

The Gospel of Matthew

Lesson 24: The Rich Young Man; Laborers in the Vineyard -- Matthew 19:16–20:16

He came running, by Mark's account, and knelt in the dust before Jesus. He was young, he was rich, he was respectable, and he had a question that had clearly been burning in him. "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (19:16). Here is a man who had everything the world prizes and still felt the ache of something missing. He did not come to argue or to test Jesus. He came hungry. And Jesus, Mark tells us, looked at him and loved him.

What happens next is one of the most tender and most sobering exchanges in the Gospels. Jesus walks him through the commandments, and the young man insists, with apparent sincerity, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" (19:20). Then Jesus lays a finger on the one thing the young man cannot bear to release. "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (19:21). And the man who came running walks away sorrowful, "for he had great possessions" (19:22).

Jesus turns to His stunned disciples and says it is hard, terribly hard, for a rich man to enter the kingdom. Harder than threading a camel through a needle's eye (19:24). The disciples are astonished: "Who then can be saved?" And Jesus gives the answer that the whole passage rests on. "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (19:26). Salvation is not a prize the worthy earn. It is a gift the helpless receive from a God who can do the impossible.

Then Jesus tells a parable that catches Peter, and us, mid-calculation. Workers hired at dawn and workers hired at the eleventh hour all receive the same wage, and the early workers grumble that it is not fair (20:11–12). But the landowner answers, "Do you begrudge my generosity?" (20:15). Here is the heart of grace. God is not merely fair; He is lavishly, scandalously generous. And those who follow Jesus, forsaking all, will find that the One they followed gives far beyond anything they could ever have earned.

Group Discussion: The rich young man kept the commandments and still felt something was missing, yet he walked away sorrowful when Jesus named the one thing he could not give up (19:20–22). Why do you think Jesus pressed on the very area the young man was least willing to surrender?

Personal Reflection: Jesus put His finger on the one thing the young man was clutching too tightly to follow. If Jesus looked at you with love and named the one possession, comfort, or security you are gripping hardest, what would He name, and how would you respond?

Read Matthew 19:16–20:16

Study Questions

1. The young man asks what “good deed” he must do to have eternal life, and Jesus redirects him first to God’s goodness and His commandments, then to following Him (19:16–21). What is Jesus teaching about how eternal life is actually received, and why does He not simply give the man a deed to perform?
2. Jesus named the one thing the young man could not surrender. What is the one possession, relationship, or comfort that you would find hardest to lay down if Jesus asked you for it today?
3. Jesus says it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom, harder than a camel through the eye of a needle (19:23–24). Why does wealth pose such a particular spiritual danger, and what is Jesus warning every disciple about, rich or poor?
4. Money has a way of quietly making promises it cannot keep: security, identity, freedom. Where have you found yourself trusting in your resources rather than in God, and what has that trust cost you?
5. When the disciples ask, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus answers, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (19:25–26). What does this reveal about the source of salvation, and what is ruled out by saying it is impossible for man?
6. Peter points out that the disciples have left everything to follow Jesus (19:27). Where is following Jesus currently costing you something, and how do you wrestle with what you have given up?
7. Jesus promises that those who have left homes or family for His sake will receive “a hundredfold” and inherit eternal life, yet warns that “many who are first will be last, and the

last first" (19:29–30). What is Jesus teaching about the rewards of discipleship and the danger of measuring our worthiness against others?

8. It is easy to start keeping score with God, comparing our service or sacrifice to others'. Where do you catch yourself quietly expecting God to owe you something because of what you have done for Him?
9. In the parable, the workers hired at dawn receive the same wage as those hired at the eleventh hour, and when they grumble, the landowner asks, "Do you begrudge my generosity?" (20:1–16). What is this parable teaching about the grace of God, the difference between fairness and generosity, and how we should respond when God is lavish toward others?
10. Look back across the whole passage, from the man who could not let go to the workers paid by grace. Name one specific thing Jesus is calling you to release, or one way He is calling you to rejoice in His generosity, this week.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Luke 12:15–21, Jesus warning against covetousness and the rich fool who stored up treasure for himself; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, 17–19, the love of money as a snare and the call to be rich in good works; Philippians 3:7–11, Paul counting everything as loss for the sake of Christ; Ephesians 2:8–9, salvation by grace through faith, not of works; Romans 9:14–16, God's mercy as His to give, not a debt He owes.