**JESUS TEACHES HOW TO GET ETERNAL LIFE**

March 10, 2019

Matthew 19:16-30

Key Verse 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.’”

In this passage, there are five expressions “eternal life,” “enter life,” “treasure in heaven,” “enter the kingdom of heaven,” and “be saved.” They are used interchangeably. They mean the same thing. In today’s passage, we meet a young man who felt that he did not have eternal life, who felt that he was not saved. He was young and rich. It seems that he had everything, and yet he felt empty. Have you ever felt like this man? After having great success and getting what others around you want, you still feel something is lacking. Even after you attend many Bible studies and church meetings, and do almost everything better than your friends, you still feel something is missing. To make the matter worse, you do not know exactly what you are lacking? This sounds very sad. However, this kind of self-realization is redemptive because it helps us turn from ourselves and this world to Jesus Christ. Today Jesus teaches us that only following Jesus by giving up our worldly possessions is the way to eternal life. By giving up worldly possessions, we will gain 100 times more in his kingdom.

**First,** the young man’s agony (16). Look at verse 16. “Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” According to verse 22, he had great wealth. Jesus lived in a time of great suffering for the Israelites. Most Israelites were poverty‑stricken. Still, this young man was rich and powerful. He must have been a hardworking man; he must have founded a successful startup tech company. It seems that he got everything he ever wanted. It seems that he lacked nothing. People around him must have envied him greatly. Still, he came to Jesus and asked, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” His question tells us that even if he got everything in this world, he could not get eternal life.

Look at 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, keep the commandments.” Jesus could have argued with or corrected him saying, “Do you think you can do something good and earn eternal life? No! There is no one righteous. Eternal life is gift from God. Your theology is all wrong!” Instead, Jesus picked up the word “good” from this man’s question so that this man could think about whether he was truly good or not. We live in the relativistic world where we seek to have something good, improve ourselves to be good at something, and desire to become good persons. By the way, what is good? Who is good? Are you good? Almost everyone thinks that they are a good person. According to the Bible, the confusion of “what is good?” or “who is good?” began long ago from Genesis 3 when Adam and Eve took the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil disobeying God the Creator. Their sin was that they dethroned God and began to exercise self-autonomy: “I know what is good for me!”

This young man thought that he was good. But the Bible clearly says, “There is no one who does good, not even one” (Ro 3:12). This kind of view of man seems too pessimistic. But that is not true. Rather, this kind of view of man is realistic. What Jesus said is indeed true: “There is only One who is good.” God is the absolute standard of being good. We may say that we are good compared with others. But when we compare ourselves with God, we are not good enough. We are immature, imperfect and evil in our thoughts and actions. Man is not good because even though he intends to do something good, he ends up doing something evil. In order to obtain eternal life, we must realize that we are incorrigible sinners before God and seek God’s goodness and righteousness humbly.

In order to make him aware of his sins, Jesus told him to keep God’s commandments. Look at verses 17-19. “If you want to enter life, keep the commandments…You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,’ and ‘love your neighbor as yourself.’” Through this, the man should have realized that he was an incorrigible sinner before God. The man should have confessed of his sins and asked Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Look at verse 20. “‘All these I have kept,’ the young man said. ‘What do I still lack?’” Wow! How could he say this? Anyway, to this man’s knowledge he was sure that he had kept all these commandments. It may be true that he kept them since he was a boy. Perhaps he had also memorized and recited many parts of the scriptures. However, to him, keeping the law was only a matter of outward observance and ritualistic ceremonies. He did not grasp the idea that we have to keep the law positively from our hearts. In effect the man was saying, “I never in my life did anyone any harm.” That was true. But the real question is, “Did he really love his neighbor as himself?” Jesus could have argued with him saying, “No! You haven’t kept them all. In fact, you have violated every single one. I can prove it.” But Jesus didn’t criticize him for his prideful words. Instead he loved him like a mother even if his son was dressed in dirty clothes. Even more, Jesus could hear the hidden despair and fear, as if he were saying, “I was sure that I was a good person and I did my best to keep the commandments. What do I still lack? Why do I have no assurance of eternal life?” Even if he had youth, wealth and wisdom, even if he did keep the commandments, he still felt something was lacking. To make the matter worse, he didn’t know what other good thing he had to do. While conversing with Jesus, the man felt as if he looked at himself in a mirror and saw two persons; the first one was dressed like a prince, but the second one like a hungry beggar searching for something that was lacking in his life.

**Second,** sell your possessions and follow me (21-24). How did Jesus help him next? Look at 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.’” The man thought that he truly kept the commandments, but Jesus says, “If you want to be perfect.” In other words, this man was not perfect in keeping the commandments. What was worse, he deceived himself as if he did it perfectly. To Jesus, his problem was that he wanted to get everything for himself. He was extremely self-centered. He had no love for his neighbors. He was not interested in others. This guy thought he was obedient to God – but Jesus is bursting his bubble and showing him just how far from God he really is. We do this a lot – we don’t fall into a temptation or we do some good deed and we praise ourselves – “man, I’m good.” But it’s like giving a kid a toy camcorder and telling him that he is a film director. To God our good deeds are like dirty rags.

