

Difficult Passages in the NT The Rich Young Ruler (Matthew 19:16-30)

Matt. 19:16 ¶ And someone came to Him and said, “Teacher, **what good thing shall I do** that I may **obtain eternal life**?”

Matt. 19:17 And He said to him, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only* One who is good; but if you wish **to enter into life**, **keep the commandments.**”

Matt. 19:18 *Then* he *said* to Him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER; YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY; YOU SHALL NOT STEAL; YOU SHALL NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS;

Matt. 19:19 HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER; and YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”

Matt. 19:20 The young man *said* to Him, “All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?”

Matt. 19:21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be complete, **go and sell your possessions and give to the poor**, and you will **have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me.”

Matt. 19:22 But when the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.

Matt. 19:23 ¶ And Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man **to enter [into] the kingdom of heaven.**

Matt. 19:24 “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.**”

Matt. 19:25 When the disciples heard *this*, they were very astonished and said, “Then who can be **saved**?”

Matt. 19:26 And looking at *them* Jesus said to them, “With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Matt. 19:27 ¶ Then Peter said to Him, “Behold, we **have left everything and followed You**; what then will there be for us?”

Matt. 19:28 And Jesus said to them, “Truly I say to you, that you who **have followed Me**, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His

glorious throne, you also **shall sit upon twelve thrones**, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Matt. 19:29 “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name’s sake, **will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life.**”

Matt. 19:30 “But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first.

Some important questions:

1. What does “entering the kingdom of heaven/God” and being “saved” mean in Matthew 19? Does this mean salvation from hell?

2. Why does “entering the kingdom of heaven” require obedience, giving to the poor and following Jesus?

3. What does Jesus promise to Peter and His disciples exactly? What does it mean to “inherit eternal life”?

4. Why does Jesus say, “There is One who is good?”

This passage is important to understand because if “saved,” “entering into the kingdom of heaven” or “inheriting eternal life” refer to salvation from spiritual death or hell, then obedience and following Jesus would be necessary to live with Jesus forever. This would contradict that the believer’s new birth and justification by faith are God’s gracious gift.

John 5:24 ¶ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and **believes** Him who sent Me, **has eternal life**, and **does not come into judgment**, but has passed out of death into life.

Sometimes it is argued that Jesus is doing “pre-evangelism.” The argument is that this rich man is not born again and needs to believe in Jesus as Savior. So, Jesus is leading the rich man to recognize his sinfulness and

need to believe in Jesus for eternal life. But nowhere do we read that this man does not believe in Jesus. Jesus never invites the man to believe in Him. And Jesus makes a joke about how hard it is for rich people to “enter into the kingdom of heaven”! Would Jesus make a joke about people spending eternity apart from Him?

1. What does “entering the kingdom of heaven/God” and being “saved” mean in Matthew 19? Does this mean salvation from hell?

The context helps us:

Matt. 19:13 ¶ Then *some* children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them.

Matt. 19:14 But Jesus said, “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom [= kingship] of heaven belongs to such as these.”

Matt. 19:15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

The word for “kingdom” in NT Greek means the same as “kingship.” In the standard koine Greek dictionary, the first definition is “kingship, royal power, royal rule” and the second is “territory ruled by a king, kingdom.” The “kingdom of heaven” often means not a heavenly territory, but a royal ruling power that is sourced in heaven.

A good example to see this clearly is the Parable of the Minas:

Luke 19:12 So He [Jesus] said, “A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom [= kingship] for himself, and *then* return.”

Luke 19:13 “And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business *with this* until I come *back*.’”

The nobleman travels to a place to get a “kingship” and then come back to his “kingdom.” The nobleman is a picture of Jesus who would ascend into

Heaven to receive a **heavenly kingship** (fulfilling the Son of Man prophecy in Daniel 7:13-14), and entrusting His disciples with authority until He comes back again to rule and reign.

Looking back to Matthew 19:13-15, what quality was Jesus pointing to that His disciples needed to embrace to be worthy of “heavenly kingship”?

Why then is it so fitting that Matthew writes about the rich young ruler after relating this incident with children?

