

Matthew 21-09-05b

We're ready now to resume our study in Matthew chapter 19. And this is very fascinating because we don't have to be a child. We don't have to be a disciple.

We don't have to be a rich young ruler to benefit from what Jesus teaches here in these circumstances with children and with this rich young ruler, because it is all about two interwoven themes. One is the unity, the fellowship, the brotherhood of believers that is a precious thing in God's sight. What God has joined together, whether it is a marriage, whether it is a family, whether it is a fellowship, whether it is relationships of almost any kind that are centered in and benefit from and revolve around our relationship with God.

These are precious and worth cultivating and sustaining and maintaining. And secondly, to recognize that it is not by our might. It is not by our power.

It is by God's power, God's presence, in our case, God's spirit and God's word that we can live life to fruitfulness and productivity now leading to inheritance, blessing, and opportunity in the So to be receiving the kingdom, as Jesus said, to receive it as a little child and emphasis on receiving, not taking. Remember what Jesus said earlier about from the days of John the Baptist, men were trying to take the kingdom by force, take it by the way Jacob tried to get his blessing from the angel that he wrestled with until dawn. I will not let you go until you bless me.

But it is in giving up reliance on ourselves, our resources, our talents, our ingenuity, our wisdom, and looking to the wisdom and the might and the power of God that he provides to us that we enter in. So of such children is the kingdom of heaven. Good teacher.

What good things shall I do that I may have, that I may inherit eternal life. I need to do something. What can I do? Jesus says, you're looking for good in the wrong place.

You're calling me good. You, why are you even coming to me? If you're a ruler, particularly if he's a synagogue ruler, he should know already what the source of goodness is. It's God.

So if you want goodness, then look to God and his commandments, keep the commandments, guard the commandments. And the young man says, which ones? So Jesus references the ones that are horizontal in their nature, horizontal in their nature. So he doesn't quote the first one, have no other gods before me, not make under the any graven image, not take the name of the Lord in vain.

He starts with the second table of the law, which is how you treat your fellow believer. Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not bear false witness. All of these are injurious and divisive note, breaking up the unity and the cohesion of God's people.

Honor your father and your mother and love your neighbor as yourself. All of the commandments in the law are summed up in loving your neighbor as yourself, all of the horizontal commands. So Jesus gives him every single one of them.

In Mark, I think one of them says, do not defraud, which sums up the ninth and the 10th. Don't covet your neighbor's possessions and so on. Um, the young man said to him in verse 20, all these things I have kept from my youth.

What do I still lack? Interesting question. He doesn't say great. All these I've kept from my youth.

I'll see you later. Thanks for the answer. He knows there's something missing.

This is why he came. When you go to the other gospels, it says, uh, and, and Matthew for thematic reasons, leaves these details out. But Mark, uh, preserves Peter's eyewitness account of this episode.

And, uh, Luke adds details from the people that he interviewed when he wrote his gospel. But when you look at the parallel accounts, this young man, evidently Jesus left the house. And as he was leaving the young man, having heard what went on and what Jesus said about the little children, ran up to Jesus, ran up to him and fell on his knees.

So it isn't a lack of earnestness. It isn't a lack of desire. This young man ran.

And you could imagine if he's a ruler, he might think that he has some dignity and he should, you know, send a messenger or, or do something, but he's, he's willing to run to Jesus and willing to fall on his knees in Jesus presence and ask this question. So it's not a lack of sincerity. It's not a lack of desire.

And when Jesus says, keep the commands. And he says, I've done all of this since my youth. What do I still lack? He senses that there's something missing.

He knows in his heart that he's not quite there. That's why he came to Jesus asking this question. He could have just assumed like the Pharisees that his good works were going to get him in, but he doesn't.

He comes to Jesus and ask, and he says there, there must be some other good thing beyond what I've already done and have been doing. What do I still lack? Well, this gets at the heart of Jesus quoting these commands because what do those commandments imply? You can avoid injuring others. These are things that you don't do.

