paul went away glad! The young ruler went away sad.
- **Any speculation on what happened with the rich young man?**
- Can’t you see Jesus shaking his head as the young man walked away?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

Our Lord’s encounter with the rich young ruler has a couple of lessons for us. First, the basic theological lesson is that salvation is a gift of grace, received by faith, and impossible to earn through good works.

The way the encounter ended teaches another lesson for both the saved and the unsaved. It is a lesson about surrender. This second lesson of the rich young ruler is not about money or greed. Material possessions just happened to be where this young man found his security. Money and things were HIS specific weakness. What you and I cling to and refuse to give up may be something else.

Any logical person will guard the people and things they value most. We protect what is valuable by keeping it safely out of the reach of those who would steal, kill, and destroy. We call that good stewardship. However, protecting what we value is not the same as finding our security in it. Here’s the reality, when we are face to face with Jesus asking Him, *“what must I do,”* every door must be opened, every strong box unlocked, and our grasp released.

In our relationship with Christ everything we are and everything we own must be surrendered to Him as Lord of our lives. In our relationship with Christ, the only thing we should be clinging to is the cross of Calvary. We must be able to live out the words of the old hymn: *"I surrender all, I surrender all, all to thee, my blessed Savior, I surrender all."* The rich, young man couldn't sing that song. That's why he went away sad.

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 72). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 19:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ Barbieri, L. A., Jr. (1985). Matthew. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 64). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁴ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 73). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

⁵ Words: Fanny Crosby, 1879. Music: John R. Sweney The last verse

**[Take the world, but give me Jesus.
In His cross my trust shall be,
Till, with clearer, brighter vision,
Face to face my Lord I see.]**

recalls her often quoted statement: *"If I had a choice, I would still choose to remain blind...for when I die, the first face I will ever see will be the face of my blessed Saviour."* <http://cyberhymnal.org/htm/t/t/ttwbgmej.htm>