
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage Matthew 19:16-26

Supporting Passages Matthew 19:27-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-27

Memory Verse Matthew 6:33

Biblical Truth Nothing in life is more important or more valuable than following Christ.

Context After leaving Galilee, Jesus spoke to large crowds of people who asked Him many questions. In response to a rich man's question about how to receive eternal life, Jesus explained the cost of following Him, which for this man would have required selling his possessions in order to trust in God alone. Instead of following Jesus, the man went away sad.

Learning Goals

- Students will determine what is required to follow Christ.
- Students will identify ways to give God everything.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for those in your group.

- Pray that students will discover what is required to follow Christ.
- Pray that students will identify ways to give God everything.
- Pray that students will see the benefits and blessings of truly following Christ.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

In the first century, people saw wealth as a sign of God's blessing. Therefore, a religious teacher was expected to be somewhat wealthy. The lifestyle of Jesus and His disciples, however, was noticeably different. Within this passage in Matthew, Jesus expressed the priority of discipleship over wealth and everything else in life.

The Gospel writers recorded the story of Jesus' conversation with this rich young man three times (in Mt. 19:16-30, Mk. 10:17-31, and in Lk. 18:18-29) with little variation. Matthew's account showed Jesus as the King to whom we should submit our lives. In this passage, the rich young man chose to submit his life to money instead of Jesus.

Importance

Because **Salvation is by Faith Alone**, we cannot earn eternal life through good deeds or financial contributions. Only those who place their faith in Christ alone find salvation. By studying this passage, students may discover that living a "good" life also leaves them empty and searching for more. Just as Jesus identified the one thing standing between the rich young man and Himself, He also knows the things that stand between Him and individuals today. Trusting in Jesus for salvation requires people to let go of all things they hold dear to replace them with Jesus. Only by doing this can people receive eternal life.

Interpretation

Matthew 19:16 As Jesus taught through the region of Judea, He was approached by a man asking how he could obtain eternal life. Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded this encounter and described the young man as rich. According to Luke, the man who approached Jesus was a "certain **ruler**" (Lk. 18:18). As a ruler, he would have been a leading member of society.

His question regarding eternal life seemed sincere. Mark recorded that the man "ran up to him and fell on his knees" before Jesus (Mk. 10:17). All three writers placed this event just after Jesus had blessed the children. The context suggests that this occurred in the middle of parents bringing their young children to be blessed. The young man was not ashamed to seek a blessing. He was saying to Jesus, "I need your help just as much as these little children." However, he incorrectly thought that one could attain blessings through actions: "What good thing must I **do** . . ." The most important question a person can ask is how to obtain eternal life.

Matthew 19:17 Jesus didn't respond with an explanation of salvation. Instead, He explored the nature of goodness. Jesus pointed the young man to the divine: "There is only One who is **good**." The man had come to the

right source to have his need fulfilled, but he failed to recognize Jesus as God.

Jesus' response in verse 17 may seem to advocate a works-based salvation. Nothing could be further from the truth. The young man was a Pharisee. His life was committed to the observance of the Law. Jesus answered him using the same line of reasoning with which the young man approached Him: "If you want to enter life, **obey** the commandments." Jesus reinforced the fact that God had already given the commandments, the guide for righteous living. Jesus was leading the young man toward a true understanding of salvation by meeting him on a level that he could comprehend.

Matthew 19:18-20 When the young man asked, "Which ones?" Jesus responded with five of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:12-16) and added the second greatest commandment (Lev. 19:18). The commandments that Jesus quoted engaged the young man and compelled him to continue the conversation. Each of these commandments deals with relating with others: "Do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal . . ." Jesus could have quoted the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). He could have quoted the second commandment: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex. 20:4). Jesus, however, chose not to answer the ruler in this way, but addressed the young man at his weakest point.

In all the Gospel accounts, the young man appears to be a sincere person. So when he said in verse 20, "All these I have kept," there was no reason to doubt him. His exchange with Jesus seems to be born out of a true desire to understand salvation. He seemed to sense that obedience of the Law was not enough. He was not, however, ready for Jesus' next response.

Matthew 19:21-22 Jesus had confronted the young man about his attitude and love for others in verses 18 and 19. The young man felt that he had kept the commandments; Jesus did not disagree. But Jesus did reveal the real issue keeping the young man from salvation in verse 21. He told the young man that he must sell his possessions, give the money to the poor, and then follow Him. The man's possessions were standing in the way of his relationship with God. His obsession with his wealth violated the first two commandments; wealth had become an idol for the man, taking precedence over God. While the young man appeared to be a righteous person, there was something in his life preventing him from following Jesus.

