

We have a new section today, so we have a new study guide in the back if you haven't gotten one. Today we start Matthew 19:23-30, the last section of Matthew chapter 19. Today is a continuation of the two-part series that we took in chapter 19 verses 16-22, when we studied The Poverty of the Rich Man. It sounds like a contradiction; how can a rich man have poverty? But it's true. Rich people are poor just like we all are; we all have poverty of spirit.

We studied how the rich young ruler comes to Jesus and says to Him, "Good teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And the Lord is going to deal with this in two parts.

First Jesus said, "Why did you call Me *good*?" The word the young man used was **ἀγαθός** (agathos). So Jesus says, "Why do you call Me **ἀγαθός** (agathos)? Only One is **ἀγαθός** (agathos) and that is God and you instinctively called Me *good*."

In answer to your second question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus says, "Keep the commandments," and he says, "Which ones?" Jesus referenced the last six commandments of The Ten Commandments listed in Exodus chapter 20:1-16, the last six. The Ten Commandments, or in the Hebrew Bible they are called The Ten Words, they are not called *commandments*, they are called *words*, The Ten Words of God. And so, of The Ten Commandments, or Ten Words of God, the first four commands deal with a person's personal relationship with God Himself. The last six of The Ten Commandments had to do with man's relationship with his or her fellow man. So when Jesus said, "Keep the commandments," and the rich young ruler said, "Which ones?" Jesus listed five out of the last six commandments; didn't even mention the first four that have to do with one's relationship with God. He purposely didn't mention these first four commandments, purposely.

In Exodus 20:3-11 we have those first four commandments:

You shall have no other gods besides Me.

Not *before Me*, but, *besides Me*. The Lord is saying, "You can only have one God and nobody else. Just Me."

You shall not make any graven image or likeness of anything in heaven above...

No pictures. No statues.

...in order to bow down and to worship them and reverence them.

Verse 7 of Exodus chapter 20, the third,

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain.

In vain doesn't mean just *to curse*, it means *to associate it with nothingness*. To associate God's name with something that is not of God, that's *vain*. We have a tendency to attach God's name to things in order to justify doing things, which have nothing to do with Him.

Then fourthly,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all of your work: but on the seventh day is the Sabbath day; you shall rest from all of your work, you, your servants, your cattle.

All of those commands Jesus did not say to this young man, just five out of the last six.

And you say, "Well, what's the sixth one that Jesus didn't mention?" **You shall not covet**, which means *want more, lust for more than what you have*. He didn't tell him that because the young man would not have passed that test. Instead, He read to him those last five commandments: *You shall not steal, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not bear false witness*, all of these commands dealing with a relationship with his fellow man.

In response to this - the young man saying, "Which of these commandments do I need to keep?" and Jesus listing those five out of six commands at the end - the young man says, "All of these have I kept, what yet am I lacking?"

"I haven't killed anybody. I haven't committed adultery. I haven't borne false witness. I haven't done any of these things. So what am I still lacking, so that I can inherit eternal life?" Jesus gave two commands:

- 1) "Go and sell all of your possessions and give to the poor."
- 2) "And come, follow Me."

Those are the two commands He gave, along with those five from The Ten Commandments. But verse 22 says that the young man left grieving because he had many possessions.

The young man was saying, "I'm good at helping out my fellowman. I'm good at not bringing harm to my fellowman. What do I lack yet?" And Jesus is about to expose both to him and to us, which I'm glad you're here this morning.

So why did Jesus tell him to sell his possessions, rather than give him the first commandments of The Ten Commandments? Why didn't He just say, "You are to have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make any graven image or any likeness of a picture. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. And you are to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy and not do any work." Why didn't He just name those four commands, instead of telling him, "Sell your possessions, give to the poor, come and follow Me"?

Now listen to this - this is the quote of the year, because what a person spends most of his time on, what a person spends most of his energy on, and what a person spends most of his money on, is his god. See, it's more than beliefs and convictions. You can say, "Well, Jesus is my God. I believe in Him. I believe what the Bible says about Him. I'm convicted about Him. I'm convicted that it is true." And we will get more into it next week, but as I said in the past, I'll say it again because the Bible does make a distinction, a follower of Jesus Christ is a believer, but a believer is not necessarily a follower.

In John chapter 8 Jesus had a message to those Jews who had believed because of the miracles which He was performing, and He says, **You are a genuine disciple if you continue in my word**. Just believing isn't enough.

