

THE DANGER OF RICHES

MATHEW 19:23–26

Introduction

The words “then Jesus said” connect this passage to the experience of the rich young ruler. Jesus took the rich young ruler’s rejection and *warned* all men about the dangers of wealth. Wealth is fraught with dangers and pitfalls...

- for the man who is seeking to be rich
- for the man who is already rich

The dangers are many, and they are entangling and enslaving — so much so that Christ made the shocking statement that it was extremely difficult for a rich man to be saved.

The words are strong; the idea is shocking. However, Christ loves and cares for all men including the rich, so He had to be truthful. It is extremely difficult for a rich man to enter heaven. The dangers that face the rich are real and terrible, so the warning must be real and truthful.

- I. The fact: wealth pulls a person from the Kingdom (v. 23).
- II. The great difficulty illustrated: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom (v. 24).
- III. The shock: who is saved if wealth is not God’s blessing and a blessing of righteousness (v. 25)?
- IV. The only hope (v. 26).

I. Mathew 19:23 Wealth Pulls a Person Away from the Kingdom

Wealth pulls a person away from the Kingdom of Heaven. It is difficult for a rich person to enter heaven. Christ made this statement because of the things that *pulled* the rich young ruler away. Wealth does pull a person away from heaven. There is a lure, an attraction, a force, a power, a pull that reaches out to draw us when we look at or possess wealth. There are pulls so forceful that they will enslave and doom any rich man who fails to turn and embrace God.

1. *Wealth creates the big “I”* (see vv.16, 20). The wealthy are usually esteemed, honoured and envied. Wealth brings comfort, possessions, position, power and recognition. It boosts *ego* and makes a person self-sufficient and independent in this world. As a result, there is a tendency for the rich to feel independent and self-sufficient, to live as though they need nothing; and in such an atmosphere and world of thought, God is forgotten. A person forgets that there are things that money cannot buy and events from which money cannot save. Peace, love, joy — all that really matters within the spirit of man — can never be bought. Neither can money save a person from trouble, disaster, disease, accident or death — the trials that are sure to come upon all.
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2. *Wealth tends to make a person hoard* (see v. 21). The Bible lays down the principle for handling money for all men, even for the poor:

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Mat 19:19; 22:39 *'Honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'*

The world reels in desperate need. People are starving, sick, homeless, unclothed and suffering by the millions; and teeming millions are spiritually lost and without God in this world and doomed to die without ever knowing Him. When any of us sit still and objectively look at the world in its desperate plight, we ask: “How in this world can any man hoard and not help — even to the last available penny? Why would any man keep more than what he needs for himself and his family?”

As God looks at the rich, He is bound to ask the same questions. In fact, His questions are bound to be more pointed and forceful. This is exactly what Christ said to the rich young ruler:

Mat 19:21 *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.”*

3. *Riches tend to make a man selfish.* For some unexplainable reason, the more we get, the more we want. When we taste the things of this world and become comfortable, we tend to fear losing our possessions. We struggle to keep what we have and to get more. True, many are willing to make contributions — but only a certain amount, an amount that will not lower their overall estate, or standing, or level of comfort and possessions. There are few who give all they are and have to Christ in order to meet the needs of the world.

As Christ said, “It is difficult, very difficult for the rich [meaning those who have anything in comparison with most of the world] to enter heaven.” If we do not have compassion and take care of our brothers (fellow-man) when they are in desperate need, how can we expect God to have compassion and take care of us when we face the desperate need for heaven? It is foolish for us to think that a loving and just God will meet our need for life when we would not meet the need of our fellow man for life. The rich (all of us who have anything in comparison with the rest of the world) have the means to help and to reach the world with the gospel if they just would.

4. *Wealth attaches a person to the world* (see v. 22). Wealth enables a person to buy things that...
- make him comfortable
 - expand his experience
 - stimulate his flesh
 - please his taste
 - challenge his mental pursuit
 - stretch his self-image
 - stir his ego

If a man centres his life upon the things of the world, his attention is on the world and not on God. He tends to become wrapped up in securing more and in protecting what he has. Too often, he gives little if any time and thought to heavenly matters. Wealth and the things it can buy can and usually do consume the rich.

