

# Matthew 19: 16-30

By Tom Deaderick

April 12, 2026

Lesson: Eternal Life

Matthew 19: 16-22

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 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.

18 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,

19 Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Q: What's our reaction to a surprising gift?

We open gifts with high expectations, and once the gift is revealed, we hide our misgivings or disappointment.

We have been on both sides of this. We have watched people's faces as they open our gift, watching their faces as we try to determine if they like our gift.

Q: How good are you at hiding your misgivings about a gift?

<Pause for responses>

Studies show that almost 60% of people feel they have mastered hiding their true feelings about a gift. Some of the ways we hide our disappointment are

- Avoiding eye contact
- Forcing a fake smile
- Over-talking how much we like the gift.

Interestingly though, gift givers correctly detect negative feelings about 75% of the time, so even though we learn to mask our disappointment, people are usually able to see it.

The rich young ruler asked for a gift from Jesus, and he had high expectations for it, but when he opened it, he was very disappointed and everyone could see it and knew why.

## Relearning what we learn

God's spiritual guidance is often a **reversal** of what we've learned in our physical interactions. The lessons we learn as children, that guide our interactions with others, aren't as helpful as we strive toward the Kingdom of Heaven.

So many of Jesus' lessons are a realignment of the lessons we've learned as children, and the guidelines that work on earth.

Here are some examples of lessons we learn that don't hold up.

**If you're nice people will be nice back to you.** Generally, but not always true, and often people take advantage of us.

**Don't talk to strangers.** Essential safety rule for children, but as adults, almost every meaningful opportunity (new job, friendship, romance, business deal, etc.) begins by talking to strangers.

**Clean your plate.** As adults, this can lead to overeating.

**If you work hard, you'll succeed.** Hard work doesn't guarantee success, and some people do better with less effort.

**Tattling is bad.** Holding people accountable is a good thing.

**Everything should be fair.** Parents try to keep everything fair between each child. As adults we learn this is not always going to happen.

**Bad things only happen to bad people.** The people listening to Jesus, believed that God blessed those who were doing the right things with greater material wealth. This is why they were so shocked by the incident with the rich young ruler. They thought God had blessed him with great material success. It was common for them to see success as a sign of God's blessings.

The rich young ruler came expecting to walk away with a gift. He expected Jesus to praise him, but just like when Peter thinking that he would be praised for forgiving people seven times instead of three and James and John's mother who thought her sons should be seated by Jesus' side in the kingdom, Jesus surprised him.

We'll look at Jesus' surprise gift but first let's discuss verses 16 and 17.

16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

17 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.

The rich young ruler is trying to flatter Jesus in a way that an earthly leader would just accept and move on. It's superficial and meaningless. Just the way someone would address an earthly leader, but Jesus turns the scalpel in deeper.

He could be challenging the young ruler's understanding of what "good" really means, or he might be asking if he understands that Jesus IS God. It's clearly lost on the young ruler though. He's intent on getting the gift he clearly expects and won't be distracted by thinking along a deeper line.

So, Jesus gives him His gift, and if the young ruler had stopped to consider Jesus' question, perhaps he would have responded differently. When you know what **God** wants you to do, you know it is more important to do it.

When we're seeking praise or guidance, when we're doing anything that involves God, we must think more deeply, or we too risk disappointment.

Q: Have you ever met someone that you'd like to engage in a meaningful way, to coach them through some behavior that is causing them trouble, or maybe trying to share salvation with them, but you can't seem to get them off of social media, or shows like American Idol or sports or politics?

It's frustrating, isn't it? You feel discouraged and eventually you might give up and talk where they are rather than driving down into what you think will help them the most.

Jesus does what we do. He moves on and meets the young ruler in a more superficial discussion.

"Keep the commandments" Jesus tells him.

18 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,**

19 **Honour thy father and thy mother:** and, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**

20 The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?

21 Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.

22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

Jesus didn't share all the commandments did he?

Q: Which commandments (Exodus 20:2-17) did Jesus not mention?

- Thou shalt have no other gods before me (1<sup>st</sup>)
- Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image (2<sup>nd</sup>)
- Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain (3<sup>rd</sup>)
- Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy (4<sup>th</sup>)
- Thou shalt not covet (10<sup>th</sup>).

The commandments that Jesus focused on are those that relate to our relationships with others. He didn't go into the relationship with God because the young ruler was failing at a much more superficial level. There was no reason to consider the deeper guidance of how we relate to God, the young ruler was stuck at the superficial set of rules that he thought he was following well. Maybe that's us too sometimes.

In a way, the young ruler's failing could almost be summarized by the human relationship commandment that he, Jesus, left out which was "thou shalt not covet". The young ruler essentially coveted everything. His possessions **were** his life.

Q: How many of us have sold everything that we have to give to the poor?

Do we have to? Is this required of us? Why not?

2 Corinthians 9:7

7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

2 Corinthians 8:12-15 (NASB)

2 For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted **according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.**

13 **For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:**

14 But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:

15 As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.

Jesus doesn't want us to give up everything. The young ruler's possessions were in his way, if ours aren't then that's not what Jesus would say to us. We obviously need to have our eye on our own barriers to following Him better, but He didn't ask all people to give everything to the poor.

Q: Before we move on, here's something to think about. This interaction between the rich young ruler and Jesus was a crucial turning point for him. It was something he likely would have remembered forever, just as we remember thousands of years later.

But how often have we done the same thing in a less public way?

How often have we understood what God wanted us to do, and instead we just stayed at the superficial level?

I really should do this, I know God wants me to, but right now, I need to get this done. Our important interactions with the Lord don't get written down. They aren't recorded or remembered. But our missed opportunities do matter. We are saved, and we hold onto that great blessing unlike the rich young ruler, but what are we still missing?

Matthew 19: 23-26

23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

25 When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

26 But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

The disciples watched Jesus turn the rich young ruler's whole world upside down. He came expecting a gift, to be praised for his righteousness, and left humbled and realizing that he was far from the Kingdom of Heaven, and that he was as likely to turn away from it as to take the next step toward it.

And now Jesus did the same thing to the disciples. Everything they thought they knew about the world gets turned over. The story of Job captures the way they believed God

rewarded people. When someone had God's favor, they received rewards, and so they thought that Job had surely displeased God for such horrible things to happen to him.

Job 4: 7-9

7 Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? or where were the righteous cut off?

8 Even as I have seen, they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same.

9 By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed.

Their beliefs were simple and straightforward. If you are innocent God rewards you and you get rich, and if you were wicked God punished you. Joel Osteen is basically still teaching this today. People call it a "prosperity gospel" and believe that positive words and generous giving (especially to the ministry) produces health, wealth, and success. Any kind of suffering suggests hidden issues that God is punishing. Those beliefs are just like the ones of Job's wrong-thinking friends.

Jesus turned that upside down and said that neither rich people or poor people could get to Heaven without God's grace – all of those apparent blessings meant nothing. In fact, a wealth of possessions just gives you more to dig out of to reach the Lord.

Matthew 19: 27-30

27 Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.

30 But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

And Peter, no different than any of us, wants to bring the discussion back to what will happen to us.

Jesus again describes the Kingdom of Heaven as the reverse of our Earthly experience. The people with hearts that put Jesus before all the gifts He gives us on Earth, will be first in the Kingdom.

This lesson shows us the way that our life here on Earth is very different from our life to come. All that we value today will have a lower value for us in Heaven, and the people who are elevated in Heaven are those focused on Heaven now.

Our task in the week ahead is to try seeing the world in reverse, like Jesus. Look for what is Holy and worthy, which is often hidden by what is shiny and chased after by everyone else.