

Matthew

A Careful Study of Matthew

June 15, 2025

I. Introduction

- A. **Matthew 19:16-26**, And someone came to [Jesus] and said, “Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?” [17] And [Jesus] said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.” [18] Then he said to [Jesus], “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; [19] honor your father and mother; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” [20] The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?” [21] Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” [22] But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. [23] And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. [24] Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” [25] When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be saved?” [26] And looking at them Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”
- B. Pray

II. The rich young ruler

- A. [16] And someone came to [Jesus] and said, “Teacher, what **good thing** shall I do that I **may obtain** (*take hold of, acquire*) eternal life?” [17] And [Jesus] said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good (*as if there is some specific good you could do that would enable you to obtain eternal life. There is nothing you can do to make yourself good enough.*)? There is only One who is good (*and that One is God. To be good enough to obtain eternal life you must be perfectly good, always and forever—and only God fulfills that requirement*); but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments.”
1. This young man came to Jesus looking for the one thing that would make him worthy of eternal life and thereby give him the assurance that he was in good standing with God and possessed eternal life.

- a. He had enough understanding of God, the scriptures, and Jesus' teaching to know that eternal life required doing what is good.
 - b. However, because only God is perfectly and completely good, then what is good is to be understood and measured by His righteousness, His faithfulness, His justice, His love, His patience, His long-suffering, and His compassion.
 - c. God not only sets the standard, God is the standard for what is good – which means the good we are and the good we do is only as good as it aligns with and manifests God's good. This is one of the reasons Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (**Matthew 5:20**).
2. Though Jesus' response did not fit the grace theology of our day, it is not foreign to the NT. Consider:
 - a. **Matthew 7:21**, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who **does** the will of My Father who is in heaven."
 - b. **Romans 2:5-8,13**, But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, [6] who will render to each person according to his **deeds**: [7] to those **who by perseverance in doing good** seek for glory and honor and immortality, [**God will render**] **eternal life**; [8] but to those **who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness**, [**God will render**] **wrath and indignation**. [13] for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God, but the **doers** of the Law will be justified (*have the penalty for sin paid for them*).
 - c. **James 2:20-24**, But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without **works** is useless? [21] Was not Abraham our father justified by **works** when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? [22] You see that faith was working with his **works**, and as a result of the **works**, faith was perfected (*completed by showing it is more than mere words*); [23] and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "And Abraham believed God (*that God would provide a substitute or raise Isaac from the dead, and so in faith he placed Isaac on the altar and was ready to slit his throat*), and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God. [24] You see that a man is **justified by works and not by faith alone** (*mere words/claims of faith*).

3. The reality is, because the penalty for sin is eternal damnation, keeping the law cannot save us, for no matter how well we keep the law, it cannot take our place and pay the penalty for sins committed – whether committed before, during, or after our time of keeping the law (**Galatians 2:21;3:21**). We need a savior.
 - a. Yet as Paul says in **Romans 2:13**, God justifies those who **keep** the law. In other words, keeping the law puts us in the position to be justified. John affirms this in **1 John 1:6-7**, “If we say that we have fellowship with [God] and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; [7] but **if** we walk in the Light as [God] Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another (*God with us and us with God*), and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from **all** sin.”
 - b. And **James 2:22** adds that **doing** the law shows our faith to be genuine, that is, more than mere words – to which God responds by graciously giving us the gift of eternal life.

- B. [18] Then he said to [Jesus], “Which [laws]?” And Jesus said, “You shall not commit murder (#6); you shall not commit adultery (#7); you shall not steal (#8); you shall not bear false witness (#9); [19] honor your father and mother (#5); and you shall love your neighbor (*everyone around you, be they good, frustrating, bad, or an enemy*) as yourself (*the standard for human love is to want good for others just as you want good for yourself*).”
 1. Notice that the focus of the commandments Jesus lists deals with protecting the good of the community (*murder, adultery, stealing*), the good of the family (*adultery, honoring parents*), and anyone else you encounter who is not included in your community and family (*love neighbor*).
 2. Finally, when Jesus’ response is understood in light of His Sermon on the Mount, we see two inferred requirements in the list.
 - a. **First**, to keep these commandments as God intends, the keeping must come from within, that is, from the heart, for that is the only way it will include our thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds.
 - b. **Second**, to avoid the “hypocrite” label, our godliness, love, and (*righteousness*) must surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees.

- C. [20] The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still **lacking**?” [21] Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be **complete**, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.”

