

How to Obtain Eternal Life

Scripture: Matthew 19:16–22

Code: 2343

INTRODUCTION

During a flight I took some time ago, a young man sitting next to me introduced himself and said, "Sir, you wouldn't know how I could have a relationship with Jesus Christ, would you?" Now that sort of incident doesn't happen often! I was reading my Bible, which prompted him to ask the question. He seemed ready and eager to be saved. I said, "You simply believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him as your Savior." He said, "I'd like to do that." So we prayed together. I was excited about what happened but was later unsuccessful in my attempts to follow up his commitment. I have since discovered that he has no continuing interest in the things of Christ, as far as I can tell.

Some of you who have shared the gospel of Christ with others have experienced those occasions where someone you led to Christ never shows change in their life. If you've been struggling with why that happens, then I think you'll find the answer in this lesson. I don't think I fully understood why that happened until I understood Matthew 19:16-22. We could say this passage is an illustration of another truth clearly articulated in Luke 14:33. The Lord said, "Whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." That is a straightforward truth. Salvation is not necessarily for people who pray a prayer or think they need Jesus Christ; it is for people who forsake everything. There must be willingness to abandon everything for salvation to be genuine.

Let's look at the text: "Behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." Jesus gave the man a test: he had to choose between his possessions and Jesus Christ. Because he was unwilling to forsake all, he never could be a disciple of Christ.

A. The Purpose of Evangelism

In Matthew 19:16 the young man wanted to know how he could obtain eternal life. The phrase "eternal life" is used about fifty times in Scripture. The heart of all evangelism is to get people to seek and then receive eternal life. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Most of our work in evangelism is to get people to the point that the young man of Matthew 19 had

already reached. Many of us think that when we get someone to say, "What do I need to do to inherit eternal life?" all you have to do is say, "Believe, sign the card, raise your hand, walk the aisle." When the young man asked Jesus the right question, he didn't need to be prompted to respond to the gospel; he was already interested--just like the young man I encountered on the plane. The Lord was asked the same question on several occasions in the New Testament (e.g., John 6:28).

B. The Methods of Evangelism

The young man was one of the hottest evangelistic prospects in the gospel of Matthew. He was ready. But amazingly, he went away without ever receiving eternal life. The reason is simple: he was not willing to forsake everything.

1. Of Jesus

Jesus set up an insurmountable barrier for the man. Instead of getting him to make a decision, Jesus stopped him and made it impossible for him to get saved. Now what kind of evangelism is that? Jesus would have flunked the evangelism seminar! He didn't know how to sign the guy up. He missed out on a hot prospect. You certainly don't want to lose someone like him!

2. Of contemporary evangelism

Today there exists many contemporary unbiblical modes of evangelism. Our present-day mass evangelism, with its decision statistics and its aisle-walking emphasis, is leading all kinds of people into the delusion that they're saved when they're not. That's why we must go to Matthew 19:16-22 for its important instruction.

Let's ask a question similar to that of the young man's: How does one obtain eternal life? I think you'll see why this young man never did obtain it.

I. KNOW WHAT YOU WANT (v. 16)

The man came to Jesus wanting to obtain eternal life. He knew what he wanted, and that's where anyone has to start. You've got to know what it is you seek before you can seek it. This man wanted eternal life because he knew he didn't have it.

A. What the Ruler Had

Matthew tells us the man was young (v. 20) and rich (v. 22). Luke tells us in Luke 18:18 that he was a ruler (Gk., *arche*). I believe he was probably a ruler of a synagogue (cf. Matt. 9:18, Luke 8:41), which was extremely rare for a young man. As a Jewish religious leader, he would probably have been devout, honest (in terms of his relationship to Judaism), wealthy, prominent, and influential. He had everything in terms of his culture and religious environment. I think that's why Matthew said, "And, behold" in verse 16. That exclamation could be translated in our vernacular as, "Can you believe this?" It was amazing that a man of his stature would come to Jesus and admit he didn't have eternal life.