The man wanted eternal life. But he did not want to make Jesus Lord of his life in order to receive it. "He went away **sad** (or sorrowful) because he had **great wealth**" (v. 22). The possessions he thought that he owned really owned him. He chose to be a servant of his possessions rather than a servant of Christ. Why was he sad? The Greek word *lypoumenos* denotes more than emotional sadness. The young man left grieving and feeling uneasy about his choices. He came for salvation but left without it. He wanted salvation and subsequently came to learn that Jesus was the source of salvation. But he wanted to keep his property more than he wanted eternal life. (For a proper reaction, see the story of Zaccheus in Lk. 19:1-10.)

Matthew 19:23-26 Jesus was not saying that wealthy people cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Rather, Jesus was correcting a misguided Jewish expectation that wealth was evidence of God's blessing; thus, the rich could indeed inherit eternal life. The phrase "easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle" was a Jewish colloquialism for the impossible. This is a form of **hyperbole** that Jesus used to illustrate His point. Some scholars have suggested that the "eye of a needle" referred to a small, narrow gate in Jerusalem. Another idea is that the term referred to small entrances into homes that were impossible for camels to go through while carrying a load. Only when the load was removed from the camel's back could the camel enter the home—on its knees.

When the disciples heard that not even the rich could be saved, they wondered, "Who then can be saved?" Just

as it is impossible for a camel to go through the “eye of a needle,” it is impossible for people to enter God’s Kingdom by their own efforts. Regardless of earthly accomplishments or material possessions, every person stands completely helpless before God. Humanity is sinful and stands condemned before a righteous God. But Jesus helps us see that with God all things are possible. Through Jesus, God forgives sin, changes sinful hearts, and provides a way into His Kingdom.

Implications

You can identify your priorities in life by evaluating the things you spend time pursuing. What do you spend your life pursuing? Nothing in life is more important or more valuable than following Christ. The rich young ruler put money before following Jesus. People put all kinds of things before Christ such as jobs, prestige, relationships, or hobbies. What has value to you materially, relationally, and spiritually? How are your values most likely different from those of your students? How can you encourage them to realize the value of following Christ?

Whatever we love the most is what we will serve the most. The rich, young ruler served his money instead of his money serving him. God gives us material possessions to use for His glory. We must realize that all we have really isn’t ours. Everything belongs to Him. What struggles do you face being a good steward with the gifts God has given you? How can you encourage students to view their possessions as a means of service to others rather than a self-indulgent barrier to following Christ?

Following Jesus will result in the ultimate reward, but it comes at a cost. It costs some Christians their families. But though their families reject them for following Christ, they receive an eternal blessing by becoming a part of God’s family. It costs every Christian complete devotion. Following Christ will transform every area of your life. His call and His love are consuming. As we walk with Him, He becomes the focus of our thoughts and the object of our worship. Jim Elliot was a young missionary who was martyred by the Auca Indians of Ecuador while trying to reach them for Christ. He wrote in his journal before his death, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” What has your relationship with Christ cost you? How has your life been transformed as you answer His call? How can you encourage your students to walk in complete devotion to Jesus

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Print one copy of the “Review Questions” activity sheet for your use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today's lesson.

Master Teacher Option: Make A Deal

(10 minutes, moderate set-up)

Prepare seven sheets as described below and tape them to the wall with the numbers 1 through 7 visible.

Also provide a calculator.

Prior to class, prepare seven sheets of paper with the numbers 1 through 7 on one side and one of the following dollar amounts on the reverse side: \$100; \$10,000; \$1; \$1 million; \$10; \$1,000; \$100,000.

Explain that students are going to play the game *Make a Deal*. Choose someone to be the contestant. Explain that behind the seven squares are the amounts of \$1, \$10, \$100, \$1,000, \$10,000, \$100,000, and \$1 million. Instruct the contestant to choose the square that he or she think holds the \$1 million amount. Remove that square from the wall (without revealing the dollar amount on the back of it) and place it on another wall. Then tell the contestant to choose three more squares to help them determine if they made a good choice. Reveal the amounts from the three squares they chose. Then determine the four amounts that have not been revealed. Add these dollar amounts together and divide by four. Then make this offer: **I will give you \$__ (the amount you just calculated) to walk away from the amount of money on the square you originally chose. Do you want to make a deal?** Allow the contestant to keep the square that he or she initially picked or accept your offer. Afterward, determine if the contestant made a good deal.

Conclude the activity by telling learners that the person in today's lesson lost big in a game with eternal consequences.

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: The Rich Young Ruler's Questions

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Student will study Matthew 19:16-26 to determine what is required to follow Christ.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will determine what is required to follow Christ.

Pass out pens and copies of the Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Matthew 19:16-26.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss their willingness to set aside everything to give Christ first place in their lives.