MATHEW 19:23 HARD (DUSKOLOS)

The word means barely or with great difficulty. It is difficult, very difficult for a rich man to enter heaven. Why? In one simple sentence, it is difficult for a rich man to give all that he has to help the needy — to give all that has been so pleasing, so comfortable, so ego boosting, and so rewarding in possessions and position and self-esteem. □

MATHEW 19:23 RICH

Who are the rich? This question desperately needs to be asked of every individual in light of the great and desperate needs of the world. Every one of us needs to compare what we have with what the vast majority of the world has. The rich are persons who have anything to put back beyond meeting the needs of their own family (and by needs is meant *real* needs). This is exactly what Christ and the Bible say time and again (see also Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4; Acts 4:34-35).

In a summary statement, who are the rich? The rich are any of us who have anything beyond what we need. What Christ demands is that we give all that we *are and have* to meet the needs of those in such desperate need, holding back nothing. This is often the great complaint against Christians, that we just do not believe, not to the point that we are willing to follow the sacrificial example of Christ. The evidence of our unbelief is seen in Christ's insistence that we give all we have to feed the starving and to meet the desperate needs of the world, and yet we do not do it. Gandhi, the great leader of India's independence, is said to have never embraced Christianity for this very reason. How many others have rejected Christ because of our hypocrisy?

Mat 19:21 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."

Mat 19:29 "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life."

Mat 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Mat 22:39 "And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

Luke 12:31-34 "But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give

you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Luke 19:8 *But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”*

John 13:35 *“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

John. 15:10 *“If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.”*

Rom 12:9 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

1 Cor 10:33 *Even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

2 Cor 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

1 Th 3:12 *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

Heb 13:5 *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* □

MATHEW 19:23–24 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

The Kingdom of Heaven evidently means the same thing as the Kingdom of God, eternal life and salvation. The Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God are interchanged when Jesus says, “it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 19:23) or “Kingdom of God” (Mt. 19:24). Eternal life (Mt. 19:26) and salvation (Mt. 19:25) belong to the very same concept. Eternity and salvation, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven, is the very subject being discussed in Mt. 19:16-30. Having eternal life, being saved or entering into the Kingdom of God or of Heaven is more difficult for a rich man than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.

The Kingdom of Heaven and of God is revealed in four different stages throughout history.

1. There is the spiritual kingdom that is at hand; it is present right now (Mt. 4:17; 12:28).
- a. The present kingdom refers to *God's rule and reign and authority in the lives of believers.*

Eph 1:18-23 *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.*

Phil 2:5-11 *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Col 1:13 *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.*

- b. The present kingdom is offered to the world and to men in the person of Jesus Christ.
- c. The present kingdom must be received as a little child.

Mark 10:14,15 *When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."*

- d. The present kingdom is experienced only by the new birth.

John 3:3 *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."*

- e. The present kingdom is entered now and must be received now.

Mat 21:31 *“Which of the two did what his father wanted?” “The first,” they answered. Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.”*

Mark 10:15 *“I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”*

- f. The present kingdom is a spiritual, life-changing blessing.

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

- g. The present kingdom is to be the first thing sought by believers.

Mat 6:33 *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

2. There is the professing kingdom that is also in this present age. It refers to the people who profess Christianity in every generation. It pictures the imperfect state of the Kingdom of Heaven or professing Christianity, what professing Christianity is like between Christ’s first coming and His return. This imperfect state is what is called “the secrets of the kingdom of heaven” (Mt. 13:1-52, esp. 11)

Mat 13:24-25 *Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away.”*

3. There is the millennial kingdom that is future. It is the actual rule of Christ or the government of Christ that is to come to this earth for a thousand years.

- a. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom predicted by Daniel.