B. What the Ruler Lacked

The man had not found the reality that could put his soul to rest. He lacked a confident, permanent peace, joy, and hope. He came to Jesus on the grounds of felt need. There was restlessness and anxiety in his heart. There was a sense of unfulfillment. And he knew what was missing--eternal life. But how did he know?

1. Eternal life defined

The Jews understood the concept of eternal life. Since life is the ability to respond to the environment, eternal life is the ability to respond to the divine environment--forever. We respond to the life of God. When we're saved, we enter into the heavenlies (Eph. 1:3). Our citizenship takes on an unending divine character. We come alive to God. Eternal life is more a quality of existence than a quantity of existence. I become sensitive to God; I can respond to Him. Before I was saved, I was dead in sin--totally unresponsive to the divine environment. When I became a Christian, I became capable of responding to the divine environment.

2. Eternal life desired

The young man knew he did not have the ability to respond fully to the divine environment. He wasn't sensing God's love, rest, peace, hope, and joy--the things that give security of belonging to God. He knew he didn't possess the divine life. He knew he didn't have the life of God in his soul. He knew he didn't walk with God or commune with Him. He had gone beyond the Pharisees, who were content with their own musings and prayers to themselves. He knew he was missing out on a quality of life. I hope we will understand that eternal life is not just a length of life but being alive to God.

Older and Older

The idea that eternal life is a length of life is given a different perspective in the Greek myth about Aurora, the goddess of the dawn. She fell in love with Tithonus, a mortal youth. She didn't want him to die, so she went to Zeus, the head of the Greek gods. She asked that Tithonus never die, and Zeus granted her request. But Aurora forgot to ask that he would stay forever young. So Tithonus lived forever, but he became older and older until life was a horrible punishment. That's not eternal life in the biblical sense. Eternal life is the process of unending communion with the living God.

The rich young ruler knew what he wanted. When we preach or evangelize, our efforts need to be aimed at getting people to understand that they should want eternal life.

II. HAVE A DEEP-FELT NEED (v. 16)

A. The Lack of Desperation

There are people who know they don't have eternal life but they don't feel any need for it. They know they're not alive to God, and they don't care to be. They know they don't sense the divine dimension or have security in the life to come, but they really aren't interested. They're not desperate enough to want what they don't have. The young man was. He knew what he wanted and felt deeply the need for it.

B. The Urgency of Desperation

There is an urgency in the young man's question, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" (v. 16). After claiming he had kept all the commandments Jesus told him he should keep, the man said, "What lack I yet?" (v. 20). I sense frustration, unfulfillment, and anxiety in that question. His life had been one great effort at being religious, but there was something missing.

This man was a great prospect. He knew he didn't have eternal life. He wanted it badly because he had an emptiness in his life. Certainly he had lived an exemplary life. He had avoided external sins. He was moral and religious. He had conformed to the standards of his religion. He was a leader in the eyes of the people. Yet he was unsatisfied because he knew he lacked eternal life.

III. SEEK DILIGENTLY (v. 16)

Jesus waited for the man to come to Him. How can we know the young man was a diligent seeker? All Matthew 9:16 says is "one came." But the parallel passage in Mark 10:17 says, "There came one running." There is urgency in his approach. There was frustration in his heart. He was a religious man with integrity. I believe he wanted the peace and joy that come with knowing God. Those elements were missing inside him.

A. The Ruler's Self-Centered Attitude

There is one thing about this man that must be pointed out: he was self-centered. He came to Jesus to satisfy the need of his heart. That's not a wrong motive, just an incomplete one.

B. The Ruler's Humble Approach

Mark 10:17 indicates that the Lord was walking down a road, and no doubt a crowd had gathered around Him. The young man ran into that crowd. If he indeed was a ruler of the synagogue, they surely knew him, yet he wasn't embarrassed by his public confession of his lack of eternal life. That would have been an extraordinary confession from a person of his stature.

Mark adds that the man got down on his knees before Jesus. That was a position of humility. He was a man of great integrity, who was serious, motivated, and anxious. He wanted eternal life so badly, and sought it so diligently, that he didn't mind losing face with all the people who already thought he was a spiritual giant.