Learning Goal: Students will identify ways to give God everything.

The rich young man seemed to have it all. Even though he was young, he was already wealthy and was probably considered a leader in his community. Yet there was one thing he didn't have—the assurance of eternal life. When he asked Jesus what he had to do to gain eternal life, Jesus asked him to give up his wealth to follow Him. Unwilling to give up the wealth he worshipped, the rich young man rejected Jesus and the assurance of eternal life. This conversation reveals that people who want to be saved and gain eternal life must be willing to surrender anything that stands between them and Jesus. Lead students to discuss these questions:

- **What things in this world attempt to gain first place in our lives?**
- **What do you consider your most valuable possessions? Which of them might hinder your relationship with Christ?**
- **How difficult would it be for you to give up those things to follow Christ?**
- **What would it look like if you made your relationship with Christ the priority of your life?**

Point out that the world offers many things to attract our attention and devotion, such as material goods, relationships, favorite hobbies, worthy goals, and even helping others. All these things, even the good things that allow us to help others, must be set aside if they interfere with our relationship with Christ. He wants to be the highest priority in our lives. Conclude by praying that students will identify the things

that distract them from Jesus and set them aside so they can follow Him whole-heartedly.

Master Teacher Option: A Prayer of Surrender

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will write prayers about surrendering things that distract them from following Christ.

Provide slips of paper and pens for each student. Also bring a trashcan (several trashcans if your class is very large).

Learning Goal: Students will identify ways to give God everything.

Read the following quote from C. Gene Wilkes, **“Jesus knew the man’s wealth had become his treasure, and . . . wanted the man to dethrone the god of wealth by using the money for the one thing it was not intended for. Jesus wanted the young man to give it away.”**

Distribute pens and slips of paper. Instruct students to list on the paper the things that they find most difficult to give up in order to follow Christ wholeheartedly. Remind students that it may not be money or material possessions, but it could be anything that gets in the way of giving Christ first place in all areas of their lives.

Move the trashcan to the center of the room, or if your class is large, set up trashcans in four places near the corners of the area where students sit. Instruct students to pray silently about their willingness to give up whatever it is they wrote down, then—if they are willing—to go and drop their paper into the trashcan as a symbol of their decision to give up that item so they can fully commit to following Christ.

After all have had a chance to respond, lead the group in a prayer asking God to give them the strength to turn their backs on things that really don't matter instead of turning their backs on Christ.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 27: "The Parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.

1. To what kind of seed did Jesus compare the Kingdom of God?
 - a. An olive seed
 - b. A fig seed
 - c. *A mustard seed***
 - d. An apple seed

2. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, what became of the mustard seed after it was planted?
 - a. It withered.
 - b. It grew into a nice plant.
 - c. It did not grow.
 - d. *It became a tree.***

3. In the Parable of the Mustard Seed, what other metaphor did Jesus use in describing the Kingdom of God?
 - a. A loaf of bread
 - b. Manna
 - c. *Yeast***
 - d. A vessel

4. How is the Kingdom of God like a mustard seed?
 - a. *It begins small grows huge.***
 - b. It watered, it will grow into a tree.
 - c. Birds will be there.
 - d. People will be covered by its shade.

5. How is the Kingdom of God like yeast in a large amount of flour?
 - a. It balloons into a loaf of bread or rolls.
 - b. *A little bit of yeast permeates and changes the nature of the dough.***
 - c. It browns nicely.
 - d. It tastes good in the end.

LESSON 28

THE RICH YOUNG RULER'S QUESTIONS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 19:16-26

Memory Verse: Matthew 6:33

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

1. Eternal life cannot be _____ or _____ (Matthew 19:16–19).
2. Eternal life is _____ to those who _____ in Jesus (Matthew 19:20–22).
3. Eternal life requires total _____ and _____ to Jesus (Matthew 19:23–26).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What things in this world attempt to gain first place in our lives?
 - What do you consider your most valuable possessions? Which of them might hinder your relationship with Christ?
 - How difficult would it be for you to give up those things to follow Christ?
 - What would it look like if you made your relationship with Christ the priority of your life?
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OBSTACLES

Draw pictures that represent obstacles that can prevent you or others from accepting Christ.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“There’s the answer—only by letting go and following Jesus as your life’s priority can real life be found.”—*Johnny Derouen*

THE RICH YOUNG RULER'S QUESTIONS

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Introduction: What happens after a person dies? Beliefs vary. Some believe that there is nothing else after death. Others believe that they will come back as another person or even an animal. Still others believe that there is life after death and hope that they are “good enough” to be admitted to this place of eternal comfort. Jesus taught that salvation and eternal life are only available to those who follow Him.