Dan 2:44 *“In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.”*

Dan 7:18, 22, 27 *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever - yes, for ever and ever, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.*

- b. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom promised to David.

2 Sam 7:12, 16 *“When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”*

Psa 89:3-4 *You said, “I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, ‘I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.’”*

Zec 12:8 *On that day the Lord will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the Lord going before them.*

- c. The millennial kingdom is the kingdom pictured by John.

Rev 20: 4-6 *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

4. There is the perfect kingdom of the new heaven and earth that is future.

- a. The eternal kingdom is the rule and reign of God in a perfect universe for all eternity.

John 14:1-3 *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

1 Cor 15:24 *Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.*

2 Pet 3:10-13 *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*

Rev 21:1 *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

- b. The eternal kingdom is the perfect state of being for the believer in the future.

1 Cor 15:50 *I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

Rev 21:4-5 *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

- c. The eternal kingdom is an actual place into which believers are to enter sometime in the future.

Mat 8:11 *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*

- d. The eternal kingdom is a gift of God that will be given in the future.

Luke 12:32 *“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”* □

II. **Mathew 19:24** *Extreme Difficulty of the Rich to Enter the Kingdom*

It is extremely difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. It is so difficult that Jesus says, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

There have been various interpretations of *camel* and *needle* in an attempt to soften the words of Jesus. For example, some have said that the “needle” was a small gate in the wall surrounding Jerusalem, a small gate which sat right beside the large gate. It is thought that the large gate was closed at night to protect the city from marauders and enemies, and the small gate was used by the traveling public. The small gate is said to have been called “the Needle’s Eye” because it was so small that it was difficult for even a single person to pass through.

Others have said that the Greek word Christ used was *kamilos* (a ship’s rope or cable) not *kamelos* (camel). Note: the only difference between the two words is that the letter *i* is an *e* in the word for *camel* (*kamelos*).

Three things need to be noted about these interpretations.

1. There is no doubt that Jesus means a literal *needle*. He as much as says so in v. 26, “With man this is impossible.” What He does is use a proverbial saying *for an impossibility*. Most countries have proverbs that express the impossibility of some

things. The camel was the largest animal among the Jews, so Christ either used a well-known proverb among the Jews or else created one. There is also this point, when Christ chose to speak in parables, He chose the most common and ordinary thing to express His meaning.

2. Attempts to soften the Lord's point are just that: attempts to soften. But nothing can be softened with v. 26, "With man this is impossible." No man, not even the rich man himself, can save a rich man. The danger of riches is very real and terrible. Wealth entangles and enslaves a man so much that it is extremely difficult for a rich man to let go and give his wealth to help the desperate needs of the world. He just cannot accept the fact that he is to "work so that he may have to give to others" (Eph 4:28). If a man is rich, it is difficult not to live in personal luxury and to build large estates. Heavy and fancy meals, full and fashionable wardrobes, a fine and large house, recognition and attention, position and power — so much is so difficult to let go. It is the ego that refuses to let go.
3. It is just as difficult for the softening interpretations to be performed as it is for the literal interpretation. How does a camel's trying to get through a gate made only for a man soften anything? It would be impossible. And how does threading a needle with a ship's cable soften anything? Again, it is impossible.

Thought 1. In the illustration given by Christ, there are some comparisons between a camel and a rich man.

- 1) A camel is *too big* to go through the eye of a needle; a rich man is too big to go through the gate of heaven.

1 Tim 6:17 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

- 2) A camel *never thinks* about going through the eye of a needle; a rich man seldom, if ever, thinks about going into heaven.

Luke 12:19-20 *And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'"*

Prov 18:11 *The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.*

Deu 8:13-14 *And when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

- 3) A camel was *not made* to go through the eye of a needle; a man was not made for wealth, not made to be possessed and enslaved by the *things* and *possessions* of this world.

Mark 4:19 “But the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”

1 Tim 6:9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction.

4) A camel works for its master; a man is to work for his Master (God).