Now you would think that was a great opportunity for him to become saved. He was ready for

salvation. It would be great to have someone like him saved. After all, we need rich and influential Christians. He seemed to be a can't-miss convert.

IV. COME TO THE RIGHT SOURCE (v. 16)

A. The Counterfeits of Satan

There are many people looking for eternal life, but they're looking in the wrong place. Satan has counterfeit religions all over the face of the earth so people would chase the wrong thing. They won't find eternal life there, but many people diligently seek it there. However, this man came to the right source.

B. The Cornerstone of Christ

First John 5:11 says, "This is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Verse 20 says Jesus Christ "is the true God, and eternal life." Jesus is not just the source of eternal life; He is eternal life itself.

C. The Conclusion of the Ruler

1. About the morality of Christ

The young man had probably heard of the power of Jesus. No doubt he had heard of His teaching because he said to Him, "Good Master [Gk., didaskale, `teacher']." He acknowledges Jesus as a teacher of divine truth. Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18 indicate that he called Jesus "good." (That word was added in the King James version in Matthew, but it wasn't included in the original manuscripts.) There are two Greek words for good. Kalos refers to what is good in form, or good on the outside. The word used in Mark and Luke is agathos, which means "good on the inside," "good morally," or "good in essence." He acknowledged Jesus as a morally good person. He knew Jesus taught divine truth, and perhaps knew the secret of obtaining eternal life.

2. About the deity of Christ

I don't think the man thought Jesus was God. I don't even think he particularly thought of Him as the Messiah because he referred to Him as a morally good teacher. I do believe he was so struck with the power of Jesus' teaching and the power of His life that he thought He knew the secret of eternal life and how he might get it.

Although the man didn't know who Jesus was in the fullest sense, he certainly came to the right source. Acts 4:12 says, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

V. ASK THE RIGHT QUESTION (v. 16)

Many people have discredited the man for asking, "What good thing shall I do?" thinking he's asking a works-oriented question. Certainly he was works-oriented--he was raised in the Pharisaic system of tradition. He was trained to think that you did religious things to gain divine favor. But I still think his question was a fair one. There's nothing in the text to indicate he was emphasizing one specific work. The fact is, you do have to do something to get eternal life: you have to believe in Christ. Your will has to be involved. There has to be a response. He didn't say, "How can I be more religious?" "How can I be more moral?" or "How can I get more self-respect?" He said, "I want eternal life. What do I do to get it?" It was not a question aimed at trying to trap Jesus. He was not trying to offer his self-righteousness as a solution to gain eternal life; he simply asked an honest question.

The man's question is reminiscent of the one the people asked Jesus in John 6:28: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Now that was a works-oriented question. Jesus responded, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him who he hath sent" (v. 29). We must act in faith, activating our will to trust in Christ. The man also asked, "What good thing?" (emphasis added). He knew he had to do something genuinely good.

VI. CONFESS YOUR SINFULNESS (vv. 17-20)

Jesus' answer is amazing. A contemporary evangelical might say, "Just believe. Jesus died for you and rose again. If you believe that, pray and ask Jesus into your heart. Confess Him as your Savior and you'll be saved." But Jesus didn't do that at all. He put up a wall in front of the man and drew him to a sudden stop.

A. The Lord's Command (vv. 17-19)

1. The requirement for salvation (v. 17)

"He said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

Jesus was saying, "Why are you asking Me what good thing you have to do? Do you think I've got some secret no one else knows about? There's none good but God, and you know what He said. So if you want life, then keep the commandments. You know what they are; you don't need to ask Me." The man knew the good things that were written in the law of God; he just needed to go do them. God alone is good. It is in His goodness that He has revealed His will. The man knew the revelation of God and the law of God. Jesus didn't add anything to it, so all the man had to do was keep it all.

