

NOON BIBLE STUDY: MATTHEW 19 (PART 2)

Matthew 19:13-15 - Let The Children Come To Me

In this short scene, Matthew shows us what (and who) the world tends to value. The disciples, perhaps thinking they were protecting Jesus' time and dignity, try to keep children away. In their minds, children were not the priority audience for a respected rabbi. They were messy, unpredictable, and—let's be honest—not always “neat” or orderly additions to a religious gathering. But Jesus flips that value system upside down. In His kingdom, the very ones others might dismiss are the ones He draws near.

He not only welcomes them and blesses them. This moment reinforces one of Jesus' recurring themes—he wants his followers to become like children. And he's teaching something new - he is showing us the type of community he is forming. His community is not reserved for those who look impressive or have it all together. Children in a community are wildcards! They don't always know they need to be politically correct or have a certain decorum. And that's the church too. The fact that children wanted to come to Jesus tells us something about his character too. He was approachable, safe, and joyful in a way that drew them in. In our own communities, we're called to reflect that same welcome—not just to children, but to anyone the world might try to keep at a distance from “good” or “godly” people.

Matthew 19:16-20 - Rich Man Questions

Matthew tells us this man is young and rich; Luke calls him a “ruler” (*archon*), possibly a synagogue leader or local official (Luke 18:18-30). Socially, this man had almost everything considered desirable in that culture: youth, resources, and respect.

When the man approaches Jesus with the question, “What good thing must I do to get eternal life?” Jesus gives what would have been a perfectly good Jewish answer: “Keep the commandments.” That's exactly what the Law taught. But the man pressed further—“Which ones?”—and Jesus responded by listing six: do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.

These are significant commands, but if we look a little closer, they all have something in common: they govern visible, relational behavior. They're the kinds of commandments others can see you keeping, and that shape your reputation in the community. Notice what's missing from Jesus' list? The commands about worshiping only God, rejecting idols, honoring His name, keeping the Sabbath, and even coveting.

This reveals that outward morality, even when genuine, is not the full measure of faithfulness to God. You can keep these rules and still have a heart far from Him. Jesus is setting the stage to address the man's heart, showing that loving God supremely is the foundation for eternal life. The man's assumption is that eternal life is earned by doing “good” or being “good”. Jesus' path will

show that entering life is about wholehearted surrender to God, not just checking off moral boxes.

Matthew 19:21-22 - The Man Walks Away

The mood certainly shifts at this moment. The man questioning Jesus is looking for an answer while at the same time perhaps looking for validation about his own life. The man is questioning who is “good”, how someone can be considered “good” and whether or not that “goodness” is enough to bring salvation. Jesus discerns that the man, though devout, is deficient. The man has probably given money to the poor as a good Israelite, but has allowed his wealth, possessions and status to define him and direct his heart.

Ultimately Jesus is saying that the way to eternal life is found by following him. And following him means we follow *him*.

The man walks away grieving because in the end he desires what he has more than eternal life. Wow. Is there anything you’d be unwilling to change, part with, surrender, address or whatever in exchange for eternal life? I’m sure we all want to give an enthusiastic “there’s nothing! I’ll follow Jesus no matter what” - but, our attachments, comfort, and security often run deeper than we realize. This story calls us to lay them before the Lord, trusting that he is better than anything we could ever give up.

Matthew 19:23-26 - Difficulty of Rich People to Enter The Kingdom of Heaven

Bible Study Note: This chapter gives us some terms which are commonly used in Christian conversation: saved, obtaining eternal life, and entering the kingdom of God/kingdom of heaven. These are synonymous terms. The “be saved” is to “obtain eternal life” which is to “enter the kingdom of God.” There is nuance to each of these terms and at times they can be used to describe different parts or stages of the Christian life, but in this context and in their most common usage, they are synonyms.

“*A camel to go through the eye of the needle*” is a metaphor to express near-impossible probability.

ESV Study Bible: “*Camels*” were the largest land animal in Palestine. “*The eye of a needle*” is the smallest opening found in the home. Jesus paints a picture of something impossible in order to illustrate that even the seemingly impossible is possible with God. There is no evidence for the popular interpretation that there was a gate in Jerusalem called “the eye of the needle,” which camels had to stoop to their knees to enter (- thus implying that camels could enter the gate/eye with a little effort”). Such an interpretation would miss the point: it is not merely difficult for the wealthy to be saved; without God’s grace it is *impossible*.