Mat 6:24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”

Col 3:22-24 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

III. **Mathew 19:25 Wealth and Salvation**

The disciples were shocked, thoroughly dismayed. Christ was saying something diametrically opposed to what they and everyone else had always thought. They had been taught (as have succeeding generations, even the church)...

- that prosperity (wealth, comfort and things) is God’s blessing
- that a person receives and has because God is blessing him
- that prosperity is the reward of righteousness and obedience
- that God blesses a person with the things of this earth if they are righteous and obedient

However, Christ was saying the very opposite: that a prosperous person would most likely never enter heaven; that prosperity posed such a dangerous threat to a person that his eternal doom was almost assured. The disciples knew that God would never put a person in such a precarious and dangerous position. They knew that Christ was attacking the world’s most cherished and ardent belief: be good (righteous) and you will be blessed by God (and the thought of blessing is always of material blessing. See note, Eph 1:3.)

They were shocked, thoroughly dismayed: Who then could be saved? The vast majority of people were threatening their own eternal destiny. They were dooming themselves. Since prosperity is not the reward (sign) for righteousness, and the rich are barred from heaven, that means that the poor, too, are barred; for they are spending most of their time dreaming and seeking prosperity!

The idea that prosperity is the reward for righteousness, that God blesses a person with the things of this earth if they are righteous and obedient, is so prevalent a view that a comment is needed at this point.

1. God's concern is spiritual blessings, not material blessings. God promises a man the necessities of life (food, clothing, shelter) if he seeks God first (Mt. 6:33; see Mt. 6:25-34). God can, if He chooses, bless any of us with whatever and however much He wishes for special purposes, for the purposes of having in order "to share with those in need." But just because a man is prosperous does not mean the man is righteous, and just because a person is righteous does not mean that he is going to be blessed materially. Righteousness and prosperity have nothing to do with each other. In fact, "It is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven."
2. Wealth is seldom a good thing. As Christ taught in this passage, wealth is fraught with dangers that make it extremely difficult for the rich to enter heaven. Nevertheless, the whole world, rich and poor alike, puts its primary attention upon securing more and more.
3. Wealth is secured by man himself, by his own energy and effort. Man secures wealth by dreaming how to make it (a vision, perspective) and having the initiative to make it (acting and timing). A man may trust God to help him secure wealth, but a man may have nothing to do with God and secure wealth on his own. There is a sense in which a man's strength and mind are from God, but that has nothing to do with a personal or active relationship with God. Most rich men control their own lives and go about securing their treasure on this earth *without God* (Mt. 6:21).

On the other hand, a man may trust God to bless him so that he may help others, and God may choose to bless him. But God's choosing to bless him is for the purpose of helping others, not to hoard and live above what is needed (extravagantly and sumptuously). In fact what Christ teaches is that the rich are to *live just as sacrificially as the poor*. (See *Hard*, Mt. 19:23; *Rich*, Mt. 19:23; Mk. 12:42. See Lk. 21:1-4.)

Thought 1. Something is usually forgotten: man was not made for things (money, wealth, possessions), but things were made for man. Yet man allows himself to become enslaved to things, ever lusting after more and more.

Wealth (money, possessions, things) is only a commodity — a means, a tool — to help man carry out his purpose and service upon earth. At least, that is what wealth is supposed to be. But most men become the tool and the commodity of money. Few men know why God put them on earth.

Psa 118:9 *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes.*

Isa 2:22 *Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils. Of what account is he?*

Jer 17:5 *This is what the LORD says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord."*

IV. *Mathew 19:26 The Only Hope for the Rich*

The only hope for the rich man — God.

1. A rich man must turn away from men. No man can save a rich man nor any other man for that matter.
 - a. No man has the strength or know-how to break the power of *seeking things* that hold sway over a rich man. The natural urge within man is to seek more and more comfort and ease and possessions. No man has the power to break that *natural urge*. The entanglements are too pleasing and enslaving,
 - b. No man can recreate the soul of a man, change it so that he seeks “things above” and sets his “mind on things above, not on earthly things” (Col 3:1-2). No philosophy, no psychology, no medicine, no education, no politics, no social movement can change the soul of a man.