a) An incomplete understanding

There was something missing in the man's approach. He came to Jesus seeking salvation based on his felt need. He was experiencing anxiety and frustration, and he wanted to experience joy, love, peace, and hope. Yet that is not a good enough reason to come to Christ. It isn't wrong; it's just incomplete. If we offer people happiness, joy, and peace, we'll have a great response. All we would need to do is find all those who are psychologically incomplete. If we can offer people the panaceas to their anxieties through Jesus, they'll take Him right away. But that is not a complete understanding

of salvation.

b) An insensitive perspective

Jesus told the man that the one thing he hadn't done was something he already knew to do, and that was to keep all God had revealed to do in His Word. He needed to keep the commandments." You say, "No one can do that." That's right. Jesus told him to keep the commandments so he might realize that he couldn't do it. The man's problem was his sin. It hadn't even been mentioned. He had no sense of offending a holy God. His desire for eternal life was wrapped up in his own anxieties and needs. He had no thought for the affront that his life had been to an infinitely holy God. That realization is necessary in understanding the truth of salvation.

c) An imperative confrontation

The one good thing Jesus told the man he had to do was keep the law of God. There was nothing Jesus could add. God is good and has revealed His good will, which is His law and which must be kept. Could you be saved if you kept them? Yes, but you can't keep them. The young man had to be confronted with the fact that he had violated God.

(1) Necessary confession

You cannot bring people to Jesus Christ simply on the basis of psychological needs and anxieties, or the lack of peace, hope, joy, or happiness. They must understand that salvation is for people who want to turn away from the things of this life and turn to God. It is for those who see they have lived in violation and rebellion against holy God. They have to want to turn around, confess their sin, and affirm their commitment to live for His glory. All the young man felt was a personal need. He felt anxiety. And he felt there was something lacking in his life. But that is not enough.

Our Lord shifted the focus from the young man to God. He tried to show the young man that the real problem in his life was what he was doing to offend holy God. When He said, "Keep the commandments," He held up the man's life against the divine standard so he might see that he came up short.

As I look back on the time I spent talking to the young man on the plane, I realize that I took him at face value. I led him to Christ for his psychological needs without making him understand that he needed to receive Christ to deal with his sin. When you share the gospel with others, make sure they understand the full nature of their sinfulness--that it violates the holy law of God. All evangelism must take the imperfect sinner and place him up against the perfect law of God so he can see his deficiency. That's an essential element. Evangelism that deals only with men's needs, feelings, and problems lacks true balance. That is why churches are jammed full of people who aren't really saved because they sought and gained psychological affirmation and not transactional redemption. Why do you think Paul spent the first three chapters in Romans affirming the sinfulness of man before he ever got to the subject of salvation? Because man's sin is the issue.

(2) Necessary remorse

The rich young ruler had no sense of offending God. He had no remorse. I believe remorse needs to precede salvation (cf. Matt. 5:4). A man must manifest the attitudes that Christ presents in the Beatitudes. He needs to beg God for forgiveness. He needs a sense of meekness. He needs to manifest a mournful heart that is overwhelmed by his sin. But the ruler didn't have that. He wanted his psychological needs met, period. I don't see his remorse over his sin at all in this passage. I don't see him saddened that he's offended God. And I don't see him even aware of his sin. You must not approach people on the basis that Christ will meet their psychological needs.

This may sound like heresy, but did you know that God does not have a wonderful plan for your life? Unless you consider eternal torment a wonderful plan. He has a horrible plan for those who don't know Christ. When we approach people, perhaps we ought to say, "Did you know that God loves you and has a horrible plan for your life?" We must approach the problem of sin. The Old Testament says, "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). A good, holy, and pure God cannot tolerate evil. So Jesus affirms what must always be affirmed-- there is a divine law that must be kept.

If you violate that law, you're under the judgment of God.

Christ set up a barrier for the young man by explaining that his reasons for wanting eternal life were incomplete. He had to see himself as living in violation of holy God, and be willing to change.