In Jesus’ day, being rich was admired and aspired to, yet Jesus warned that the very thing people longed for could stand in the way of eternal life.

This is similar to what he said during the Sermon on the Mount when he declared that “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you won’t enter the kingdom” (5:20). The norm was to view the scribes and Pharisees as “righteous” and similarly to view the rich as those blessed by God. Jesus is saying that wealth can actually more often be a burden and obstacle to discipleship to Jesus than an advantage.

This word from Jesus is seriously under-believed by the modern American church. We are unaware of how our possessions, pursuits, and desires are at odds with the way of Jesus.

Remember what Jesus taught in his parable of the sower and the seed:

Matthew 13:22 - "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the **deceitfulness** of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.

There is a deceitfulness that is related to this topic. I think that’s important to acknowledge. Deceit often looks one way but is actually another. Deceit promises one thing but actually results in another. Deceit seems like XYZ will happen but really it's much more complicated than that. When we approach our wealth and possessions we have to be mindful that we probably are not looking at things clearly, that we might not have the best/right perspective on the matter. Surely this young questioner approached Jesus thinking he was on the right path only to walk away lost.

It is only with God’s help that a rich person can be saved. God must turn the heart of the man or woman to see their wealth and resources as instruments for God’s glory. There are instances of wealthy followers of Jesus and in such cases these individuals are used by God to care for others.

Paul will write about this important topic in 1 Timothy 6

1 Timothy 6:6-11, 17-19 (NLT) - ...true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. 7 After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. 8 So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content. 9 But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. 11 But you, Timothy, are a man of God; so run from all these evil things. Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

17 Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. 18 Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. 19 By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.

If you earn \$30,000 a year in the United States, you might not feel “rich,” especially when compared to wealthier neighbors—but globally, that income places you well above the median. The worldwide median annual income is around \$9,700, which works out to roughly \$27 a day, and many in lower-income nations earn less than \$1 per hour. Even modest American incomes fall into the top 5% of earners worldwide. In addition, the average net worth per adult globally is about \$56,500—meaning that many Americans, even with modest assets, have more financial stability than the majority of the world. This perspective reminds us that wealth is relative, and that what may seem ordinary here is extraordinary in much of the world. And when we see just how wealthy we actually are in comparison to most of humanity, Jesus’ sobering words about how hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven suddenly hit much closer to home.

In this scene we learn a lot but we also see the approach and approachableness of our Lord. With the children, he is warm, welcoming, and accessible. He makes space for those the disciples thought unimportant. With the rich man, he is equally open and respectful, willing to listen and answer questions, yet unwilling to let the man settle for surface-level righteousness. He engages with him but also doesn’t chase him when the man walks away, unwilling to follow. Jesus draws the conversation toward the heart, because he knows that if he is Lord of our heart, he will be Lord of our lives.

Jesus’ welcome spans the spectrum—he embraces children with messy hands and wandering attention, and He engages the wealthy and respected with patience and truth. He invites both to come closer. His community is not reserved for those who “have it all together,” nor is it shaped around the desires of those who already hold influence or comfort. It is for those willing to come with humility, to release their grip on status, wealth, or self-importance, and to follow him with a childlike trust. That invitation still stands—for every one of us.

Jesus’ approach to people was marked by both truth and tenderness. He did not rush to condemn, nor did he shy away from hard words when they were needed. He saw the person in front of him—their dignity, their need, their story - and responded with wisdom shaped by love. Whether holding a child in His arms or looking into the eyes of a wealthy seeker, he met people where they were without compromising where he was calling them to go.

As his followers, we are called to do the same: to engage with patience, to listen before speaking, to address the heart as well as the actions, and to extend both grace and challenge. We want to be approachable - people that allow children to feel loved and seen and safe and also able to engage with the questions of a man of status. Jesus was so good at this. I pray we can be too. Ultimately the approach and approachability of Jesus can be summed up in one word: “love”.

Jesus loves the little children and the grown ups too.