Don't take someone's life. Don't take someone's wife. Don't take someone's stuff.

Don't take someone's good name or someone's future by bearing false witness. Don't take from others. And he says, well, I've, I've done all of this as long as I've been alive.

And I've, I've, I've had enough substance that I probably wasn't really challenged or tempted in those areas. He's rich. He probably comes from a wealthy family and he's got influence and wealth and he doesn't need to take from someone else.

A lot of crime is motivated by perceived need. I really need that stuff. I really need that person out of my life.

I really need self-gratification of some kind. And that motivates most crime is self-gratification in one form or another. Well, he's got the substance that he doesn't have to go outside his own resources for gratification.

What do I still lack? What he lacks is the understanding of what those commands connote. It isn't enough to not take from others. If you love your neighbor, and this is why Jesus puts it last.

If you love your neighbor as yourself, you want your neighbor to be as well off as you are to share what you enjoy, which is all from God. What do you have that you did not receive? And this young man has got human power to meet his own needs and to avoid being a burden to anyone else and certainly avoid sinfully taking from others. What do I still lack? Jesus said, if you want to be perfect in the other gospels, the conversation, you get the idea that this was a longer conversation because in the, in the other gospels, it says, Jesus says one thing you lack here.

The young man asks the question there. Jesus simply points it out. You still lack one thing.

So if you want to be complete, this is not moral perfection. This is, you've got the whole set of things. Go sell what you have and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven and come follow me.

There are five imperatives in that sentence. If you want to be complete and by being complete, this is to be qualified to inherit five imperatives. Number one, go.

Number two, sell. Number three, give. Number four, come.

Number five, follow. Now this is often been referenced in terms of, you know, it is better to give than to receive, to do charity, look around and, you know, give away your substance to others. This is not about material charity.

Ultimately, nothing wrong with material charity. Most of us have chosen places where we can try to make a contribution and help those. You can't give to every charity.

Wealthy people in particular really have to be careful. I know some wealthy people and you're approached by everybody for help and many of them are worthy causes. And you really have to stop and think about where am I going to be charitable? How am I going to

be charitable? To what extent am I going to be charitable in terms of good stewardship? I cannot sell everything I have and give it to the poor because that would be abdicating my higher responsibilities to my family, to my people who depend on me and so on.

So everybody, this is kind of like if your eye offends you, pluck it out. You have to understand the spiritual truth that is being conveyed and not start strapping a phylactery between your eyes and on your hand and nail the commandments to your door as we saw in Deuteronomy 6. These things represent a deeper truth. Same thing here.

This represents a deeper truth. Why does Jesus tell this particular individual? Who else did Jesus ever tell? Sell everything you've got, give it to the poor and come follow me. He talked to thousands, tens of thousands of people.

Nicodemus came to him who is a ruler of the Pharisees and is wealthy. Zacchaeus, he went and ate dinner at Zacchaeus' house. He didn't tell Zacchaeus sell what you have and give it to the poor.

He didn't tell Nicodemus that. He didn't tell Joseph of Arimathea that. He didn't tell the centurion that who had the son or servant that was dying.

There were any number of wealthy people in Jesus' periphery. He went and ate at wealthy rulers' homes. He didn't tell any of them sell what you have and give it to the poor.

Why? He tells it to this young man because the issue is what power are you relying on? Are you coming to the kingdom and receiving the kingdom like a child or not? A child doesn't think that he earns or deserves what he gets because of his influence, his attainments, his accomplishments. When parents were bringing these little children to Jesus to lay his hands on them and bless them, they had no portfolio, they had no resume, they had no curriculum vitae that they could bring and say, well, here's why I deserve to be blessed or here's what my parents have done that make me. They come without one plea.

It is all of grace. So this young ruler is self-sufficient and figures the same kind of power and status that he has in this life. He wants it in the next and he feels like he can do something good to accomplish it.