Jesus wanted to strip the man of his false righteousness and of the idol of his earthly wealth. Here comes Jesus’ surgically life-saving, life-entering command; “Go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.” Here “your possessions” are something you absolutely believe you earned. “I worked hard investing everything to get it. Therefore, it is mine! My money, my children, my achievement!” But the reality is that we were born naked and will go to a grave-yard empty handed. What can be mine? We are nothing but stewards for all we have now. “Your possessions” are also known as “counterfeit gods” or “idols” that offer people false promises; self-worth, security, pleasure, acceptance or approval from others, respect and love. The rich young man had believed that his wealth was his future security. He could not live without it. But Jesus was telling him to let it go, let it go and use it for others. The more he clung to his wealth and his idols, the more difficult getting eternal life becomes. Jesus was telling him not to become like a stupid monkey that was holding a banana in a trap until the hunter came to catch him. Let it go! Empty your hands of what has not given you eternal life!

Jesus tells the young man to sell his possessions and give to the poor – and I think that’s all the guy heard. Look at verse 22. “When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.” The real deal – the real core of the issue were in the last three words: “come, follow me.” That’s all Jesus wants – that is the way to eternal life. It is not through external obedience to a set of rules, it is not even through selling all our possessions. Verse 22 is one of the most disappointing verses in the Bible: “When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.” He went away sad, because he refused Jesus’ greatest offer to have eternal life by following Him. Instead he chose his wealth, which he knew couldn’t give him eternal life. He went away sad, because he knew that what Jesus said was true, but he couldn’t make that choice, that sacrifice. He went away sad, because he was cowardly and disappointed in himself again. This explains Jesus’ waring earlier, “Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Mt 7:14) This rich young man was an influential guy. Can you imagine what would happen if he becomes a Christian? He would be a prime candidate for testimony on Christian TV, or write a book. He would bring in so many people to Christ. But he left. Indeed only a few find life. What is your choice? To follow Jesus or to follow something else you know that can’t give eternal life?

**Third**, all things are possible with God (25-30). After the young man sorrow­fully scurried away. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.” (23-24) When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” (25) The reason for their astonishment was that Jesus was turning accepted Jewish standards completely upside down. Jews believed that prosperity was the sign of God’s favor, and poverty God’s curse. If a rich person who has God’s blessing couldn’t enter the kingdom of God, who can enter? Look at verse 26. “Jesus looked at them and said, ‘With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.’” Like this rich young man, it seems that all people are totally impossible to change and enter the kingdom of God. But to Jesus they are all possible to become great servants of God and to enter the kingdom of God. Man cannot change a lover of money or a selfish person. But God can change them, and raise them up as sacrificial servants of God. In fact, nobody can get eternal life with his effort or based on his own goodness. Eternal life is God’s gift to those who believe in Jesus. (Ro 6:23b) When I first started Bible study in 1987, I did not know Jesus. I still held on my dream of becoming a great mathematician. Even after studying the Bible and attending church, I felt something was missing. I thought that I was in a wrong church, and seriously considered attending other churches which looked more spiritual. But I realized that the problem was not the church, but myself. I was not following Jesus by giving up my worldly dream. When I repented of my worldly dream, by the grace of God, God changed me and helped me to follow Jesus and become a disciple of Jesus.

Look at verse 27. “Peter answered him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?’” Jesus fully understood the agony of the disciples. Peter had a good fishing business and he had a wife. Probably he had a Little Peter, too. But he left them all and followed Jesus, which the young man was not willing to do. His question was, “What is my reward?” Some say, “Christian life is a losing business.” In order to follow Jesus, we must lose many kinds of sinful habits, anything standing in the way. We may lose worldly friends. We may lose many things. But the reward far outweighs the loss. Jesus said in verses 28-29. “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. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or motheror wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” It is very interesting to see how Jesus viewed his disciples. He did not identify them as those who had left everything. He simply called them “you who have followed me.” We have a tendency to think about how much I have given up and how much I have sacrificed to serve God and others, and become sorry and bitter. But what truly matters is “following Jesus” trusting in and loving him. When we focus on following Jesus, what we have left or given up will look very small and look like garbage, or a rotting banana. At the days of renewal, we will say, “Wow! Thank Jesus! We made a right choice.” This verse plainly tells us that Christian life is not a losing business at all. When we suffer with Jesus, we will reign with Jesus. When we lose worldly friends, God will bless us with spiritual friends and family members a hundred times over. There was Stanford University experiment with children of ages 4 to 6. The children were given one marshmallow, and they were told that they could eat the marshmallow, but if they waited for 15 minutes, they could have the 2nd marshmallow. Children who were able to wait longer had better life outcomes in the end. Sometimes, we think we should eat the marshmallow in front of us right now. But Jesus promises us that if we give up one marshmallow in order to follow him, we will get not just one more, but 100 times more.

Today we learn that following Jesus is how to get eternal life. If we give up worldly possessions to follow Jesus, we will gain 100 times as much and inherit eternal life. May God help us to get rid of anything standing in the way to follow Jesus so that we may have eternal life.