

Gospel of Matthew

19:23~30

Leaving Home



“Who then can be saved?!” Great question! A vitally important question, actually! It was prompted by the previous statement of Jesus on how impossibly hard it is for a wealthy person to be saved – like a camel through the eye of a needle – one of the most well-known fragments of Jesus’ teaching. It has become a rather iconic saying in our culture. We need to first answer why this statement prompted one of the disciples to ask this question – and you can literally hear the incredulity in the question – ***“Who then can be saved?”*** Why did the previous statement concerned the disciples so much? ***None*** of the 12 disciple were wealthy, as far as we know, although Jesus undoubtedly had other disciples who were not of the 12 that ***were*** wealthy. These wealthier disciples ***often*** provided for the needs of the whole group. Jesus didn’t always send His disciples to find gold coins in the mouth of a fish, or some ***other*** unlikely place. In fact, we only know of that happening once. Otherwise their needs were met the old fashioned way, with people, mostly people along the way just ***giving*** them money, clothes, food, and shelter! But, I think we need to think the way ***they*** thought. They were part of an almost feudal society, where the rich had become aristocratic dynasties that had accumulated land, money, power – and they had many servants to meet their every need AND whim. They had tenant farmers that made money for them by using their land and having to pay a large portion of their proceeds to the landowner. And with all these things they had privilege! Here is the important thing – it was thought that people’s success in material goods had a direct correlation to the favor of God since you could certainly not become wealthy without God’s blessing! So to hear Jesus say that the wealthy were greatly handicapped spiritually, was jaw-dropping for them! If the wealthy who enjoyed God’s favor could hardly be saved, then who could be saved? If the rich, who enjoyed the favor of God were in jeopardy, well, then, the poor who God had not smiled upon and blessed with material goods were ***certainly*** in jeopardy! Thus the question – if it is nearly impossible for the rich to be saved, ***“Who then can be saved?”***



That answers ***why*** the disciples asked this question – for me anyway. It does not answer the question of ***why*** it is so hard for the rich to be saved. The short answer is ***pride!*** The wealthy have always been notorious for being prideful. There is something about having a lot of money that brings the the onset of the mental disease of arrogance, and the strange and unwarranted feelings of superiority over other people – especially those that are poor or not rich. *If you have ever noticed, the poor person that wins the lottery moves away from the hood. Or who become a “star” in music, or sports, or the entertainment industry, and are suddenly making millions, inevitably begin hanging out with much wealthier people – who generally embrace them because,.. well,.. because they have a lot of money! They all inevitably move out of their lower value neighborhoods into a neighborhood with mansions and other wealthy people. Suddenly they became the biggest zucchini in the patch and they mistakenly think that makes them better than the other zucchinis. Gardeners know better!

And God reacts badly to such pretensions. He “opposes the proud”. He has given them life. Their every heartbeat depends upon Him. They think they are in control when they are not. He is. It is He who has been gracious to them – not because they are special, but simply the product of being in the right place at the right time, or benefitting from a talent He gave them, or because the conditions were right for them to become wealthy, or they got lucky, or perhaps they can work hard, or have a better sense of drive, or of grasping the intricacies of numbers and money! But **He** gave them that ability! They may have developed their gifts with hard work, but the basic ability is God-given. So they have no reason to brag, to strut, to preen, for without God giving it to them in the first place they would have nothing.