Mat 19:23, 26 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”...Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

2. A rich man must turn to God and His power. God is the only hope for a rich man. Only God can break a rich man’s enslavement to this earth — only God can convert and change, turn and save the rich man from the danger and doom of wealth.

How? Very simply. The words of Christ to the rich young ruler tell the rich what to do: “...go, sell your possessions, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, then come follow me” (Mt. 19:21).

This is a hard saying, a difficult thing for any of us to do — so difficult that we try to escape from its stringent demand, softening it and explaining it away. *But it is what Christ said. The disciples understood it perfectly* (vv. 25-27).

In very practical terms, to receive eternal life, we must *give all we are and have*. Naturally, this is more difficult for the rich, for he has “great wealth” (v. 22).

There are four practical steps that will help a rich man be saved.

1. He must listen and heed immediately the inner voice, the pricking of conscience to give his life and possessions to God. He must turn immediately to God and never turn away.
2. He must study God’s Word daily for direction and talk to and trust God to keep his heart free from the lure and deceptions of possessions.
3. He must use his wealth to help the desperate needs of others. He must *realize, know and acknowledge* that the vast majority of the world is hungry, hurting and needing help — desperately so — and that God expects him to use all he has to meet those needs. He must not hoard and live extravagantly in the midst of so much need.

4. He must develop a strong desire for heaven, knowing that his sojourn on earth is ever so short, as brief as the lily of the field.

Luke 1:37 “For nothing is impossible with God.”

Job 42:2 “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.”

1 Tim 6:17-19 *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.*

1 Cor 3:11-15 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

Heb 11:24-26 *By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ■*

MATHEW 19:26 THE RICH

Some rich persons did turn to Christ. They serve as excellent examples for the rich to follow in turning to God (also see Lk. 8:2-3).

=> James and John (Mk. 1:20; see note, Mk. 10:36-37).

=> Mathew (see note and *Tax Collector*; Mt. 9:9-13).

=> Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:1-10).

=> Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57).

=> Nicodemus (Jn. 20:39; see 3:1f. He may or may not have been saved.)

=> Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)*

=> Manan, a foster brother of Herod, who was probably wealthy (Acts 13:1).

=> Some women who supported Jesus (see notes, Lk. 8:2-3). □

THE REWARD FOR BELIEVERS

MATHEW 19:27–30

Introduction

Peter's question is often misunderstood. Peter was not being mercenary; he needed assurance. He wanted to make sure that he and the other disciples were *really saved*. Anyone would need assurance after what Jesus had just said: "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" (Mat 19:21).

Few sell everything and give it all away (v. 21), and few, whether rich or poor, control their dreams and urges to have more (see note, Mark 10:25). The disciples, as all honest men, knew this. They also knew the extreme demands Christ was making to be a true follower of Christ. They, unlike so many of us in our attempts to soften His words, understood exactly what He was saying. The extremity of His words was shocking. They could not see how anyone could be saved, and the answer Christ gave to their question about salvation said nothing to give them personal assurance: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (v. 26).

The disciples sensed a deep need for assurance. Had they done enough and given up enough? They thought so and were almost sure they had, but had they?

Somewhat meekly Peter said, "Lord, we have left everything to follow you! We have surrendered all to you. What then will there be for us? Shall we receive eternal life?" Christ used Peter's question to teach a wonderful truth. They and all who followed Him could rest assured — they would be enormously rewarded.

Note the Lord's assuring words: "I tell you the truth, that you will also sit on twelve thrones....And everyone who has left [all]...will inherit eternal life" (vv. 28-29).

- I. The two essentials for reward (v. 27).
- II. The apostle's reward: will reign and rule with Christ (v. 28).
- III. The believer's reward: will receive great benefits (v. 29).
- IV. The believer's judgment: a shocking surprise — execution of perfect justice (v. 30).

