

LESSON 12
February 16, 2025

Unit III: Life in God's Kingdom

What More Do I Have to Do?

DEVOTIONAL READING: 1 Samuel 2:1-10
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Matthew 19:16-30
PRINT PASSAGE: Matthew 19:16-30

KEY VERSE

Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. (Matthew 19:24, KJV)

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“Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 19:24, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do the following:

- Analyze the conflicting feelings the rich young man experienced in weighing the cost and reward of following Jesus.
- Affirm the grace of God, who makes salvation possible.
- Integrate understanding the cost of following Jesus into your discipleship.

*Key Terms

Behold (verse 16, KJV)—Greek: *idou* (id-oo’): look at, view; “Lo!”; see.

Good (verse 17)—Greek: *agathos* (ag-ath-os’): intrinsically good in nature; upright; honorable; preeminently of God, as consummately and essentially good.

Kingdom (verse 23)—Greek: *basileia* (bas-il-i’-ah): royal power; kingship, sovereignty, authority, rule, especially of God—both in the world and in the hearts of humankind.

Neighbor (verse 19)—Greek: *plésion* (play-see’-on): someone or something that is near, neighboring, nearby; “neighbour” (KJV).

Perfect (verse 21)—Greek: *teleios* (tel’-i-os): having reached its end (i.e., complete; by extension, perfect); finished; full grown.

Teacher (verse 16)—Greek: *didaskalos* (did-as’-kal-os): instructor; doctor; “Master” (KJV).



The Biblical Context

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus delivers five critical discourses that form the core of His teachings: the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7); the Missionary Discourse (see Matthew 10); the Parables of the Kingdom (see Matthew 13); the Church Discourse (see Matthew 18), and the Olivet Discourse (see Matthew 24–25). These teachings offer a comprehensive view of Jesus' message, as originally presented by Matthew for a Jewish audience.

Chapter 18, positioned between the Church Discourse and the Olivet Discourse, emphasizes humility and forgiveness within the church community. Following this, chapter 19 marks a transition—Jesus' departing Galilee for Jerusalem, foreshadowing His crucifixion for lost humanity. This chapter presents two pivotal teachings: Jesus clarifies to the Pharisees that divorce is permissible only in cases of sexual immorality, and He challenges a wealthy young ruler to renounce his wealth and follow Him. The ruler's refusal leads to a discussion about the difficulty for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, underscoring that salvation is attainable through a relationship with God, not wealth or status.

Chapter 20 continues the narrative, featuring a parable that echoes Jesus' statement from the previous chapter about the first being last and the last first. It also highlights the theme of servant leadership and concludes with Jesus' healing of two blind men, setting the stage for His triumphant entry into Jerusalem.

have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (NIV). The key is to find contentment in what we have and trust in God's provision for what we need. A notable example from Jesus' teachings is the parable of the rich young ruler. This story illustrates how wealth can grip a person so tightly that it becomes difficult for him or her to trust the Lord for a deeply fulfilling life that is much richer than material possessions alone.

Treasure (verse 21)—Greek: *thésauros* (**thay-sow-ros'**): a storehouse for precious things (hence, a store); the things laid up in a treasury.

***(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)**

Introduction

In the old television series *The Honey-mooners*, the late Jackie Gleason played a character named Ralph Kramden, who was constantly devising “get-rich-quick” schemes and roping in his best friend, Ed Norton. Typically, Ralph lacked the necessary funds to execute these plans and turned to Norton, the one who often bore the financial burden of the scheme's failure. Ralph's behavior reflects a belief that wealth is essential for security in life—a mindset shared by many throughout history. This attitude extends beyond merely earning a living to meet basic needs to the hope of achieving lifelong security through accumulating wealth.

The Bible teaches that diligent work brings financial rewards (see Proverbs 10:4), but advises caution regarding the potential pitfalls of pursuing wealth. In 1 Timothy 6:10, Paul cautions against the love of money and the relentless chase after it; specifically, Paul wrote, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money,

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Discipleship's Lack (*Matthew 19:16-21*)

KJV

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

18 He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

NIV

16 Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

18 "Which ones?" he inquired. Jesus replied, "You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony,

19 "honor your father and mother," and "love your neighbor as yourself."

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

R. T. France begins his exposition of this section of Matthew 19 with this statement: "In a culture where wealth was regarded as a sign of God's blessing and where a religious teacher was therefore expected to be at least moderately wealthy, the lifestyle of Jesus and His disciples was conspicuously different. The relation of wealth to discipleship was therefore an important issue, not least to the disciples themselves" (France, R. T. [1985]. *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* [Vol.1, pp. 287-292]. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press). This context introduces a dialogue in Matthew between Jesus and a rich young ruler, possibly a Pharisee or another religious leader. The man's inquiry in **verse 16** about the required deed for eternal life implies his belief in Jesus as a knowledgeable teacher and his assumption that one significant act could ensure entry into God's kingdom.

In **verse 17a**, Jesus challenges these notions, questioning the young man's understanding of goodness and asserting that only God is good (**verse 17b**). Jesus advised showing obedience to the commandments for eternal life (**verse 17c**). When the ruler claimed perfect adherence

to the commandments since his youth (**verses 18-20**), Jesus confronted the young ruler with a radical proposition to sell all his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor, and follow Him (**verse 21**).

Jesus' counsel, specific to this individual's situation, is neither a universal mandate for all believers nor a condemnation of wealth. The point of the dialogue is that no one can earn entry into God's kingdom through personal merit. Jesus exposed the man's misguided belief that his rigid adherence to the Law was good enough to merit eternal life. The passage also warns believers about the risks of letting wealth or worldly possessions obstruct their relationship with God. Jesus emphasizes the importance of authentic faith that serves others and transcends ritualistic religion.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does this man's misconception of how to inherit eternal life support the need for understanding justification by faith and sanctification?