So to him, Jesus says, if you want to be perfect, here are five things, these five commandments that he quoted up in verse 18 that are summarized as love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus gives him five imperatives that are summed up by coming and following the Lord Jesus. It says in Mark that when Jesus looked at this young man, he loved him because his and you ask yourself, that's such an odd thing to say.

Jesus looked at him and loved him. Matthew probably had Mark before him and does not

include that detail. Luke doesn't include that detail.

Only Mark. Rehearsing Peter's firsthand account says Jesus looked at him and loved him. You're so close when Jesus looks at you and sees your potential and sees that all you have to do is lean on the everlasting arms, give up reliance on self.

The spirit is willing, and I think that's why Jesus looked at him and loved him. But the flesh is weak and we become dependent on what we have. We become dependent on human structures and human provisions and human standards of what constitutes security and accomplishment.

Go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Let go of what you cannot keep so that you can lay hold of what you'll never lose. You see that this really turns on what is the young man depending on and relying on if he is willing to, as they used to say, and I quote this with some reluctance, you know, let go and let God.

But there is a sense in which we have to be careful that we're not trying to straddle the fence. Well, I'm keeping the commandments of God, but I've got the insurance policy of my wealth. I've got the insurance policy of my retirement account.

I'm relying on, you know, I've got belt and suspenders here. I'm not just going to trust God and, you know, let the rest of it go. This doesn't mean, you know, fail to plan, fail to provide, don't invest in a retirement account or plan for the future.

Part of this is looking out for those in your periphery. You don't want to be a burden to others. And, you know, if you're a provider, I'm looking at it in terms of a husband and father and so on, you want to fulfill that responsibility.

And that involves doing things in the world, working, saving, investing, planning ahead, hopefully leaving something behind when you go that sort of thing where possible. But what do we ultimately rely on? This young man ultimately is relying on his status, his position and his wealth. And if he weren't ultimately relying on them, he could give them up.

This, I think, reminds me. Well, I don't think it reminds me. I know it reminds me of Abraham climbing the mountain with his son Isaac and God saying, are you relying on this son or are you relying on me? Are you so devoted to Isaac and preserving him and nurturing him and investing your hopes and your faith in him that you've lost sight of the one who provided this miraculous son? And he's a miracle.

Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born. And God says, are you looking at the gift or are you still relying on the giver? And so he says, sacrifice him. Abraham, unlike this young man, recognizes that God is the source and Abraham raises the knife and he is ready to give up everything God has given him because he knows God is the source.

And. If he loses this son, God's just going to have to give him another one because God has promised God has said that a son from his own body is going to be his heir. And Abraham figures, I don't know how God's going to do it.

I don't know if he's going to raise Isaac from the dead. I don't know if he's going to have Sarah have another son at the age of over 100 or what. But one way or another, God is the source of my future.

God is the source of my hope. Abraham raises the knife and God has to stop him. I suspect if this young man had said, fine, I'll be back in a couple of days, I'm going to go liquidate my estate.

I'm going to do everything you've said because I know you're right. I know God is the source of good. I know that this is what the law really implies is that love is sacrificial to self and beneficial to others.

And if I need to sacrifice what I have on behalf of the poor, the poor whom God loves the Old Testament, we've seen it many times, how much God emphasizes looking out for the powerless, the widow, the orphan, the poor, the stranger, the slave. God provides for them. He looks out for them.

And those who love God are going to love the people God loves and are going to endeavor to look out for them the way God does. If this young man, I strongly suspect if he had had a different answer, if he had said, I'll be right back and had left and had liquidated his estate and started trying to give it to the poor, Jesus would have probably stopped him and said, now I know your heart. Just like God said to Abraham, you have not withheld your son, your only son for me.

And Jesus could say, God has seen your faith and your hope and your love that you've not withheld everything you have and everything you are from him. Or he might have let him go liquidate it and he would have been another disciple. All of the potential is there.