2. The recitation of the commands (vv. 18-19)

The young man responded to Jesus' command by saying, "Which?" He wanted to know which laws he needed to keep. So the Lord gave him five of the last of the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, honor thy father and thy mother" (vv. 18-19). Then He adds, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself", which is from the book of Leviticus (19:18). The Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first four deal with man's relationship to God, the second six deal with man's relationship to man. Jesus gives the young man the second group, which are easier to keep, relatively speaking. Certainly they're all impossible to keep, but the second group is less impossible. You know you haven't loved God the way you should and that you haven't always been totally honest before Him, but at least you might say, "I never killed anyone. I never stole from anyone. I never committed adultery with anyone. I never lied to anyone. And I've always tried to honor my father and mother." So Christ gives the young man the benefit of the doubt and gives him the easier group of the impossible. Then He adds one command at the end just to make it more difficult, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (v. 19). Jesus put the man's life against the Ten Commandments, including Leviticus 19:18 so he might understand he was violating God's law. Sin against the law of God is the issue in salvation, not psychological need or religious desire.

You can't preach grace until you preach law because no one can understand what grace means unless he understands what the law requires. No one can understand mercy unless he understands guilt. You cannot preach a gospel of grace unless you've preached a message of law. And that's what Jesus did with the young man--He bound him to the commandments of God. He wanted the man to admit he had fallen short of the divine standard. Jesus wanted him to understand he needed to get right with a holy God and not just have his psychological needs met.

B. The Ruler's Response (v. 20)

1. His perception of the law (v. 20a)

The response of the young man is incredible: "All these things have I kept from my youth up."

a) Externalizing the law

Maybe the rich young ruler never murdered anyone, committed adultery, stole anything, or lied. Perhaps he thought he honored his father and his mother. He probably did those things based on his external concept of righteous behavior. But when Jesus confronted him with an internal command such as loving his neighbor as himself, he was only deceiving himself when he said he kept them all. Now we know he's not telling the truth, so he has at least violated the command of not bearing false witness. But the majority of Jews had so externalized the law that they never dealt with the heart.

b) Internalizing the law

In Matthew 5:21-37 Jesus internalized the law with statements like these: "I know you don't think you murder, but when you hate someone, you commit murder in your heart. I know you don't think you commit adultery, but when you look on a woman with lust, you've committed adultery in your heart. When you divorce your wives without biblical grounds, you commit adultery as well. And I know you say you don't lie, but you lie through the phony oaths you make." Jesus confronted the people throughout Matthew 5. They might have looked good on the outside, but on the inside they were full

of evil. The Ten Commandments are external behavior patterns that indicate right attitudes. It isn't enough to avoid killing someone; you also shouldn't hate the person. It isn't enough to avoid committing adultery; you shouldn't even want to do it. The young man didn't understand the internal character of God's law; he only understood the external requirements. On the outside he believed he had kept all the commands.

What is amazing is that the man made his confession of righteousness in the presence of all the people. He must have believed they would affirm his righteousness. And that was his problem. He had no sense of having violated God at all. Jesus couldn't take him on those terms--He had to open him up to his sin. Walter Chantry in his *Today's Gospel: Authentic or Synthetic?* cites the following: "When you see that men have been wounded by the law, then it is time to pour in the balm of Gospel oil. It is the sharp needle of the law that makes way for the scarlet thread of the Gospel. You have to wound them before you can sew them up" ([Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1970], p. 43).

The young man didn't think he had a problem with sin. With that attitude he couldn't be saved. He didn't understand the meaning of salvation--that a sinner comes to God and asks for forgiveness. If you don't think you've sinned, you can't be saved.

The man diligently sought eternal life, so when he asked the right question Jesus confronted him with his sin, but he wouldn't confess it. Confession of sin and repentance are essential in salvation. Our Lord illustrates that for us here. The young man missed the point of God's law. He had externalized it, failing to understand that it was only an indication of how God wanted the heart to be.

2. His problem with self-righteousness (v. 20b)

At the end of Matthew 19:20 the young man said, "What lack I yet?" In his mind he had tried to keep the commandments, and was convinced he did. That is the way self-righteous religion works. It is self-deceiving. The man believed he was righteous. He believed he had kept the law. That's why he couldn't figure out what he still needed to do. He had no idea he had fallen short of God's law.