In fact, I would argue that wealth and the ability to amass more wealth is not a blessing but a curse! Jesus assessed that it made it very difficult, terribly difficult for a person to come to Jesus and be saved if they were proud! A proud heart needs nothing, or so they assume! They are god-like, and in charge, and life is good ‘cause they have made it all about themselves”. So why would they need to submit their lives to **another** God? It is easy for them to reject Jesus and continue to live in their little fantasy bubble. But as we see in this story of the rich young ruler, if a proud heart comes before God, it does not work. God and human pride are not compatible. Don’t get me wrong. It is not a conflict of big egos. It is a virtually non-existent comparison between a created being and the Creator. *On this planet, Mount Everest deserves to have a big ego. It is virtually **the** top of the world! There is only one mountain with the glory of Mount Everest and that is Mount Everest! On the other hand, the slight mound of a sandy anthill in the crack of a sidewalk does not deserve to have an ego as big as that of Mount Everest! To compare them is completely ludicrous, an absurdity of the most laughable kind! Yet, as absurd as it is, you have all these anthills thinking of themselves - imagining themselves, seeing themselves in their mind’s eye – as Mount Everest! It really is a complete and total joke! And that comparison does not even begin to capture the magnitude of the inequities between God and human beings! The one who designed the the incomprehensible complexities of the human brain, the simple yet complex structure of the eye, the same thing with the ear, (who but the most wildly creative genius could come up with those original organic designs), our neural (nerve) system, our vascular system - and on, and on it goes! Our bodies, all other living organisms (similar, or wildly different from each other) the planet with its seasons, water above ground and below, land, forest, plains, mountains, the glad **harvest**, the sun and our solar system, the seemingly infinite universe beyond! What I’m saying is that He **designed and made** our brains, eyes, or our ears - and we human beings simply **use** them! And then we think can compete with Him! Wow!

Jesus cut to the heart of the issue with the rich young ruler. He was a good man as men go, but he thought he was a cut above other humans, and he liked that. And,.. it was all His wealth, possessions, position, and status, that distinguished Him from others and gave him stature among men. But the **ONLY** thing that matters in this life is **God's** opinion of us. It is driven by both His love and sense of justice – and from **reality!** He sees us as we are – and still loves us - **Mk. 10:21!**



But that is why Jesus had to say to the man, “***Here is what you have to do. Go sell all you have, give all the proceeds away, and come invest your life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Accumulate treasure there, not here!***” And the man could not do it, and KNEW he could not do it. So He didn’t argue. He just walked away. He was very sad about it, but not sad enough to turn around and go back to Jesus and do what He said! So He continued to invest in the things of this world – His own Kingdom - not the Kingdom of God - and I cannot help but wonder how that worked for him?! I **know** it did not work very well. It NEVER does! **No one** is particularly happy and fulfilled because they are rich and powerful! That almost NEVER happens! It **certainly** becomes a problem at the end of one’s life when you come face to face with the fact that you must leave it all behind – everything you have ever worked for – gone – and the emptiness of your eternity is staring you in the face!

So the disciples are concerned. “***Who, then, can be saved?***”, one of them asks? And Jesus answers those famous words – “***With man this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible***”. Salvation does not have its origins in humanity, but in God Himself? That is why total investment in the things of God is never a losing proposition! He does what we cannot! But to be saved does require that our values switch over to the values of the Kingdom of God! We cannot hang onto the values of this world and try to **also** have the values of the Kingdom of God. They are incompatible! One must go for the other to remain, but it is like riding a picket fence to try to handle them both at the same time! One relies on self-aggrandizement and the other upon God’s aggrandizement and our own subservience! As the prophet John said. “***He must increase, and I must decrease!***”

The question Peter asks is telling. It tells us that the disciples have been thrown into a bit of a panic. I don't think they heard Jesus that God can do what He wants to do because He is God. *"So if you won't save a good rich man, what can WE expect at your hands?! We are not rich or powerful, **BUT**, we have left everything to follow you! So, really, Lord, why are we doing this?! When it comes right down to it, what's in it for us?!"*



If I didn't know better, I think that I would have been shocked that Jesus does not rebuke Peter for phrasing the question the way that he does. He actually answers him! The fact that Jesus answers the question, and the way He answers the question tells me something very important about Christianity. When I attended a Christian college almost four decades ago, I remember the kids being filled with idealism – grandiose ideas that have little or no basis in reality. Christian college kids are usually idealistic about certain interpretations of scripture or on some theologies. It is an idealistic time of life, I think, lots of passion and often a little short on wisdom. I remember that the prevailing idea among the most “spiritual” of the students was that Christianity is anti-self. We are to be self-less if we would follow Christ. We do everything we do, or do not do as Christians, purely because we seek God's glory! But, yes, I think they were right in the sense that we seek God's glory, and we deny ourselves to follow Christ – which is also true - but no where does the Bible say that we get no return!

They would argue that Jesus was our pattern. That He was selfless. But Ph'p 2 would differ in a significant way. **[Ph'p. 2:5-11]** The cross was the most selfless act imaginable, but there was great glory in it for Jesus Himself. In acting selflessly He gained the highest honor and glory in heaven! In humbling Himself He knew He would be exalted. In dying, He knew He would rise and ascend back to His exalted place Heaven!