I. *Mathew 19:27 The Two Essentials for Reward*

There are two essentials for reward.

1. A person must leave or forsake all. What is meant by this? Peter and some of the other disciples had families, and they readily met the needs of their families (Mat 8:14). Therefore, *leaving or forsaking all* does not mean deserting and shirking our day-to-day responsibilities to our families. What *leaving all* means is to renounce and to relinquish all — to give up all unreservedly. It means that a person takes care of his family, yes; but beyond that, he uses what he has to meet the needs of a desperate
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world. It means that a person serves and puts Christ before all, including family and friends. It means that a person *leaves behind all sinful behaviour* such as dirty habits, evil associations, crooked ways, off coloured jokes and curse words. It means that we allow nothing to interfere with serving Christ. It means to put *following Christ* first. When we put Him first, we discover a wonderful truth: life becomes balanced. All other things, including family, fall into their proper place; and life becomes a most enriching experience (even if a person's family rejects him).

2. A person must follow Christ (see *Cross and Discipleship*, Luke 9:23). A person who really follows Christ has no sense of regret and no desire to complain. He is truly a new creation: "the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17). He is satisfied and complete (Col 2:10).

Mark 10:28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!"

Luke 5:27-28 After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him,

Luke 9:23-24 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."

Luke 14: 33 "In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple."

Luke 18:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life."

Phil 3:8 What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

Thought 1. We face two great dangers that can lower our reward.

- 1) Not leaving or forsaking all for Christ: hanging on to some things whether behaviour, habit, relationship or possession.
- 2) Super-spirituality: after forsaking all for Christ, there is always the danger of thinking that we have given up and sacrificed more than others. Several areas in particular lend themselves to spiritual pride...
 - suffering
 - financial and benevolent gifts
 - ministry and ministerial position
 - service and works
 - talents and spiritual gifts
 - being saved from the depth of sin

Thought 2. Some attempt to bargain with God. This is not to be. We are to go ahead and leave all, trusting and following Christ (2 Cor 6:17-18; 1 John 2:15-16).

II. *Mathew 19:28 Reward of Reign and Rule with Christ*

The apostles were to be wonderfully rewarded. They were to receive a great honour — the honour of ruling and reigning with Christ Himself. Note that Christ told them three things. (See *Judging, Eternal Life*, Mat 19:28.)

=> When they would reign with Him.

=> Why they would reign with Him.

=> Whom they would govern and direct in their reign.

The word *renewal* (*paliggenesia*) means recreation, restoration, renovation, new birth. The word is used one other time in the New Testament referring to the new birth of an individual (Tit 3:5). Here Christ uses the word to refer to the “restoration of everything” (Acts 3:21), a period of time in the future when He will set up the new order of things under His personal rule and reign (see Rom 8:19-23; Isa 11:6-9). That day is often called the day of redemption or referred to as the Kingdom of God. (See note and *Redemption*, Eph 1:7; *Kingdom of Heaven*, Mat 19:23-24.)

Note several things.

1. “The renewal of all things” is in the future. Christ did not say “you who have followed me in the renewal,” but “you who have followed me, in the renewal when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne.” The period of time is “when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory” — a time out in the future.
2. Christ said that the apostles would be rewarded with twelve thrones, each one governing one of the twelve tribes of Israel. When were they to govern? “In the renewal,” when the new order of things are set up under the rule and reign of Christ. But when is the new order of things to be? There are two possible answers: either during the millennial reign of Christ (see *Kingdom of Heaven*, Mat 19:23-24; *Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ*, Rev 20:4-6) or during the new heavens and earth (Rev 21:1f; see 1 Cor 15:23-28).

There are three passages in which Christ deals with the renewal as predicted here.

Mat 19:28 Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Mat 20:21, 23 “What is it you want?” he asked. She said, “Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.” Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father.”

