

Our Lord Blesses Children; the Account of the Rich Young Ruler

Matthew 19:13-30

Matthew 19:13-30 - *“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” ¹⁵ And He laid His hands on them and departed from there.*

¹⁶ Now behold, one came and said to Him, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” ¹⁷ So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.” ¹⁸ He said to Him, “Which ones?” Jesus said, “ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ¹⁹ ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” ²⁰ The young man said to Him, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” ²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” ²² But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

²³ Then Jesus said to His disciples, “Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ And again I say to you, 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.” ²⁵ When His disciples heard it, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” ²⁶ But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” ²⁷ Then Peter answered and said to Him, “See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?” ²⁸ So Jesus said to them, “Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹ And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. ³⁰ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Background Notes

The events covered in the second half of Matthew 19 took place in Perea, an area on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The Lord had left the Galilee area and was on His way to Jerusalem, where He would be crucified. As He traveled south from Galilee, He crossed the Jordan River and traveled through Perea before returning to the west side of the Jordan near Jericho. While the Lord was in Perea, some children were brought to the Lord and He blessed them, and a wealthy young man came to the Lord and asked about obtaining eternal life.

When the children were brought to Him, the Lord said, *“Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven”* (v14). Some people have interpreted this Scripture as a basis for baptizing infants or toddlers, but that’s **bad hermeneutics** - a **bad** interpretation! Young children can be baptized, but only when they have trusted in Christ as their Savior, and become Christians. No one is born a Christian, and no one becomes a Christian by being baptized (at any age)! We must **become** Christians by putting our faith and trust in the salvation accomplished by our Lord at the cross. However, I believe that this Scripture can be used in support of the comforting doctrine that children who die in infancy go to heaven, and are part of the company of God’s elect.

Then Lord said, *“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”* (v24). There have been various interpretations of “the eye of the needle” – including a narrow mountain pass and a small door within the large city gate. However, most likely the Lord had in mind the tiny “eye” of a sewing needle! The Greek word that’s used for “needle” supports this straightforward meaning. Of course the Lord was using hyperbole, or exaggeration, to emphasize how hard it is for rich people to enter into the kingdom of God. It’s not impossible, because with God **all things** are possible (v26), but it is often more difficult for wealthy people to enter the kingdom of God. Wealthy people often don’t feel a need for God because they take pleasure in their possessions and rely on their riches.

Aren’t you glad you’re not rich? If you were rich, you might be trusting in your wealth for your security - and you might never become a Christian! I know what some of you are thinking right now, “I’m already a Christian, so why can’t I be rich too?!” Well, there are pitfalls for rich Christians as well! If you doubt that statement, read 1 Timothy 6.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord tests the person who desires to be a true disciple.

We often refer to the man who questioned the Lord about eternal life in verse 16 as “the rich young ruler.” Why? When we compare Matthew 19 with the parallel accounts in Mark 10 and Luke 18, we find that the man was young, and he was rich, and he was a “ruler.” Maybe he was a member of the ruling body of the Jews, the Sanhedrin. This man had a lot going for him, just like a lot of people today.

In verse 17, when the Lord indicated in that only God is good, He was not denying that He Himself is God, or denying His deity. He was testing the man to see if he was willing to acknowledge that Jesus was more than just a good man. When the Lord listed the commandments that the man was to keep, He was not explaining a different way of salvation from the rest of the New Testament. He was testing the man to see if he was willing to admit that he was a sinner. In fact, this man who thought he was righteous had failed to keep even the very first of God’s commandments, which says, *“you shall have no other gods before Me,”* because his money and his possessions were gods in this young man’s life!

As a further test of this man's heart, and to expose his priorities, the Lord said, *"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me"* (v21). Again, the Lord wasn't teaching another way of salvation! He was exposing the young man's heart - exposing his true priorities. At this point, the man turned away from the Lord, because he was unwilling to part with his money and possessions. This rich young man's heart and priorities were fully exposed.

Suppose the Lord said to you, "So you want to follow me? Here's what I want you to do. Go sell everything that you own! Have a big garage sale, and **sell it all!** (And don't try to rip anybody off with the price, either! Give away all the money to the poor, and come back and follow Me." If the Lord asked us to do that, would we do it? It would surely expose our hearts and reveal our priorities, wouldn't it? The Lord may not test us by asking us to sell all that we have and give everything away to the poor, but you can be sure that the Lord will test the person who wants to be a **true disciple**.

2. The Lord rewards the person who proves to be a true disciple.

"Then Peter said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (v27-20).

In these verses the Lord promised His disciples that because they had sacrificed a lot to follow Him, they would be rewarded at the time of the restoration or renewal of all things - *"in the regeneration"* (v28). Here our Lord was speaking of His future earthly kingdom, known as the Millennium.

The Lord's millennial kingdom is the time when the wolf will dwell with lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat (Isaiah 11). The Lord will return to earth and set up His glorious throne, and believers will reign with Him. *"And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years"* (Revelation 20:4). Matthew 19:28 indicates that during this millennial kingdom of Christ on earth, the apostles will have a special place in the kingdom with regard to the nation of Israel.

In verse 29, the Lord didn't mean that you must forsake family responsibilities to be a committed disciple! Far from it! The Lord was talking here about giving up the pleasures and benefits of marriage and family life for the sake of the kingdom.

For example, one of my former students, for the present time at least, has given up the idea of marriage and family life in order to serve the Lord in China. The Lord promised that any disciple who gives up the normal blessings and benefits of this life in order to serve Him more effectively will be rewarded - both in this life and in the life to come!

“But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (v30). This verse indicates that, regarding rewards, there will be a lot of surprises in the millennial kingdom and in heaven! *“Many who are first will be last and the last first.”* Many Christians who appear to be first now will be last then, and the last will be first. So Christians who are well-known and up front and famous, but they’re not sacrificing much for the Lord, will not be rewarded as much, compared to many unknown believers from around the world who have sacrificed everything for the sake of Christ. The Lord will reward the person who proves to be a true disciple.

Practical Application

Bring your children to the Lord!

“Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (v13-14).

These verses are filled with lessons about children. The disciples tended to think that adults were more important (and we often tend think so, too). But if do, our priorities are mixed up. Children are very important! The Sunday school classes and youth ministry are just as important as the Sunday adult services!

Children should be encouraged to come to the Lord. Don’t hold them back! Never tell a child that he or she is “too young to be saved.” In chapter 18 we saw that adults must become like children in order to be saved - but children don’t have to become adults to be saved! Children can become believers at very young ages. Be careful not to manipulate or pressure a child into making a false profession of faith, but encourage them if they are ready to put their trust in Jesus as Savior.

Pray often for your children and your grandchildren! Margie and I pray for the salvation and Christian growth of each one of our grandchildren, and we continue to pray for their parents as well.

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