What does He ask us to sacrifice? Serve each other in the church unity, and love – **[vs. 2-4]**! Oh NO! NOT THAT! That is so terrible! It's so... unrewarding to put others before ourselves, right?! And yet, there is promised wonderful things for those that take this seriously and serve, and love people wholeheartedly and who put Jesus first!

Look at **[Matthew 5:3-11]** and the try telling me we *don't* do this for reward. We live and breath for Jesus as our #1 love and we know it is about Him, but we also know that one day He will reward us *greatly* for our devotion and our obedience! That is just a fact – and there is nothing to be ashamed about! I think the scriptures are explicit in saying that prioritizing God and His purposes, and subverting our will for His, will greatly benefit us in the here and now, and *especially* in the future!

Vs. 28 – So Jesus answers Peter that he and the other 12 will receive their reward. They will be given a lofty position in the end. They will each have their own throne from which to judge God’s people! They will, in effect, be Kings or great Lords in their own right. Now, this they understood! It was what they had been dreaming of! When Jesus took His throne as was expected of the Messiah, they expected that Jesus would bring them along with Him. It was only right after all that they had given up to follow Him! But Jesus is speaking here of the next world, the second and final creation - when He would recreate all things on earth, and it would be so good that heaven would actually come down to join with earth! The description of the heavenly city is beyond description, as John tries to describe what we cannot imagine – things from the heavenly realms – things from another dimension that we cannot visualize because there is nothing in our experience to compare it to **[Rev. 21:10-14]**



The 12 princes of Heaven. One of the kingly duties of Kings or powerful Lords has always been to hear the disputes in their realm and to render a final decision for one side or the other! The word of such a one was final! But earthly kings, and queens for that matter, have generally been fools and thieves. So they were never known to hand down just verdicts. Most of them judged in their own self-interest, which meant that if the case did not impact the king personally in any way, there was always bribery. Large bribes would help tilt the scales of justice in one’s favor. But the 12 would not rule or judge in this way. They will judge in the interest of the God of heaven and earth, and His interest is pure justice! Now, what they will have to judge, I have no idea. I don’t think anyone does. **[1 Cor. 6:23]**. Things will be different, that is for sure. But there must be at least some conflict there, and some of it unresolvable between the principles in the dispute. And if there are judges and judgments made in heaven, there will be losers. If there are losers, there will be tears in heaven! The prevailing Christian myth about heaven is that there are no tears there. That is not what the Bible says. It says that the Lord Jesus will “*wipe away every tear*”!

Listen – heaven is not about eternal retirement, where we are absolved of all responsibility and we just sit there and while away our days sitting around, eating free food (but not gaining weight) in our heavenly mansions. No – that would never work for us. We would be bored out of our minds after a short time, much less an eternity of doing nothing! So we will live vigorous lives, interesting and fulfilling lives, complete with responsibility. The 12 disciples will be given the greatest of heavenly responsibility and they will judge all things in the interests of true justice!



But then Jesus turns to his other followers and speaks to them! When they leave everything to follow Him, He will reward them 100x over! Is that an actual figure! No – it is to indicate God’s great largess!

Now, is Jesus advising that we abandon our children, leaving them/orphaning them to go and serve Jesus in the ministry or on the mission field?! Of course not! But many have read it that way and have left their children in the care of others, relatives, boarding schools, so that they can concentrate/focus on bringing the lost to Jesus in some other part of the world. That unfortunate mentality has ruined a lot of people’s lives! The children grow up missing their missionary parents and resenting the God who took their parents away from them! Many a great pastor has literally abandoned their children, providing for their children’s physical needs, but not having any time after their busy work day at the church to spend with them – to help them grow up! It is a terrible thing that they have done to their children, and Jesus *loved* children as we have just seen in the previous story in chapter 19. So I cannot imagine that Jesus has been pleased by their unnatural lack of love and care for their own. All Jesus is saying here is that we hold the love on no **one** and no **thing** above the love we have for Him! That’s it! He comes first in all things! But in denying ourselves and putting Him first, we benefit hugely, both in this life and in the life eternal! [Matthew 6:33]