Mark 10:21 says, "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him." The man was sincere and genuine, and Jesus loved him. He is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord was about to die for the sins of that man and He longed for the salvation of his soul. Nevertheless Jesus still wouldn't take him on his terms. The rich young ruler needed to understand his utter sinfulness.

There must be confession and repentance to obtain eternal life. They are a work of the Holy Spirit, not some pre-salvation human work. We are dependent on the Spirit of God for the realization that we have offended a holy God. Jesus wouldn't take the man without his confessing his sin and understanding that he must turn from it.

VII. SUBMIT TO THE LORD (vv. 21-22)

A. The Lord's Priority (v. 21)

Jesus went one step further for the man. In verse 21 He said, "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." The man claimed he loved his neighbor as himself, so Jesus told him to give everything he had to his neighbor as proof of his love. Jesus gave him a pre-salvation test. Jesus is saying in effect, "Are you going to do what I want you to do? Who runs your life? Do you or do I?" So He gives him a command. I believe true salvation includes a submission to obey the Lord.

1. The priority of obedience

Now I don't believe a person who comes to Christ has a full understanding of all that submission to the Lordship of Christ may mean. But I do believe the Lord wants him to be willing to confess and submit. Then Christ will unfold the fullness of what those things mean.

Jesus confronted the man's sin of covetousness. It was a sin of indulgence and materialism. He was indifferent to people who were poor and in need. So Jesus gave him the ultimate test: Would he obey His Lordship?

Do you have to give away everything you own to be a Christian? No. The Lord didn't ask that of others. But do you have to be willing to do whatever the Lord asks of you? Yes. And what He asks depends on whom He's asking. In this case, the Lord isolated the main issue in the young man's life. Jesus takes us to the principle in Luke 14:33: "Whosoever he is of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my disciple." So Jesus asks the man, "Are you willing to do what I tell you? I'm asking you to get rid of everything you own!" He knew what was most important to the man. The most important thing for others might be a girl, a career, or a certain sin they want to indulge in. But for this man it was his money and possessions. And the Lord wanted him to be willing to give them up.

The willingness to give up what you have reminds me of the story of a slave and his master. One day the master said, "How can I have what you have?" The slave said, "Put on your white suit and come down here in the mud and work with us slaves." The master said, "I'll never do it. Why do I have to do that to be a Christian?" The slave said, "I'm just telling you that you have to do it." The master came back several times asking the same thing and receiving the same answer. Finally the master said, "I'm willing to do it because I want what you have." And the slave said, "Good, you don't have to do it. You just have to be willing to do it." Jesus exposed the nerve of the young man's existence. He was telling him, "Unless I become the number-one priority in your life, there will be no salvation for you."

2. The price of salvation

Salvation demands two things: Acknowledging your offense to God and leaving your present priorities and following Christ's commands, even if that should cost you what is dearest to you? Salvation is a commitment to leave sin and follow Jesus Christ--at all costs. If you're not willing to be saved on those terms, Jesus won't take you.

The faith that will not save offers men some psychological relief from their anxiety, but does not require a turning from sin and an affirmation of the lordship of Christ. In Matthew 13:44-46 are two parables--the parable of the hidden treasure and the parable of the pearl of great price. I believe both refer to the salvation that's offered in the Kingdom. One man sold everything he had to buy the field to get the treasure; the other sold everything he had to buy the pearl. What they wanted cost everything they had. To come to Jesus Christ means you accept Him as the supreme Lord of your life. He becomes your first priority. I don't think people understand the full implication of the lordship of Christ when they are first saved, but I do think salvation involves a commitment to it. That's why Romans 10:9 says, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (emphasis added). There's a price for salvation--it costs you all you possess.

B. The Ruler's Priority (v. 22)

The man was given a test because he was holding on to all he possessed. What was his reaction? Matthew 9:22 says, "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." Why did he go away? Because his possessions were more important to him than Christ. He couldn't receive salvation on those terms.