Luke 22:28-30 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

The fulfilment of this promise seems to be the Messianic kingdom or millennial reign of Christ on earth. This seems to be the way Christ's promise to Israel will be fulfilled.

Isa 1:26 "I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City."

3. It should be noted, however, that some find great difficulty in saying there is *ever again to be a distinction between Jew and Gentile*. They say that Christ came to bring peace to all men and between all men, breaking down the wall of partition between all. They say that the great weight of Scripture is opposed to there ever again being a distinction between Jew and Gentile. This interpretation simply says that when Christ returns, that is it; the end of time will be at hand. When He returns, He sets up His eternal reign and rules forever. Therefore, the apostles' rule and reign refers to the church, that is, to spiritual Israel or to the true Israel of God (Gal 6:15-16; see Rom 2:28-29).
4. Christ said He would reward the apostles with a *particular honour*. Why? The apostles believed and followed Christ in the embryonic or beginning stage of Christianity. They clung to their belief and endured in the face of unbelievable odds. Just imagine!
 - => Imagine standing before a man who looks just like all other men, merely a man, and believing that man to really be the *Son of God*.
 - => Imagine clinging to and continuing to follow Christ when everyone else had turned away from Him (see John 6:67).
 - => Imagine following immediately upon the heels of the risen Lord and being instantly responsible for reaching the world. (No wonder God had to plan for His Spirit to infill the disciples as He did on Pentecost and to live within our bodies as He does. See notes, 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19-20.)
 - => Imagine continuing on and on, trying to be obedient and to reach more and more despite unbelievable odds and having to constantly face the harassment of their fellow citizens, the Judaizers or religionists.
 - => Imagine confronting and enduring through unbelievable threats and persecution launched from both an immoral government and a man-corrupted religion that reacted fiercely against those who differed with it.

The apostles not only were responsible for more and faced more than most of us will ever know but they also were responsible for and faced more than we can ever imagine (see 1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 11:24-28).

Thought 1. There are two renewals.

- 1) The renewal of a person's life: a rebirth, a recreation of a person's nature and life (see *New Birth*, John 3:1-15).
- 2) The renewal of the universe: a remaking of heaven and earth (Rom 8:21-23; 2 Pet 3:10-13; 21:1).

MATHEW 19:28 JUDGING (KRINO); ETERNAL LIFE

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Mathew 19:28

To judge, govern, direct; to administer affairs, supervise and oversee. The assignment of responsibility, of duties, of work to be done is being taught here. There is to be *judging*, that is, governing, giving direction and supervision and oversight throughout eternity. Christ told the apostles that they would govern and oversee Israel. Paul said that believers would direct and oversee the world and angels (1 Cor 6:2-3). All this activity and responsibility, of course, is under the direction of Christ.

For some unknown reason we so often picture *eternal life* as some dreamy sleep or semi-conscious type of existence. We think of it as some future existence that puts us j on a fluffy cloud upon which we float in an eternal state of inactivity. Why man cannot accept the simple statement of Christ that life is to be eternal is difficult to understand. Eternal life is life that goes on and on. There is, however, one basic difference: life shall be perfected — perfected in body, mind, and spirit. It is life lived in the midst of a new heavens and earth (perfected) — life lived before Christ and responsible to Christ in all that it is assigned (John 3:16; 5:24; Rom 8:19-23; 2 Pet 3:9-18; 1 John 5:11-13; Rev 21:1). □

III. *Mathew 19:29 Reward of Believers*

The apostles are not the only ones to be rewarded. Every true follower of *Christ* shall be greatly rewarded. Christ said three things about the reward of the believer in this verse.

1. The reason for the reward: the believer is to be rewarded because he has left all; he has given his supreme allegiance to Jesus Christ (see note, Mat 19:27, the two essentials for reward).

Note that the two closest things to a man are named by Christ: his immediate family and his possessions (honour and lands). These are by far the most difficult things to surrender to Christ. Hobbies, habits, pleasures, friends — all can be given up (subjected to Christ) quicker than family or possessions. Note also that Christ began and ended the list with material possessions. How enslaving they are, even more so than family for some persons!

