



THEN

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Today, we'll read a story from the life of Jesus and His disciples (Matthew 19). A story of inner conflict and vital decisions. A story that could impact your life, too..

While we wrestle with doing what's necessary, God calls us to do what's *impossible!* How can that be? Kingdom living *requires miracles!*

Matthew 19:16 *Someone came to Jesus with this question: "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"*

What's wrong with that question? Born again Christians will recognize that this young man was fixated on his deeds, as a measure of his own worthiness—he thought eternal life must be (could be) earned by one's deeds. The Gospel (Good News) teaches that no amount of good deeds can outweigh our sins or pay for our sins. We cannot be saved by our own efforts. We are entirely dependent on God's grace. If He doesn't save us, we cannot be saved!

Matthew 19:17 *"Why ask Me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good.*

Jesus is all about searching out and uncovering what we believe about Him. Why do we reach out to Him? Who do we think He is? These are not spurious questions; they are vital.

What would your answer be? Who is Jesus to you? Why do you think He can tell you the truth, or help you?

What He's driving at is this: Do you really recognize Him as God? Or just a godly man? When you see Him, do you see the Father? Or just a wise teacher?

And why is this important? Because when you realize that Jesus is God in human form, then you will be confident that He has all the truth and all the wisdom and all the saving power that you need. When you realize that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah), then you will confidently follow Him and need no other.

Matthew 19:17 *But to answer your question—if you want to receive eternal life, keep the commandments."*

The young man does NOT recognize Jesus as God (Messiah); he is still thinking as a mere man (about his deeds), so Jesus answers Him according to the old covenant (Law). “Keep the commandments” is the first requirement for eternal life.

Of course, it is impossible to keep them all (even the ten basic ones)—but that is exactly what each of us must recognize, not just in theory, but in practice: I cannot do what is required of me; I cannot keep the commandments.

Only then can we recognize what God had planned—how Christ kept the commandments on our behalf, and applies His perfection to the account of every sinner who trusts in Him.

Matthew 19:18 “Which ones?” the man asked.

As though some of God’s commands were important, but others were just a joke. Haven’t you also wished you could pick and choose? This question has only one purpose: to find a loop-hole.

Moses (who passed on the commandments) said that every one of them was necessary and must be obeyed. To violate any one of them, was to break the entire Law—to fail altogether. But, before you think too harshly of this young man, he only did what every one of us has done: search for an excuse, a workaround. But there is none.

Jesus did not mock his hypocrisy. He just told him the truth.

Matthew 19:18 And Jesus replied: “ ‘You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother. Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ”

Here’s a sampling of the required commandments (not all ten). Why didn’t Jesus list them all? Were the others unimportant? NO!

This representative sample was sufficient to make His point, and (this is my speculation) I imagine that the ones Jesus mentioned were the ones this young man had actually violated, in hope that he might see his own waywardness and repent.

Consider the internal violation of each:

- If not physical murder, what about anger in the heart?
- If not actual adultery, what about lust of the eyes?
- If not stealing property, what about envying what someone else has?
- If not false testimony, what about slanderous thoughts?
- Instead of honoring your parents, what about secret disobedience?

- If not loving your neighbor actually, what about stubborn selfishness?

Matthew 19:20 "I've obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else must I do?"

The young man was squirming inside, hoping Jesus didn't really know what he had done, still looking for a loophole to justify himself.

Matthew 19:21 Jesus told him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me."

If a perfect record of performance (as the young man professed to have) was not enough to soothe his anxiety and give him confidence of salvation, then he must go above and beyond external obedience of the commandments. In fact, what he considered to be his possessions were possessing him. Sacrificial compassion could boost the young man out of the rut of his rule-keeping obsession, and provide him with treasure that would not diminish or pass away. Although that would not give him the eternal life he was seeking, it would free him from what was holding him back, so that he could follow Jesus Christ (and THAT is how one truly gains eternal life).

Matthew 19:22 But when the young man heard this, he went away sad, for he had many possessions.

Here is the evidence that his holdings held him fast. He was imprisoned by his possessions. He feared to let them go; his whole dependence was in those things that he owned. He trusted them to provide for his future.

Somehow he imagined that his possessions gave him freedom; actually, He was chained by them. He feared to let them go. He was in bondage. He couldn't move forward.

Matthew 19:23 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. ²⁴ I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"

Emphatically, Jesus told His disciples a second time that riches (possessions) can be like quicksand or a tar pit—very hard to break free from. If you hope to break free from their cords, do what Jesus said: give them away to someone in real need. At least, then, your investment will have an eternal reward.

Matthew 19:25 The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.

The disciples were stunned by this revelation! They, like most of us, were raised to think that “movin’ on up” is the aim of life, that riches are the key to freedom, and that freedom is “being able to do or have whatever I want.” If riches are not the mark of God’s favor, and cannot buy salvation, then what real hope is there?

Matthew 19:26 Jesus looked at them intently and said, “Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.”

With all seriousness, Jesus agreed with their sense of hopelessness—“Humanly speaking, it is impossible.” But that is not the end of the story! But God... God specializes in things thought impossible. God can save the hopeless poor. God can save the hopeless rich. God saves sinners who have violated His commandments.

Matthew 19:27 Then Peter said to Him, “We’ve given up everything to follow you. What will we get?”

Peter was still in shock. He couldn’t take it all in. Jesus just described a world unlike any Peter had known, operating on principles Peter was wholly unfamiliar with. Still thinking from a human perspective, Peter asked, “What’s in it for us? What’s the good of all our sacrifices?”

Matthew 19:28 Jesus replied, “I assure you that when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon His glorious throne, you who have been My followers will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus offered Peter (and us) calm assurance of the way God’s economy works. As with many earthly investments, the greatest return depends on patience. You cannot sow a seed today and expect to reap a harvest tomorrow. The real return on investments of faith in God will come “when the world is made new and the Son of Man sits upon His glorious throne.” So you can expect some leanness in this life. Not to worry; God is watching over your investments, and insuring your profits.

And the returns are amazing! Those who are merciful today will be greeted with abundant mercy THEN. Followers today become rulers and leaders THEN. Givers today receive much—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—THEN.

Matthew 19:29 And everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for My sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.

No one else may notice or care (some may even chide you for it), but God knows what you have sacrificed to follow Him. He keeps records, and He will balance the books. And I love the way that HE balances accounts: a hundredfold!

Whatever you have given up—whether you had it or only hoped for it—His return on your investment will be a hundred times as valuable. PLUS, you will inherit eternal life. That means you will enjoy your reward forever and ever in the loving presence of our Father, and the Lamb/Lion, and the Spirit of God, and the millions of angels, and the people of God from every generation.

Matthew 19:30 *But many who are the greatest now will be least important then, and those who seem least important now will be the greatest then.*

Jesus' final word on the subject is this: when He balances the books, things will look much differently—those who seem the least important now (the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, the neglected, the ignored, the abused, the persecuted, the obscure, the unknown) will be “the greatest” THEN. They will be recognized. They will be appreciated. They will be honored. They will be celebrated. They will be His.

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Do you see yourself in this story? How do you see yourself?

Do you depend on things you have, or things you want to have, to provide what only God can actually give you?

Have you been looking for loopholes to work around your unresolved guilt for the things you have done, or failed to do?

Are you ready to sacrifice your false hopes and follow Jesus instead?