1. An honest reaction

Why does Matthew indicate that the man went away sorrowful? Because there was some honesty in his heart. He really did want eternal life; he just wasn't willing to pay the price.

2. A happy reception

There is an example from Scripture of a man who had the opposite reaction. Luke 19:1-6 says, "Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man, named Zaccheus, who was the chief among the tax collectors; and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus, who he was, and could not because of the crowd; for he was little of stature. And he ran ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him; for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully." Why? Because he was a seeker, too. Tax collectors don't usually lose their dignity by climbing into trees to watch parades go by, but he did because he was a true seeker.

Verses 7-8 record what happened as a result of Christ's visit: "When they saw it, they all murmured, saying that he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." He knew he had been doing wrong all the time, and that he needed to get his life right. He realized he had to return four-hundred percent on all he had extorted from the poor. That certainly is opposite the attitude of the young ruler. Jesus said, "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham" (v. 9). Zaccheus became a true Jew. Why did salvation come to him? Because he could only think of what a sinner he was. He wanted to give back all the things he took unjustly, plus half of all he had. Therefore Jesus said, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (v. 10).

The story of the young man in Matthew 19 is a sad one. He wasn't willing to make the commitment that Zaccheus did. The Lord showed him he was a sinner by measuring him up against the law of God, but he refused to see his sin. The Lord gave him a command, and asked him to follow, but he wouldn't do either. He could not receive salvation because he wasn't willing to turn from his sin and affirm the lordship of Jesus Christ in his life. I repeat what Matthew says in 19:22, "He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions." He came for eternal life and left without it.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is the truth articulated in Luke 14:33?

2. Why did the young man in Matthew 19:16-22 go away without receiving eternal life?
3. What is wrong with much of contemporary evangelism?
4. Why was the young ruler seeking eternal life?
5. Describe some of the characteristics of the young ruler.
6. Define eternal life.
7. How do we know that the the young ruler diligently sought eternal life (Mark 10:17)?
8. Why was the young ruler's motive incomplete?
9. In what way did the young ruler acknowledge Jesus as "good"?
10. In Matthew 19:16 the ruler asked Jesus, "What good thing shall I do?" Explain why that was a fair question to ask.
11. What did Jesus remind the young man that he needed to do to enter into eternal life (Matt. 19:17)?
12. What did Jesus have to confront the young man about?
13. When you share the gospel with others, what is it that you should make sure they understand?
14. No one can understand what _____ means unless he understands what _____ requires?
15. Explain the young man's perception of keeping God's law?
16. How did Jesus define what keeping God's law means (Matt. 5:21-37)?
17. What is characteristic of self-righteous religions?
18. The young ruler claimed that he loved his neighbor as himself. What did Jesus ask him to do that proved he didn't (Matt. 19:21)?
19. What sin of the ruler's did Jesus confront? What did Jesus want him to do?
20. What kind of faith will not save a man?
21. Explain how Zaccheus' response to Jesus was different from that of the young ruler (Luke 19:1-

10).

Pondering the Principles

1. Look up the following verses: John 10:27-28, 17:3; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 5:8-9; and 1 John 5:11-13, 20. What does each say about how we obtain eternal life? Which verses indicate that possessing eternal life is related to knowing Jesus Christ? What are the benefits of possessing eternal life? How does one know for sure that he has eternal life?
2. Read Matthew 5--7. As you read, record what you believe your level of growth is in regard to each area of godly living that Christ discusses. Be honest in your evaluation. After your evaluation is complete, you ought to be ready to kneel before God and thank Him for the grace He has bestowed on you through Christ. Take this time to draw near to God as you confess your sinfulness. Be humble in your approach and allow God to exalt you (James 4:8, 10).
3. Based on this study, what changes do you need to make in your presentation of the gospel? What aspects of your presentation were affirmed by this lesson? As you evangelize the lost, remember to emphasize the reasons they are lost and their need to confess Christ as Lord.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).