

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 19:16-30
“What Good Thing”

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Matthew 19:16-30

Verse 16

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?”

- The question that this young man asked of Jesus indicates his great misunderstanding of how one is saved. He believes that salvation is achieved or earned by good deeds. He wants Jesus to tell him what single good act will earn him the reward he seeks.

Verse 17

“Why do you ask me about what is good?” Jesus replied. “There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments.”

- Jesus attempts to deal with the basis of the man’s theological understanding before answering the man’s question.
- First, Jesus points out that there is only ONE who is good. That one is not this man, but God. Jesus wants the man to understand that goodness is only found in God and in what flows from God. It is, therefore, NOT something that we do. It is only to be found in God.
- Second, since the commands came from God, Jesus points the man to these as the definition of what is good. Jesus tells the man that what he seeks is found in obeying the commandments as God’s definition of right behavior.

Verse 18-19

“Which ones?” the man inquired. Jesus replied, “Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and your mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’”

- The man assumes that he does not need to keep all of the commands to earn eternal life but only certain ones.

- Jesus humors the man by suggesting some commandments that he might keep in order to earn his goal. Jesus is not suggesting that the man can earn eternal life. He is pointing out the method for earning eternal life that is given in the Old Testament. To earn eternal life, according to the Old Testament, one must do the impossible. He must keep all of the law perfectly.

Verse 20

“All these I have kept,” the young man said. “What do I still lack?”

- It is possible that this is nothing more than the impertinence of youth. Specifically, this young man tells Jesus that he has not committed murder, committed adultery, stolen, or lied, and that he has honored his parents and loved his neighbor. He has done everything that Jesus’ list told him he should do.
- However, the young man knows that this is not enough. He knows that he still lacks something and he wants Jesus to tell him what that is.

Verse 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.”

- Jesus now turns his attention to the man’s failure. He tells the man that to achieve his goal (This is the meaning of the word translated “perfect.” It is “teleios” meaning ending or goal.), he must go and sell his possessions and give to the poor.
- Jesus is not suggesting that this deed will bring the man eternal life. Jesus says that by doing this he will gain treasure in heaven by doing this, but Jesus does not say it will bring eternal life. What Jesus is doing is pointing to the man’s failure to keep the whole law. This young man has put his faith in his wealth, not in God. The law says, do not covet. He does. His God is not the Lord, but his wealth. Jesus is attempting to show the man that he has not kept the whole law.
- Jesus invitation, “come, follow me,” is his answer to the man’s question. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. HE is the way to eternal life.

Verse 22

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

- The young man asked what he must do to get eternal life, but he was unable to do that which was required of him to accomplish his goal.
- This fact shows us, more clearly, that the young man was too attached to his possessions. He would not surrender them, even for eternal life. As Jesus suggested, this is what stood between this man and God.
- It is important for us to understand that we are not different from this man. We are all unable to save ourselves. While we may not be overly attached to possessions, as was this young man, there is something which blocks us from getting eternal life on our own.

Verse 23

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

- Because the rich tend to trust in and be more attached to their wealth, it is hard for them to trust God alone to provide their entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 24-25

“Again I tell 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.” When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?”

- Jesus says that it is impossible for a person who is trusting his wealth to save him to enter the kingdom of Heaven. In fact, it is just as impossible for this to happen as it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.
- The disciples get the point. They understand that salvation is impossible under these circumstances.

Verse 26

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

- This is the point of the passage. If salvation was dependent on the efforts of mankind, it would be impossible. We cannot save ourselves. However, God has taken our failure into account and has provided the means of salvation in Jesus Christ. What we cannot do, he has done.

Verse 27

Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?”

- Peter has missed the point. He thinks that because he and the other disciples have done what the young man could not do, they have done what is required to get eternal life.

Verse 28

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.

- “The renewal of all things” is the time when the kingdom rule of Jesus is established and the earth is changed back to the condition in which God created it and in which it existed before the fall.
- At that time, Jesus will sit over the world as king. He says that, because the disciples have followed him and are trusting him to provide for their salvation, that they will receive eternal life and share in his rule. However, this is not because of what they did. It is because they are followers of Jesus.

Verse 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.

- The promise is that those who give up things in this life for Jesus will receive it back and much more in the kingdom of God. They will have eternal life too, but not because of what they gave up. They will have eternal life because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

Verse 30

“But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first.”

- Jesus’ point is that those who think they are very good and should thereby get eternal life will not. But those who know that they cannot save themselves and so trust Jesus to provide for their salvation will get eternal life.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *What Good Thing*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)