James chapter 2 says, **You believe that there is one God, you do well, but (even Satan) even demons are believing and trembling.** Do you know Satan believes the truth about the Bible more than I do? He knows the truth more than I do and he believes it's true, but he's in rebellion. He is fighting against it. Just having the right beliefs, or having the right convictions, isn't enough. One must follow Christ. There's a difference.

We are told in Deuteronomy 6:5 that **We are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.** Love Him with everything. Everything that we are and everything that we have, to love him.

That's a summary statement by the way, of the first four commands in The Ten Commandments. Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That summarizes those first four commands. The other summary of the last six commands is found in Leviticus 19:18, where it says, **And love your neighbor as yourself.** So, love the Lord your God with everything you are and everything you have, and love your neighbor as yourself.

What a person spends most of his time on, and what a person spends most of his energy and effort on, and what a person spends most of his money on, is his god. That's the one I have given myself to. I might have the right beliefs, I might be convicted that the Bible is true, but have I surrendered my life to Christ? Do I follow Him? Literally follow Him on a daily basis?

It was easier for the rich young ruler to spend his whole week cultivating his wealth and his job and his moneymaking and then take time out on Saturday to go to temple. That's a lot like what we do. We take time out, or try to take time out to make it to church on Sunday, or make it to Bible study but the rest of the time we give ourselves totally to advancing ourselves, progressing ourselves, getting more money, making life better for ourselves, and not realizing that this is not a Sunday morning walk with the Lord only. We are to walk with Him and seek Him and serve Him, daily.

Now, the disciples were watching all of this. They were listening to the dialogue between Jesus and this rich young ruler and they saw the rich young ruler be told he had to sell everything and come and follow Jesus, and he left grieving. They saw him grieving over the possibility of losing his possessions and grieving over the things that Jesus had told him. So when Jesus saw the disciples looking in verse 23, **He says to His disciples, "Truly I say to you that a rich man with difficulty will enter into the kingdom of heaven."** King James says "will hardly enter in." *Hardly* as we know it doesn't really bring home the literal translation. It is literally the word *difficult*. A rich man with difficulty will enter into the kingdom of heaven. The rich young man was struggling. It was a difficulty for him to choose between his possessions and the Lord. And so, it's not going to come easy in other words. It's going to have some things we have to face, some things we have to give up, because we are serving them as our god in place of Jesus.

But He didn't say, "It's wrong to be rich." I was going to say, "Especially if you are a pastor," but then many pastors are rich. It doesn't say, "It's wrong to be rich."

Paul told Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus, **Godliness and contentment is great gain.** That's wealth. I Timothy 6:6-12. **For we brought nothing into this world, and it's certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing let us therewith be satisfied.** You've got clothes on your back, you've got a place to live, you've got food, be satisfied. You have the necessities of life. **But they that will be rich, that is, *they desire to be rich*, fall into temptations and traps, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown man in destruction and perdition.** Ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is the root of all evil.** Now you might say, "Well I don't love money, it is just an evil necessity." Well, the word for love here is not the word ἀγάπη (agape) but the word φιλέω (phileo). Adopting the fact that money is your friend because it's going to get you somewhere and get you what you want is the root of all evil. **Which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many pains or sorrows. But you, oh man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness. Fight the good fight of faith.** And you have to fight with possessions. You have to fight with money. It is difficult in this struggle to stay with the faith and walk away from the allurements of this world. **Lay hold on eternal life, where unto you are called and you have professed a good profession before many witnesses.** You've confessed Christ, walk in that good confession. Hold to Him. Turn from everything else, all the temptations this world has to offer.

But then in I Timothy chapter 6 also, but later in verses 17 through 19, Paul told Timothy to **Command those who are rich in this world.** He didn't say it was wrong to be rich, he says it is wrong to seek after riches but for those who are blessed with riches entrusted by God, he says, **Command those who are rich in this world that they be not high-minded** (have a high frame of mind), **nor trust in uncertain riches, but trust in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute.** Share with other people, willing to *share*, that's the word κοινωνία (koinonia), *have fellowship with others*.

In other words, "Whatever their wealth is, tell them, command them, be free and liberal in your giving. Be ready to help people. That's your ministry." Some people have a ministry of giving. I've had people come to me and tell me, they complain because a lot of people in church don't give, don't financially support and they find themselves giving sacrificially and giving a lot of money. Well, that's their ministry. It doesn't matter what anybody else gives or doesn't give. Those who are entrusted with riches have been given in order to help people who don't have and to support ministry, support the Lord's work.

Lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may hold take hold of eternal life. Let them do good in good works, spiritual works, ἀγαθός (agathos) works. Be involved in the work of the Lord with your wealth and with your riches.

As we just said earlier, what we put most of our money into is our god, is our goal. What we put most of our time into, what we put most of our effort into that's our god because that's whom or what we serve.

So the rich young ruler was told to sell everything and follow because his wealth and his possessions were his god. The Lord didn't have to give him the commands, He just had to put the finger on what his god was.

So Jesus said to the disciples that a rich man with difficulty will enter into the kingdom of heaven. Verse 24 the second statement, "**And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter in the kingdom of God.**" The eye of the needle is a Jewish proverb, but it originated in Babylon. It originated as an elephant passing through the eye of a needle. And you can imagine a needle, those of you ladies who sew, and the men say, "Sew what?" Part of your sewing needle there's an eye that you put your thread through. So Jesus is saying, originating in Babylon, "It's easier to put an elephant through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter into heaven." The Jews picked up on this proverb and made it a camel instead of an elephant. That it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven. The proverb itself, no matter which way you say it - the Babylonian way or the Jewish way, was meant to express the impossibility of something. It is impossible to thread an elephant through the eye of a needle or a camel through the eye of the needle.

There are two views as to what this proverb means. The first view - I used to teach this way because I thought it was pretty cool and pretty clever - people used to teach that in Jerusalem there were two gates. There was a large main gate and a small walk-in gate on the side. And at night when they closed the main gate, they kept the walk-in gate open for travelers to keep coming and going in, but you weren't able to get your animals and your goods in through that small gate. Some people said that, "Well, a rich man has to push his camel through that small gate and try to squeeze him through to get into heaven," or, "Squeeze his elephant through to get into heaven," which is a cool little viewpoint. Except - like I said, I used to teach that way many years ago, in my younger days; but then I found out that that viewpoint is not true. In Jesus' day they did not have a small door, they had the main gate and that was it. When the doors were closed in the evening you couldn't get in or out. In fact, those small doors on the side were not constructed and built until 60 years after Christ, so that nice little viewpoint doesn't work.

It basically means that it is impossible to put a camel through the eye of a needle or an elephant through the eye of a needle. It's impossible for a rich man to squeeze into heaven and squeeze his wealth and his lifestyle into heaven. It's impossible. He can be rich, but he's got to be in service to Christ. Christ has to give it to him, and he serve the Lord with it, which is a very difficult thing to do.

So there are two things we have to mention about the proverb itself. As I just mentioned to you the word *needle*. In Matthew's Gospel here it's a sewing needle. That is the Greek word that he uses, *a sewing needle*. In Luke's version he uses a *surgeon's* or *physician's needle*. He, Luke, being a physician, you can imagine that's why he would use that. So we are talking about a literal needle with an eye in it to pass things through. And of course, a camel. So the Lord is saying that it's about as easy for a rich man to enter into heaven as it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. Not very easy. In fact, it's impossible. So the proverb expresses the impossibility of something, and the response of the disciples tells us that's how they took it.

They took the proverb as saying it's impossible for a rich man to enter into heaven, because look at verse 25, **And when his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished.** Literally in the Greek text they were *blown out of their minds* when they heard this proverb. **They were exceedingly astonished, saying, "Who then is able to be saved?"** Who then is able to be saved, if this is true?

You see the Jews believed - and this is interesting because our culture is designed around the same philosophy - but the Jews believed a person was rich because he was blessed by God and favored by God. It is God's approval and blessing upon him. If a person was poor it meant that he was in sin or was doing things wrong. And so when you take a rich young ruler that the disciples would say, "Well, this guy's got wealth so he's blessed of God," which is why the Lord presented this whole thing the way He did, to show that his wealth and possessions were his god, his goal in life.

So, if a rich person - it is impossible for them to get into heaven unless they give it up and repent, if this is true, the disciples are saying, "We are doomed. There's no way to be saved." And like I said we have the same philosophy in our culture, if not in our churches, in our Christian philosophy in America. The philosophy is that if you've got wealth, if you've got money, if you have a successful business, if you're perfectly healthy, then it's God's approval on you that you are living the right lifestyle. If you don't have money, or if you have financial problems, that can be due to bad financial planning and bad financial conduct; but many people today believe that if you have ill health, and your finances are not doing very well, and you can't get ahead in life, and you can't reach your goals, that God's not blessing you and God is not helping you do it, therefore you're doing something wrong. That philosophy, by the way, came from the East, from the eastern religions many years ago and passed through the Christian science religion, that the body of Christ pointed out many years ago that their philosophy came from the Middle East, eastern religions. But the church in turn has adopted some of the same basic principles. It is a science. It is psychology. Practice certain principles and you will become rich. Practice certain principles and you will become healthy. Practice certain principles and you will be happy. That is all psychology. It's all man's effort, human effort.

