

February 16, 2025

"Living Lastly"
Lesson 3

Matthew 19:16-30

Intro

The encounter we look at in today's passage occurred just a few weeks before Jesus' crucifixion. There are parallel accounts of this story in Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30. The first half of the passage deals with Jesus' meeting with a man usually called the Rich Young Ruler. These terms come from combining descriptions of this person in all three accounts. By chapter 19 of Matthew's gospel, opinions about Jesus had become polarized. Luke 9:51-18:14 records several events that occur between the end of Matthew 18 and the beginning of Matthew 19. During this time frame, there were several tense encounters with Pharisees as well as other individuals. We will explore one of these encounters in today's lesson.

Read Matthew 19:16-30

1. vs. 16: The man is described differently in the three gospel stories
 - Matthew just says that "a man came:
 - Mark says he came running and knelt before Jesus
 - Luke says he was "a certain ruler", perhaps the ruler of a synagogue
 - One thing all three writers note is the man's concern: eternal life
 - He comes to Jesus to ask this question, indicating a few things
 - He knows Jesus teaches about eternal life
 - He knows that Jesus is approachable
2. vs. 17: Jesus responds to the man's question with another question
 - "Why do you ask me about what is good?"
 - This implies that Jesus must also be good if He knows what things are good (to do)
 - Jesus is trying to get the man to see Himself as the source of good
 - He is trying also to get the man to see beyond "religious" language to truth
 - Jesus tells the man to "keep the commandments", which raises some questions in the man
3. vs. 18a: The man asks Jesus, "which ones?" in Matthew's account
 - The other two don't include this response
 - The man's questions suggests that there are levels of importance to the commandments
 - Some lead to eternal life, and others are lower-ranked in their importance
 - This questions mirrors the one asked by the scribe in Mark 12:28
 - He asks Jesus which commandment is the foremost or first
 - This implies that some commandments are more important than others
4. vs. 18b-19: Jesus gives 5 of the Ten Commandments in response, and also Lev. 19:18
 - Jesus answers the scribe in Mark 12:28 with Lev. 19:18 also
5. vs. 20: The young man says he has kept all these. He has lived a righteous life according to the Law
 - But he also knows something is missing...
 - "What do I still lack?" he asks Jesus

6. vs. 21: Jesus' answer is for this particular man, not for every person
Each of us has areas of weakness that prevent us from being perfect
Jesus knows us—He knows what each of those areas are
In this man's case, it was an attachment to money and material wealth
He tells the young man to sell his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor
Then he is invited to follow Jesus
7. vs. 22: The young man goes away sad "because he had great wealth"
This indicates he had broken the first commandment to have no other gods before God
He seems to be honoring/valuing his wealth above God
This directive was not what the young man expected to hear
This man is not mentioned again after this event
We don't know if he changed his mind or not
We know he went away sad, but he wasn't the only one
We can be sure that Jesus was saddened by his refusal to accept what Jesus told him to do
8. vs. 23: Often, Jesus uses an encounter with someone as a teachable moment with his disciples
Jesus here teaches about the potential threat that riches can pose to people
One's spiritual life can be sidetracked by loving money more than God
This standard is true of loving anything more than God
9. vs. 24: Jesus uses hyperbole here—a statement exaggerated for the effect it will produce
A camel cannot go through the eye of a needle, the small opening where thread goes
Some have connected this image to a small gate called "The Needle's Eye"
However, this gate was not built until the Middle Ages (1200-1500)
Jesus is describing something which is impossible for a human being to do
We know there are rich people who love God
The statement must refer to loving those riches more than one loves God
10. vs. 25: The disciples are "astonished" at this teaching from Jesus
In the 1st century, wealth was seen as a sign of God's favor
If the rich could not be saved, then who could? No one, to the disciples
Just a little while earlier, the disciples shooed away children from seeing Jesus
They considered them a nuisance, but Jesus says "the kingdom of heaven belongs
to such as these (children)"
Now the disciples see someone they consider a shoo-in to reach heaven
But Jesus says this rich man is unworthy to enter
11. vs. 26: The important word Jesus says in this verse is "this"—"With man *this* is impossible"
The word "this" refers to salvation: this disciples asked "who then can be saved?"
What qualifies someone to be saved?
When man develops those categories, it does not align with what God thinks
It is impossible for humans to do anything worthy of being saved
This is why Jesus came to the world, a broken and fallen world
Jesus isn't saying that rich men cannot be saved or have a right relationship with God
Abraham and Job were both rich and righteous men

Joseph of Arimathea was rich and also a disciple of Jesus
The issue is what controls a person's life: money or God
The condition of the heart makes the difference

12. vs. 27: Jesus told the rich young ruler in vs. 21 to give up everything he had and follow Jesus
Peter here tells Jesus that this is exactly what they have done

They left their careers (fishing, tax collecting, etc) and followed Jesus
What rewards await them because they obeyed Jesus's command to follow Him?

13. vs. 28: Jesus tells Peter what the reward will be for the 12 disciples

They will sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel

When will this happen? Jesus tells them that as well

“When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne”

“At the renewal of all things”

This reward will not occur in this world, in this lifetime

It is possible (likely?) the disciples were thinking of an earthly reward

Many thought Jesus was going to overthrow Rome as the Messiah

Jesus says the reward will come at the end of time—the renewal time of all things

14. vs. 29: Jesus elaborates about the rewards here in more general terms

His answer here is more about who will gain the rewards

Anyone who has places earthly wealth or relationships below God will be rewarded

He says they will receive “100 times as much and will inherit eternal life”

Receiving 100x as much as you put in is a staggering amount

The rewards will be beyond what we can imagine at this point

Jesus also reminds them that they will be gaining “eternal life”

This was the rich young ruler's goal: “What must I do to get eternal life?” (vs. 16)

This life begins with a personal knowledge of and relationship with Jesus

15. vs. 30: Jesus and the Christian faith frequently deal in reversals

Things are reversed from what the world thinks, from what seems logical or right

Here Jesus says, “The first shall be last, and the last first”

Those that people think are the best (the rich, etc) will be least likely to be in heaven

Those that people think are the lowest (the poor, children, etc), are more likely

Application: This passage dealing with the rich young ruler sounds a warning. Wanting a Christian faith that doesn't require a change in lifestyle or a reordering of priorities is not Christianity. Jesus doesn't command every seeking sinner to sell everything and give the money away. He did that with the rich young ruler because He knew what the man valued most, above his interest in God. Anything we put before God in our hearts is an idol, and must be dealt with in the same decisive manner.

Prayer: Father God, give us open eyes and wisdom to see the world's standards in comparison with Your standards. Help us to continually examine ourselves about the place of our possessions and interests. Mold us into disciples of Jesus, willing to follow Him always, and confident that whatever we yield control of, You will more than compensate for in ways we cannot imagine. In Jesus' name, Amen.