“Entering into” is a phrase that often means “entering into the experience of”:

Luke 24:26 “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”

Matt. 26:41 “Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Matt. 25:21 “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’”

Believers can “enter into the experience of heavenly kingship” through becoming unimportant in the eyes of people. This has two aspects. First, when a disciple becomes unimportant, *God’s heavenly kingship is reigning through the disciple* following and being obedient to Jesus. But second and the focus of the rich man, is that a disciple also *becomes worthy and takes on heavenly kingship* in his own life.

Jesus explains to the rich young ruler how to “enter into the experience of heavenly kingship.” In order to experience heavenly kingship, this man must *do* a number of things that Jesus commands to him.

In light of this, what does it mean to be “saved” in this passage? Why were Jesus’s disciples “astonished” that the rich man would have a hard time being “saved”?

2. Why does “entering the kingdom of heaven” require obedience, giving to the poor and following Jesus?

God’s Salvation for Believers:

Justification - saved from the penalty of sin

Sanctification - saved from the power of sin

Glorification - saved from the presence of sin

What aspect of salvation was Jesus explaining to the rich young ruler? How do we know this?

What is the offer Jesus made to this man? Why is he unwilling to do what Jesus commands?

Matt. 4:19 And He *said to them, “**Follow Me**”, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matt. 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, He saw a man called Matthew, sitting in the tax collector’s booth; and He *said to him, “**Follow Me!**” And he got up and **followed** Him.

3. What does Jesus promise to Peter and His disciples exactly? What does it mean to “inherit eternal life”?

What did Peter and Jesus’s disciples do with their lives? How did this make them “enter into the experience of heavenly kingship”?

How does having “heavenly kingship” relate to having “heavenly treasure”?

How does “entering into the experience of heavenly kingship” relate to the promise that a faithful disciple “will inherit eternal life”? Would the rich man who walked away “inherit eternal life?”

4. Why does Jesus say, “There is One who is good?”

Jesus’s comment about God being One and good is a mild rebuke that Jesus is not going to add to or contradict for this Jewish man what God has already said in the Law. Jesus was in effect saying, “Why are you asking me to tell you some new, good thing to do? God the Father has already told both of us what is good!”

When Jesus quotes the 10 commandments, the nation of Israel was promised “life” for following those commands. Moses was not explaining how Israelites could be born again! Following the Law never made a person “justified by faith” and not guilty before God as Judge. But following the Law brought rewards! If the nation of Israel followed the Law, they “entered into life” in the sense that they would have a rich, blessed, secure life in the Promised Land. And they would become God’s authoritative representatives to the world with heavenly power behind their nation in this present time and even more in the future Messianic Kingdom.

Summary:

The rich, young ruler was unwilling to give up his importance to follow Jesus. However, the disciples like Peter “left everything.” They made choices that made them like children in importance. Jesus was commanding the young man to be very generous because he was very rich. And Jesus was inviting this young, impressive man to join Him as a close disciple! Jesus was offering to “save” this *rich* man from having a *poor* life in the Messianic Kingdom!

And so for Jesus’s disciples like Peter, He promises them *kingship*! This is parallel to “inheriting eternal life.” Their sacrifice of importance in this life in following Jesus would allow them to possess a *rich* life in the Messianic Kingdom. They were willing to let go of possessions and the appearance of greatness here and now for a greater reward! They could have made a lot more money in business, fishing and collecting taxes!

Jesus sums up this whole encounter with the simple statement, “But many *who are* first will be last; and *the* last, first.” The rich, young man appeared to be “first” because of his great wealth, but in the Kingdom, he will be “last.” ***This is confirmation from Jesus that this young man was in fact a believer, but he was on a course for profound disappointment with himself in the Messianic Kingdom.*** Jesus’ words to him were gracious and meant to help this young man to be great in the Kingdom to come!

To follow Jesus Christ today, we don’t have to leave behind our businesses and work. *We cannot sell everything and follow Jesus the same way today* because Jesus Christ has ascended to heaven. The disciples only had a few years’ opportunity to walk with Jesus. Instead, the NT commands us to be generous and there will be great rewards of kingdom authority!

1Tim. 6:17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

1Tim. 6:18 *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,

1Tim. 6:19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.