So, basically the disciples were struck out of their minds when they saw this rich young ruler walk away grieving, after being told he had to give up his possessions, his wealth and give it to the poor. You've got to help out the poor and then come and follow Jesus. That's pretty radical. He's not telling every single person to sell everything you have and come follow Jesus. He is, if you're doing that as your god, but if not - if the Lord's given you a good job, given you a good situation, given you what we consider a good life, serve Him. Just make sure that those things don't take over the priority of following Jesus Christ. Not just believing but following. *Following* means you seek Him in prayer as to what He wants you to do for everything that you do in life. *Following* means you let Him lead.

I mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago and I wanted to mention it again, one of the great examples of Christ-centered relationship versus man-centered relationship is that a man-centered relationship looks for the Lord to tell me what to do. I'm in a certain situation, I pray, "Lord, show me what You want me to do." He is not going to show you what He wants you to

do because He wants you to deny yourself. It's, "Lord show me what You are going to do." I'm just the follower. I'm just the onlooker. I'm the observer. That is what it means to follow Christ. It doesn't mean take directions from Him and go in my own human effort and do it. It doesn't mean that at all.

So if a rich person - it is impossible for a rich person to get into heaven because he's trusting in his wealth and his riches then the disciples are saying, "Then who can be saved? If a rich person can't, then who can be saved?"

And then the verse that you've probably heard people quote many times, verse 26, Jesus said, **But having looked at them**, literally in the Greek text, *having stared at them*, **Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible but with God all things are possible."** I've heard that quoted many, many times but people apply it to various situations depending on whether it's convenient or not. In context that statement is made for salvation. It is impossible for people to save themselves; it is not impossible for God to save someone. In fact, God is the only one who can save a person. A person can't save himself or herself.

I came across one person, as a side note, some person when talking about healing and they said, "Well, with man it's impossible, but with God all things are possible and I'm believing God for my healing." And I said, "Well, if all things are possible with God, do you believe that?"

"Oh yes, all things are possible."

"Then it's also possible for Him not to heal." Did you follow that? Because it is possible for Him to do anything. He can heal or not heal. He can sustain you by not healing you. And of course, they flipped out and said, "Well, that's not what I meant."

"I know, but that's what I mean."

You can't misapply the text. It is true that with man all things spiritual and all things of God are impossible, but with God all things are possible. Salvation is brought to us by God. Salvation is not provided by what we do. Salvation doesn't come and it is not produced from out of living a certain lifestyle. You can't save yourself by what you do. But rather, salvation is provided by God through a spiritual birth. You can't live a certain way to get saved. You can live a certain way after you are saved that expresses your relationship with Christ, but you cannot live a certain way or do anything to get yourself saved. It is impossible. With man it is impossible.

These two words literally, the literal definition of these two words, the word *impossible* in our text in verse 26 means *to be without capacity or ability*. And the word *possible* means *to have the ability*. So man does not have the ability or capacity to save himself. It's impossible. No matter what you do you can't save yourself. God is the only one who has the ability to save people.

In fact, John in John chapter 1 says, **But as many as received him, to them he gave the authority to become children of God, even to those that believe in his name.** Who were born from God, not from man, not from the desires of the flesh, but born from God, not from bloodline. You can't be born into it but somebody who has been born from God Himself. You must experience a spiritual birth. That is what it means to receive Christ. It means to receive His Spirit into your spirit, to fill you, to seal you, to live there forever. By receiving Christ into

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your spirit, you are surrendering your life. He comes in to take over. He's the Savior but He's also the Lord. That's what Jesus asked this rich man to do but he was grieved. Too difficult. Too difficult to give up what he wanted in life in order to surrender to Christ.

So remember, whatever it is you put most of your time into, whatever it is you put most of your effort into, whatever it is you put most of your money into, that is your god. It might not be what you confess. It might not be what your religious beliefs are. But the Bible presents the fact that your relationship with God, God is somebody whom you love with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. That is who God is. He's not someone just to make religious decisions about. He is someone to surrender to and to follow.

Let's close with prayer.