Discipleship's Demands (*Matthew 19:22-26*)

KJV

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

NIV

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich 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 someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The young man's dismayed reaction in **verse 22** revealed his greater attachment to wealth than to discipleship. His reaction of disappointment prompted Jesus to remark to His disciples that it is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven (**verse 23**). To illustrate His point, Jesus figuratively explained that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (*rhaphidos*, "a sewing needle") than for a rich man to get into God's kingdom (**verse 24**). Jesus' response underscores the danger that having considerable wealth can tempt people to place their trust and affection in money and material things rather than to trust God to supply for our needs. This remark astonished His disciples, prompting them to ask who could be saved (**verse 25**). Their question is not surprising, because the Pharisees' teaching influenced Jews to believe that wealth was a sign of God's favor. Therefore, they reasoned that no one could enter God's kingdom if the wealthy could not do so. Jesus' answers their dilemma by explaining that salvation is only possible through God's grace and does not rely on humanity's efforts or abilities (**verse 26**). Entering God's kingdom appears impossible to humankind because it requires a spiritual transformation only God can perform.

The disciples' question and Jesus' response suggest that believers evaluate their lives for tendencies to trust in money and multiple other forms of "riches" that can draw them away from trusting God wholeheartedly and following Him faithfully, including materialism, dishonest gain, a false sense of security, the lack of compassion for others' needs, and the quest for status, power, and influence.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why does it sometimes appear easier to trust the things that we can see, possess, and handle, more than we trust God?

Discipleship's Rewards (Matthew 19:27-30)

KJV

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

NIV

27 Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?"

28 Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, 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 wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

30 “But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

Jesus’ response to the rich young ruler’s trust in his wealth prompted Peter to ask what his and the other disciples’ reward was for living up to that condition by walking away from their previous lives to follow Him (**verse 27**). Although they weren’t wealthy men, they left what they had. The disciples heard Jesus tell the young man that he would have treasure in heaven by selling all he had and becoming one of His followers. Peter was not necessarily greedy or selfish, but he wanted to know if that promise applied to the disciples and himself. If we are transparently honest, we might confess that we, too, have been guilty of asking, “What’s in it for me?” We work our jobs diligently with the expectation of being compensated for what we do. In close personal relationships, we expect some degree of reciprocity for what we invest in others. However, Jesus did not rebuke or dismiss Peter’s question. He graciously informed the disciples and him that in the new era—the “regeneration” of all things—when He returns to occupy His throne, they will be with Him, each sitting on his own throne in heaven judging Israel’s twelve tribes (**verse 28**). These ordinary men learned that they will have more than treasure in heaven because they “sold out” to follow Him; they will share positions of great responsibility and power with Him. Next, Jesus expands His revelation to the disciples to include all who leave or sacrifice possessions and families for His name’s sake; they will receive a hundred times more than they gave up, plus the ultimate reward—inheriting eternal life (**verse 29**). Jesus concludes with a puzzling statement that He illustrates in the parable of the laborers in the next chapter (see Matthew 20:1-16). Jesus explained that God has eternal rewards for all the faithful, no matter the duration or extent of their service to Him (**verse 30**). What matters most is one’s motive for serving—for God evaluates the heart.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What is the danger of seeking the blessings, perks, and rewards of discipleship without considering the cost? Give examples of some potentially high costs of being a Christian in today’s world.

A Closing Thought

The rich young ruler’s story reminds believers to prioritize their spiritual values and the riches of God’s grace over material wealth and its false security. The young ruler is a vivid example of the inherent difficulty of making a wholehearted commitment to trusting the Lord

and following Him faithfully. God's grace is the ultimate reward for all believers in Jesus Christ, and the only pathway to salvation and eternal life.

Your Life

Jesus asked the young ruler to give up his riches, but He may be asking you to give up something else of considerable value—your circle of friends, a secret fault, your quality time, or an ungodly habit. Doing what the Lord requires isn't always easy. There are other types of "riches" that tempt believers to draw back on God. This week, pray for the Holy Spirit to reveal any of these "riches" that may be warring with your total commitment to God. Select one and make a commitment to do all you can to quickly overcome it to please God.

Your World!

This one or that one—do you want Jesus or your possessions? Most of the world chooses possessions. Evangelism is embedded in Jesus' exchange with the rich young ruler. Jesus' wanted to show the man his greater need for God than wealth. God can do more than money can do, but money can't even begin to do what God can do. People's spiritual lives are hindered daily by the love of "treasures" other than money. The church, the faith community, must identify and examine the pull of these "treasures" and prayerfully develop appropriate evangelistic messages to address them and new followers for Christ.

Closing Prayer

Dear God, thank You for revealing the only path to eternal life now and in Your presence. We pray that You will use us as Your redemptive agents to share this good news with others so they will come to know Jesus as Savior and Lord. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Conclusion

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

Next week's lesson explores Jesus' primary standard in the final judgment—serving others. Read Matthew 25:31-46.

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, February 17	"Equipped for Every Good Work"	(2 Timothy 3:10-17)
TUESDAY, February 18	"Delight in God's Ways"	(Psalm 119:17-24)
WEDNESDAY, February 19	"Keep Awake; the Bridegroom Is Coming"	(Matthew 25:1-13)
THURSDAY, February 20	"Praise for a Faithful Servant"	(Matthew 25:14-15, 19-30)
FRIDAY, February 21	"Choose the Way of Faithfulness"	(Psalm 119:41-48)
SATURDAY, February 22	"The Fast that God Chooses"	(Isaiah 58)
SUNDAY, February 23	"Compassion for the Least"	(Matthew 25:31-46)