

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 1<sup>st</sup> 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: the 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.