

Eternal Life
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Matthew 19:16-30

Opening: You don't have to be **rich** to have eternal life through Christ! --- And all the poor and working-class people said, AMEN! --- You don't have to be **poor** to follow Jesus and live with Him forever! --- And all the rich people said, AMEN! --- If Jesus asked you to give away all your money and possessions to follow Him, **would you?** And **ALL** the people said, "What?"

In 1973 the O'Jays sang about "*money, money, money...people got to have it, really need it,*" would do almost anything to get it. That 70's soul song was really a warning: If money becomes your master, it will change you. That will not only sing, **it will preach!**

The Point: How should a follower of Christ keep material things, human effort, and God's free gift of salvation in proper balance? Briefly, let's look at that in Matthew 19.

In this text Jesus was approached by a man with a very good question. When we read about this incident in Matthew, Mark and Luke we learn that he was rich, young, and a "ruler" (likely a leader in the synagogue) Based on appearances this was the kind of man you would want your daughter to marry! He was also concerned about eternity.

"*Jesus, good teacher, what must I do to have eternal life?*" Emphasis on "good" and "do." Jesus replied, "*There is only One who is good.*" Truth #1: Only God is good and human beings can't DO anything to earn eternal life...it is a gift from Him. (Eph. 2:8-9) It has been said, "*eternal life is not something we achieve—it's something we receive.*" That is a hard truth for people who have been taught to work hard for good things.

Jesus didn't cut him off (like I just did). Instead, He said, "*Let's pursue your question about 'doing' enough to earn eternal life. 'You must keep the commandments!'*" Rich, young, ruler: "*Which ones?*" I don't believe he was negotiating – my personal opinion is he was truly looking for a formula to follow. Jesus: "*Don't murder, commit adultery, steal, testify falsely. Be sure to honor your parents and love your neighbor.*"

Rich, young, ruler: "*Done! What else must I DO?*" Still looking for a checklist. Jesus in verse 21: "*If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*"[¶] The rich, young, ruler did not reply with words. He went away sad because (my translation) he couldn't bear the thought of giving up his money, stuff, and position.

Truth #2: Jesus wasn't saying that material poverty is required to be His follower. He was challenging this young man's love of material things versus his love for God. Abraham was rich... and faithful; Job was wealthy... and righteous; David was a king... and a man after God's heart; Solomon was extremely wealthy... and uniquely blessed

with God-given wisdom; Zacchaeus was rich... and repented; Joseph of Arimathea was rich... and devoted to Jesus. It has been said: *“Jesus doesn’t demand poverty—He demands priority. It’s not about what’s in your wallet, it’s about what’s in your heart. God is not against you having things—He’s against things having you.”*

(NLT) — 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. **24** I’ll say it again—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** The disciples were astounded. “Then who in the world can be saved?” they asked. **26** Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

Peter spoke up (it’s always Peter isn’t it?): *“We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?”* Peter was focused R.O.I. (return on investment or in this case, on service). He was tuned to everyone’s favorite radio station: WIII-FM (what is in it for me?).

(NLT) — 28 Jesus replied, “I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon his glorious throne, you who have been my followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **29** And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life. **30** But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.

- William Barclay wrote, *“The Christian will receive far more than he has ever to give up... but he must not follow Christ for what he can get.”*ⁱⁱ
- D. A. Carson wrote, *“The rewards are not wages earned but gifts of grace.”*ⁱⁱⁱ
- Following Jesus is not about return on investment; it is about His gift of eternity.

So, what’s the Takeaway?

- **Salvation is received, not achieved** — Eternal life is not a reward for the worthy—it’s a gift for the willing. *“By grace you have been saved... not a result of works.”* (Ephesians 2:8–9)
- **Jesus exposes what we love most** — Whatever you won’t give up may be what you truly worship. Jesus said, *“You cannot serve God and money.”* (Matthew 6:24)
- **Good morality is not enough** — You can check all the boxes and still miss the point. *“All our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.”* [Compared to God’s holiness] (Isaiah 64:6)
- **Following Jesus requires surrender, not accomplishment** — You don’t add Jesus to your life—He becomes your life. *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself.”* (Luke 9:23)
- **Wealth is a spiritual risk, not a spiritual advantage** — The more you have to rely on, the harder it is to rely on God. *“...it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”* (Matthew 19:23)

- **Salvation is humanly impossible—but possible with God** — If salvation depended on us, no one would make it—but because it depends on God, anyone can. *“With man...impossible, but with God all things are possible.” (Matthew 19:26)*
- **Following Jesus is worth it—now and forever** — You never lose what you give to Jesus—you multiply it. *“He will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:29)*
- **God’s value system is upside down from the world’s** — What impresses people doesn’t impress God—He’s looking at the heart. *“The last will be first, and the first last.” (Matthew 19:30)*
- The bottom line: Life with Christ isn’t about what we have, who we are, or what we do. It’s about what **He did** on the cross to pay for our sins. In God’s economy salvation is not about doing, being, or keeping; it’s about surrendering and receiving.

ⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Mt 19:21). Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱ The Gospel of Matthew, Volume 2 (Daily Study Bible Series)
 Commentary on Matthew 19:16–22 (The Rich Young Ruler)

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke*
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