2. The present reward: a hundred times as much. The Gospel of Mark makes it clear that Christ was speaking of present reward (Mark 10:21). No true follower of Christ has ever forsaken anyone or anything and been left alone and destitute by Christ. Christ rewards His true follower many times over. Note: the reward is both human and material.

- a. The human reward is a real and true fellowship among genuine believers. Christ knows when a follower of His has been turned against by those whom Christ loves ever so deeply. Christ knows when to send someone into the life of His own, when to meet the aching need of His follower for true friendship. He more than abundantly meets the need.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Mat 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

Rom 12:5 So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Psa 119:63 I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts.

Mal 3:16 Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name.

- b. The material reward is the meeting of necessities and whatever else God wants us to have left over so that we can help meet the needs of others.

The idea Christ was conveying is that of perfect material care and security. The very reason we seek and seek is because we are basically insecure and have a basic urge to crave more and more. Craving, greediness, fear, and insecurity are most unhealthy and destabilizing. When we forsake all, genuinely following Christ, He gives us the greatest peace and security possible: Himself and His power to provide for our necessities. We never have to worry or be anxious again (see notes, Mat 6:25-34; Luke 16:10-12. See Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:28-30; Eph 4:28.) There is much more happiness, joy, peace, security, assurance, confidence, satisfaction, completeness and fulfilment in Christ than in any amount of possessions or worldly companionship and

Mat 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

John 10:10 "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

2 Cor 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

Phil 4:19 *And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*

2 Pet 1:11 *And you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Psa 23:5 *You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. (cp. Psa 36:8)*

Psa 68:19 *Praise be to the Lord, to God our Saviour, who daily bears our burdens.*

Isa 30:23 *He will also send you rain for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows.*

Joel 2:26 *You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.*

Mal 3:10 *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

3. The future reward is eternal life (see *Eternal Life*, John 17:2-3; see *Life in Jesus Christ*, John 1:4; note and *Judgement*, Mat 19:28. See Rom 8:16-18.)

Mark 10:21 *Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

John 3:15 *That everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.*

John 3:36 *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.*

John 4:36 *Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together.*

John 5:24 *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*

John 17:3 *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

Gal 6:8 *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

Thought 1. Christ promises to reward His followers presently, reward them with an unbelievable Christian community, fellowship and security. He founded the church to fulfil this promise. The church has a high calling. Imagine, the local church and its

genuine believers are to be as close to one another as families are. The church is to provide a precious fellowship for the alienated, lonely, shy, friendless, and stranger. It is to meet the needs where families fail.

A pointed question: how many churches provide a true fellowship (see *Fellowship*, Acts 2:42)? How often does God have to turn away from local congregations to others in order to meet the needs of a disciple of His?

IV. *Mathew 19:30 The Judgment of Believers*

The Lord's words are clear. There is to be a shocking judgment of believers — the execution of perfect justice. Our judgment, human judgment, is often inaccurate. *Many persons* shall be switched around: many whom we esteemed and rewarded the highest shall be placed last, and many whom we thought weakest and lowest will be placed first. Only God knows the true heart of His servants. We judge and reward...

- by visible works
- by visible morality
- by age and seniority
- by friendliness
- by years as a Christian
- by recognition
- by ability and skill
- by esteem or influence
- by position

However, God sees into the heart of His dear followers, into the heart of every single person; and He shall straighten out the misjudgements of all our dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Christ leaves no doubt: the most humble on earth shall be elevated to be the greatest in heaven. It may be a shocking surprise, but there is to be judgment, a just realignment and positioning of believers (see *Judgement Seat of Christ*, 2 Cor 5:10; note, 1 John 3:1-2).

2 Cor 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

1 Cor 3:13-15 *His work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

Luke 1:52 *He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.*

Luke 6:25 *Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep.*

Luke 16:25 *“But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ■*