

A Rich Man, What Must I Do For Eternal Life? – Matthew 19:16-22

Matthew 19:16-22 [NIV] *“Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?’ ‘Why do you ask me about what is good?’ Jesus replied. ‘There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.’ ‘Which ones?’ the man enquired. Jesus replied, ‘Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbour as yourself.’” ‘All these I have kept,’ the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’ 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.’ When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.”*

At first glance we see this man as a very moral person and humble person [Mark 10:17] in spite of being a ruler [Luke 18:18], that is a religious leader among the Jews, probably in one of the synagogues.

The same Greek word “*archon*” is used specifically as a ruler of a synagogue in Luke 8:41 and John 3:1.

There are several things in this scripture for us to review as we consider this incident in the earthly life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This man was a religious leader who was uncertain about his religious life.

“Good master what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

He addressed Jesus Christ as a good teacher in the context of he also being a teacher.

Jesus Christ’s reply was **not** what this man expected and it must have caused him to pause before he responded.

Jesus Christ was confronting the teacher to consider Who he was speaking to, which had not been accepted up to that time.

Too often people have been brought into the Christian ministry without any confrontation and total commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ, a complete abandonment of self to Jesus Christ.

Christian ministry cannot be looked upon as a career when it must be a total commitment to Jesus Christ.

This teacher felt he was back on familiar ground with the commandments *“all these things have I kept from my youth up, what lack I yet?”*

Jesus Christ then gave this man the opportunity for a spiritual decision, an opportunity for self-renunciation, the privilege of putting spiritual things above material things, the complete abandonment of himself as a follower and disciple of Jesus Christ as God’s Son.

Let us notice a great truth here, a religious life and religious practice have never provided eternal assurance for which we all long. If we are honest with ourselves we can never consider not existing, having tasted life.

Jesus Christ heard what this young man said and was immediately able to appraise him.

Jesus knew he was a religious leader, knew he read the Hebrew scriptures and that he lifted his hands to God leading the people in their ancient prayers. Yet Jesus also saw a lack of satisfaction in this man's life.

Jesus dealt with this man where he found him, laying his eternal life on the foundation of doing good things in his life.

What Jesus was saying was, “you know there is only one good and that is God, and if you are going to do something good enough to cause God to give you eternal life, how good must your action be?”

“Young man, if you insist on seeking to buy your way into God's favour, I have the answer, keep the commandments perfectly, that is the only way you have.”

The young man considered he had accomplished this, without a doubt he had kept certain commandments from his youth.

He had kept the Sabbath day, I doubt he had ever murdered anyone. He had probably never committed adultery. Because of his financial position it had never been necessary for him to steal. Probably he had honoured his father and mother, for Jews did this as a rule. This young man has been seen so often as what we call a “*moral man.*”

Let me tell you what a moral person really is. They are good enough to deceive themselves and bad enough to condemn themselves.

This young man did **not** realise the danger of being a moral man.

He was self-deceived because his goodness prevented him from knowing his badness, so he turned his back on God and walked away.

It is better to have **no** religion than to have just enough to be self-deceived as to our standing in God's eyes.

This was the downfall of this rich young ruler.

Let us consider if this young ruler had really kept God's Commandments completely, the foundation on which he was building his hope for eternal life.

The commandment says “*thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*”

Any Jew, Catholic or Protestant will all agree that whatever comes before God is a god and an idol.

This young man knew very well the commandment that God must have first place in our lives. Yet he was very rich and when Jesus Christ put to him on his own terms the question of selling everything and giving it away, thus making God first in his life and becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, he turned his back on it.

He turned his back on God because he had another god that he loved although he would **not** omit it.

When the young man came face to face with the vital question of his love for God or his love of wealth he went away because he had great possessions.

Even as the young man talked with Jesus Christ, the poor, beggars, the crippled and starving were all around them.

When Jesus Christ suggested that, as a condition of following Him, he distributed his earthly goods to help those in need all around them, the young man turned his back on them as well.

Surely, this young man did **not** exactly love his neighbour as himself.

But in his own eyes he was a noble keeper of the commandments.