What happened to that young man and his position, his name, his estate, his goods, it's all vanished in the dust. If he had actually let go of these things and had come and followed Jesus, his name would be in scripture. He would be listed among the disciples.

He might've written some new Testament books. He clung to the temporary, the ephemeral, the superficial, the short term, what in humanized constitutes security and power instead of trusting what God says is real security and real power. Nothing wrong with having possessions, but if they become an idolatrous substitute for our dependence on God, we've got to lose it.

We've got to get rid of it. We've got to change our minds. Come follow me.

Five imperatives matching the five commandments up above that are summarized by

love your neighbor as yourself. When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, sorrowful. This is the same word that was used earlier when it talked about the weather was lowering.

The sky was lowering. Storm clouds came over his face. He was deeply troubled because it hit right at the heart of his confidence.

His security couldn't let go of those possessions. He had great possessions. Do I want great possessions now? Do I want treasure in heaven? We don't know if this young man ever changed his mind.

All we know is what Jesus has to say about it here. He went away at that point sorrowing. Did he think it over, change his mind later, or did he live the rest of his life in his sumptuous circumstances and he'll be outside the kingdom? He'll be in the darkness outside.

The last shall be first. The first shall be last. God has chosen the foolish things and the weak things of this world to confound the wise and the strong, not by might, not by power, by God's spirit, by God's power.

Jesus said in verse 23 to his disciples, assuredly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Not talking about salvation, not talking about the resurrection and entering into the eternal future. This is talking about entering the kingdom.

I think this rich young ruler is going to see the kingdom, but he's going to see it from a distance. He's going to be one of those that when Israel passes under the rod, that rod's going to come down and tap and say, you're not qualified. You're not of the childlike reliance on power of God that qualifies you for entrance.

You didn't look to God in your life. He's not going to look to you in the life to come. Sorry.

And he's going to be turned away. Many will come to me in that day. Lord, Lord, in your name, we did all of these things.

He says, I never knew you depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Whatever is not a faith is sin. Whatever is not self-sacrificial and beneficial to others, whatever does not look out for the interest of others is not love.

And love is the qualification. Love your neighbor as yourself. Hard for rich men to enter the kingdom of heaven.

Verse 24. 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. Why? Much has been said about, was there a gate called the eye of needle and camels couldn't go through it and all that.

This is much more simple than that. You would have to have some knowledge of Jerusalem for that to make sense. This is very simple.

He doesn't say a donkey. He doesn't say an ox. He doesn't say any other animal than a camel.

What did camels represent in the ancient world? The guys that brought gold and frankincense and myrrh are always represented as coming across with camels. Why? Job's wealth is represented by the number of camels among other things that he owned because camels were a sign of wealth. Only the wealthy could own camels.

As long as you hang on to that camel, you're not going to qualify. The only thing that fits through the eye of a needle is something extremely, extremely small. If you let go of the camel, have you seen these? If you let go of the camel, you can get through the eye of the needle because we are nothing.

And when we know that we are nothing, we have nothing and we accomplish nothing in our own strength. We can easily as individuals pass through the eye of a needle. But as soon as you try to hang on to something, have you seen these videos where a dog will pick up something big like a stick and then try to go through a dog door and they just keep trying and trying and the stick hits the sides of the door and he can't get through.

He doesn't want to let go of the stick, but he wants to get through the door and he can't. That's the picture of the camel and the eye of the needle. We ourselves are nothing.

But if you try to get your camel through the eye of the needle, you're never going to make it. Camel is a sign of wealth. Rich man, this rich young ruler wants to have his cake and take his cake through the eye of the needle, take his camel through the eye of the needle and get into the kingdom.

So the disciples say, who then can be saved? What is their standard? What is their cultural understanding of who is favored by God? Well, if you're blind, either you or your parents sinned. Remember that in John nine, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind, bad circumstances, you must be a sinner. Wealth, prominence, affluence, status, you must be favored by God.