1. Though the young man claimed to have kept the commandments, it appears something within him sensed it was not enough – which explains why he asked what he was still lacking.
 2. Jesus' response may seem strange, yet it cut to the heart, that is, the beliefs and values of this **rich** young man. However, wealth is not the culprit here – the culprit is how we see wealth and what we do with it that makes the difference between right and wrong, love and selfishness, generosity and stinginess, godliness and ungodliness.
 - a. Back in **Matthew 6**, Jesus made it clear that where your treasure is, there your heart is also – which is why no one can serve two masters, for your heart will favor one over the other. Therefore, your heart will either favor God or wealth.
 - b. The problem with wealth is that **money** – and what it can do for us, **riches** – and the way in which they promise a better, more secure life, and **possessions** – which make life more pleasing, woo our heart and fill our mind with reasons to trust in them, prefer them, and serve them more than God. The reality is, wealth in all of its forms is a powerful competitor to trusting, loving, and serving God.
 - c. To the rich young man, along with all who trust in money, riches, and possessions to ensure a better life, giving up wealth in order to trust in God and follow Jesus can seem as foolish as letting go of a bird in the hand with the hope of catching the two that are in a nearby bush.
 3. Think about it: if you are trusting in money, riches, and possessions (*instead of God*) as your first and foremost source of present and future security, happiness, health, and well-being, then you would have to overcome strong feelings of vulnerability and loss to trade them for trusting in God and following Jesus.
 4. Therefore, if the rich young man – who was thoughtful enough to come to Jesus for advice on eternal life – could not think of a reason to give up his wealth and start trusting in God and following Jesus in order to gain spiritual completeness, then making such a decision will be just as hard for any of us who trust in wealth more than God.
- D. [22] But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.
1. Why was his wealth the reason for going away grieving? Because he valued his wealth and the life-style it provided more than knowing and walking with God in a whole-hearted and whole-life way. And

- he valued his wealth more than the godliness that comes from a whole-hearted, whole-life commitment and effort to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
2. I suspect he wanted a more deeply felt spirituality, and a more intimate and meaningful relationship with God. I suspect he wanted to experience the power and manifestations of the Holy Spirit. And based on his question, I think he wanted to know, deep down inside, that God was pleased with Him and that he was assured eternal life.
 3. What he did not want was the cost of having these things. He did not want the trials, the tribulation, the hard daily work, and the dying to self that God so masterfully uses to mold us and grow us and conform us into Christ-likeness.
 4. In other words, like too many Christians, he wanted godly maturity, spiritual completeness, and eternal security without the character development and spiritual growth required to have these things.
 5. Have you given serious consideration to what you want in relation to God and the Christian life? It is true, godliness comes at a cost that at first seems overwhelming, but later on, it will seem like a bargain. Therefore, don't allow the circumstances of life, the path of least resistance, or your earthly desires to make this decision for you.

E. [23] And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, **it is hard** (*yet not impossible*) for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. [24] Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. [25] When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" [26] And looking at them Jesus said to them, "With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

1. We have already looked at several reasons why it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus added another reason in **Matthew 13:22**, "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world **and the deceitfulness of wealth** (*it can do more for you than God can*) **choke the word**, and it becomes unfruitful (*does not produce its intended result*)."
2. However, as Jesus says in **vs 26**, "With God all things (*including the rich entering the kingdom of heaven*) are possible." For example:
 - a. Zacchaeus was rich, yet in response to his repentance, Jesus said, "Today salvation has come to this house" (**Luke 19:9**). Joseph of Arimathea was a rich man (**Matthew 27:57**). And it appears

Nicodemus was rich – given the amount of spices he bought to anoint the dead body of Jesus (**John 19:39**).

- b. Though these examples show the power of God, they do not change the fact that wealth is a powerful deterrent to saving faith. Wealth wants to be your master – and not your servant. It provides a comforting sense of security and the assurance of happiness by responding to needs and wants far quicker than God often does. It is these kinds of things that make wealth a tall hurdle to saving faith.
3. Upon hearing how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven, the disciples asked, “Then who can be saved?”
 - a. Why would they ask such a question? The most probable reason is because from the days of the Blessings & Curses, wealth was regarded as a sign of God’s blessings on a person, a family, and a nation for being righteous.
 - b. Therefore, it is probable the disciples were thinking, if the rich are blessed by God for being righteous, yet it is this hard for them to be saved, then it must be even harder for the poor to be saved since their poverty is a sign that God is displeased with them.
4. In answer to their question, Jesus affirms that salvation is not man’s doing, but God’s. What we cannot do, or what wealth so strongly opposes doing, or when wealth feeds our distrust of God, God, by His working on us and in us, does.
 - a. God is able to make a way for the wealthiest person and the vilest sinner to come to the place where they want to enter into saving faith, where they want reconciliation with God, and where they want the Christ-like life.
 - b. As **Job 42:2** says, “I know that You (*God*) can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.”
 - c. **Jeremiah 32:17** adds, “Nothing is too difficult for [God].”

III. Conclusion

- A. If God can bring the rich to repentance and salvation, He can also bring you to a God-honoring, God-pleasing, spiritually healthy, and a fulfilling and satisfying life of godliness. The way may be hard at times, and the cost may seem high, but the results so overshadow the hard times and the cost that you will never regret having put forth a serious, planned, intentional and persistent pursuit of God and godliness.
- B. As the scripture says, the kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (**Romans 14:17**).