By refusing to give up his wealth and lifestyle he was a covetous man.

The important teaching for us in this encounter with Jesus Christ is that it is entirely possible for us to imagine ourselves to be all right with our Creator God when we are not all right.

It is well to note that Jesus Christ plainly faced this man with the terms of eternal salvation.

Full acknowledgement of sin rather than a defensive attitude, complete trust in the Person of Jesus Christ and an utter abandonment to His Lordship alone.

People in their multitudes of petty gods are still like this man, ready to declare their moral goodness even while standing knee-deep in broken laws.

A person who comes to God with a true repentant attitude and condition of mind will not work up a defence on the basis that they have not broken every law and commandment.

The defensive attitude of “*moral people*” today is one of the greatest problems confronting Christianity.

Many trying to be Christians are making the effort on the basis that they have **not** done some of the evil things that others have done.

They are **not** willing to honestly look into their own lives, for if they did, they would cry out in conviction for being the chief of all sinners.

1 Timothy 1:11-16 [King James] *“According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.”*

Paul, after his meeting with Jesus Christ, took a different path to this rich young ruler.

This rich young ruler never had this sense of his own sin and unworthiness. He dared to stand before Jesus Christ, of whom he was inquiring the way to eternal life, and defend himself.

He trusted his own moral defence rather than acknowledge his sin and his need.

No person has any hope of eternal salvation apart from trusting completely in Jesus Christ and His atonement sacrifice for all humanity.

I wonder how many people in our own day really trust Jesus Christ in this way.

There are also many who want to trust Jesus Christ **plus something else**, they want to trust Jesus Christ and add their own morals.

They want to trust Jesus Christ and add their own good works.

They want to trust Jesus Christ and then point to the merits of their baptism or church membership and stewardship.

Let me tell you straight out that Jesus Christ will **never** stand at the right side of a plus sign!

The rich young ruler thought that he possessed all of the necessary plus signs, when the truth was that he possessed nothing that really mattered.

I wonder how many Christians in our day have just “accepted” Jesus Christ and not completely abandoned themselves to Jesus Christ as their Lord.

The terms that Jesus Christ offered the rich young ruler were **not** what he expected, and he could **not** accept them at all.

Most people have a basic interest in life after death, but there are other things that they want more now in this life.

Matthew 7:21-23 [King James] *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

The truth is that men and women can be respectable and religious, prayerful, careful, eager and ask the right questions, talk about religion and still be lost.

Actually, we rarely find anyone who seems to be as eager as the rich young man who came to Jesus Christ seeking the truth. [**Mark 10:17**]

The rich young ruler was a “*seeker*,” the church today would have put his name down on a card and added him to their statistics. But all too soon “*seekers*” turn their back on straight Bible teaching and warm Christian fellowship to have their own way. They go back into the world, which they want more than they want Jesus Christ as Lord of their life.

People often want to live in two worlds, they want spiritual peace of mind but they love what the world offers.

1 John 2:15-17 [NIV] *“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world, the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does, comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives for ever.”*

You cannot be a genuine Bible Christian and love the world.

The rich young ruler wanted God’s approval, but returned to his money and possessions.

It is **not** enough to inquire about the power of a crucified life and Spirit-filled life.

It is **not** enough to want it, it must be desired and claimed above everything else.

There **must** be an abandonment to the will of Jesus Christ to receive the desired eternal life.

The rich young ruler had to pay a great price to keep what he loved most, he had to sell Jesus Christ even as Judas Iscariot sold Him.

Luke 14:26-27 [Amplified Bible] *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother, that is in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude towards God and likewise his wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross and come after, follow Me, cannot be My disciple.”*

Paul enlarges on the carrying of our cross in his letter to the Church in Rome.

Romans 6:3-11 [NIV] *“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. **For we know that our old self was crucified with him** so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin, because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*

Crucifixion is a long and painful process, for we naturally cling on to our life, our old life of selfishness.

It is **not** enough to inquire about eternal life.

A true disciple of Jesus Christ is a person who gives up today for a future, yet unseen tomorrow.