So if the favored by God who owned camels can't get into the kingdom, who's going to be delivered in? And again, this is not, they're not thinking salvation from the lake of fire, that that's an unknown concept. Who then can be, who's going to get in, who's going to qualify? Jesus looked at them and said to them, here's the key. Now with men, this is impossible.

We're talking about power, manpower. It's not possible. If you're going to try to use manpower, nobody's getting into the kingdom with men.

It's impossible with God. All things are possible. If you look to the power of God, it's possible.

Whose power are you relying on? Whose wisdom are you relying on? Whose Christ has been made to us righteousness and peace and sanctification. He is our peace. He is our power.

He is our qualification. And when we rest in him, when we rely on him, when we are looking to the power of God and not our own, that is the means of entering. When we recognize that we are nothing, we sail right through the eye of a needle.

Anything we try to hang onto that represents human attainment, it's as big as a camel, never going to get through. It's clear. It's lucid.

It's easily understood. A little child comes with nothing, sail right through. Someone who believes that they have, that they are, that they do, never make it.

Well, Peter is going to ask a question. We have left all and followed you. What shall we have? Great question.

Great answer. It ties directly into these themes that we've seen. Our application from this portion is to remember whether it is forgiveness of our sins.

Sometimes our sins are many. Our failures are colossal. We hurt ourselves.

We hurt others. We hurt the cause of Christ. We err and come short again and again.

Theodore Roosevelt said, credit belongs to a man who picks himself up after that happens. Credit actually belongs in the spiritual realm to those of us who look to God to pick us up, to clean us up, to stand us on our feet and to get us moving toward that straight gate at the end of the narrow road that leads to life. Few find it because few are possessed of the humility to rely entirely on the power and the provision of God and to let go of anything that belongs to us.

This requires faith because sometimes we are stepping out into the unknown and we say, I have not got provision. I don't have the wherewithal. I don't have the ability.

I don't have the knowledge. If I trust God for this, I don't know how he's going to address this situation, solve this problem, meet this challenge. I have no idea.

I just know that any of my available options are relying on me, relying on those around me. And if I am going to trust God many times, we're Abraham on the mountain with the knife in our hand. I don't know how God's going to, if I divest myself of this son at God's command, and it's a clear command of God, I'm not making things up.

God clearly said, offer your son Isaac as a whole burnt offering. Here I go. I don't know.

I know that this is God's command. I know that this is God's way, but to me, it looks like the path to disaster. I know whom I have believed.

I am persuaded that he is able to handle it. He's going to take care of it. I can't see it.

I don't understand it, but I know what I'm doing is right. I know that I cannot partake of sin. I cannot involve myself in evil.

I can't be sucked into human schemes and human devices and human provisions and human wisdom. But if I trust God, I have no idea how this is going to turn out. Well, faith is the substance of what is hoped for and the evidence of things that are not seen.

And without faith, it's impossible to please God. We come to God, we believe in him, and we believe that his power will handle all of our needs. He will reward those who diligently seek him.

We prayerfully, biblically, hopefully in fellowship with other believers who speak the truth to us in love, arrive at decisions. We set our priorities. We pursue our goals.

We think the thoughts of God and leave it up to him. We have to be able to leave everything behind that would keep us from getting through the eye of the needle. And that's pretty much everything.

You can't even keep a pocket knife and get through the eye of a needle. That's the message of this passage. Well, we'll pick up here with Peter's question in verse 27 next time, but we'll close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the clarity and the beauty with which the Lord Jesus speaks to us and in the hands of your Holy Spirit, leads and guides us in the way that we should go. We pray that as we reflect on it, as we apply what we've learned to our individual circumstances, that we will see clearly the right path.

We will not lead ourselves astray or lead others astray, but that the light of life will shine in our souls and qualify us for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.