1. Eternal life cannot be earned or bought (Matthew 19:16–19).

Biblical Background: The rich young man sought Jesus to find out what he could do to earn eternal life (v. 16). Jesus replied by setting the standard by which goodness is judged (v. 17a). Because the young man believed that he could earn eternal life, Jesus responded that he should obey the Commandments, giving specific ones as examples (vv. 17b–19).

Illustration: In her book, *The God of All Comfort*, Hannah Whitall Smith wrote, “God’s salvation is not a purchase to be made, nor wages to be earned, nor a summit to be climbed, nor a task to be accomplished; but it is simply and only a gift to be accepted, and can only be accepted by faith.” **Why do you think some people have such a difficult time accepting Jesus’ gift of salvation and eternal life?**

Application: Many people believe that God will measure all our good deeds against our bad deeds, and if the good outweigh the bad, then we will go to heaven. But Jesus emphasized that no one can be good enough to earn salvation.

2. Eternal life is given to those who trust in Jesus (Matthew 19:20–22).

Biblical Background: The rich young man boldly claimed that he had kept the commandments, but demonstrated his uncertainty by asking what else he must do to obtain eternal life (v. 20). Jesus required that the young man give up his wealth so that he could follow Jesus wholeheartedly (v. 21). The rich young man went away disappointed because he did not want to sacrifice what was most important to him, his wealth, in order to follow Christ (v. 22).

Illustration: Have you ever left home with a particular destination in mind? You’ve never been there before but you’re confident you can get there—after all, you have directions. Soon, you discover that you’re hopelessly lost and finally pull out your phone to ask Google Maps® how to get where you want to go. The app tells you that you’re so far off course that you’ll have to backtrack a significant distance to make the correct turns. Do you gladly retrace your steps, thankful for correct directions? Or do you grumble and complain or even decide to keep going on your own? We live in a world that emphasizes the need to work diligently for what we want. Yet we can’t work hard enough or long enough to earn salvation. Instead we must set that incorrect concept aside and place our complete and total trust in Christ if we want to be saved.

Application: Jesus identified the one thing that stood between the rich young man and salvation—his wealth had become his god. To receive the gift of eternal life, we must each set aside those things that stand between us and Jesus, placing our complete trust in Him alone.

3. Eternal life requires total loyalty and surrender to Jesus (Matthew 19:23–26).

Biblical Background: Jesus stated that it is difficult for the wealthy to enter heaven (vv. 23–24). Since wealth was considered a blessing from God, the disciples asked whom—if not one blessed by God—could truly be saved (v. 25). Jesus replied that only with God is it possible to come to salvation (v. 26). Because **Salvation is by Faith Alone**, people must realize that they cannot allow anything to stand between them and faith in Christ.

Illustration: In the *Christ* journal, Johnny Derouen emphasized this truth: “Jesus said that for people it’s impossible, but with God all things are possible. This is critical! He’s reminding us that we can never earn salvation, earn His love, earn this exciting life, or even earn the right to follow Him. Only He—God—can enable us to live this impossible life. This is why it’s so important to make your relationship with Jesus the priority of your life” (p. 167).

Application: Many things in this world compete to have first priority in our lives, but none of those things can satisfy our greatest need. When we decide to make Jesus **the** priority of our lives, we will discover that He can satisfy all of our needs in this life . . . and in the life to come.

Conclusion: We live in a world that suggests there are many ways to heaven. But Jesus clearly teaches that only those who are wholeheartedly devoted to following Him will be saved and inherit eternal life. For the rich young man, this meant giving up his wealth because it distracted him from Christ.

LESSON 28

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

THE RICH YOUNG RULER'S QUESTIONS

Biblical Passage: Matthew 19:16-26

Richard had saved his allowance for weeks and had finally bought the newest Nintendo handheld game console. He'd only had it a couple of days when he heard that a classmate had lost everything when his family's house burned down. Richard quickly announced to his parents that he was giving his new Nintendo to the classmate who now had nothing. If you had been Richard, would you have given away something you had saved so long to buy? Why or why not? How is your willingness to give up what you have affected by the value of the item you're sacrificing compared with the value of what you hope to gain?

Read Matthew 19:16-26. On the surface, the rich young man seemed to have it all. Although he was still young, he was wealthy and apparently respected as a leader in his community. Since Jesus didn't contradict his claim that he obeyed the commandments named in verse 18, the young man seemed to know and obey the Law. Yet the young man obviously felt something was missing because he wanted assurance that he would receive eternal life. To point out that the young man's priority in life was his wealth rather than his relationship with God, Jesus instructed him to sell his possessions, give to the poor, and to follow Him. This forced the young man to make a choice with eternal consequences—he had to choose between his wealth and his God. Instead of turning his back on the earthly possessions he would one day lose anyway, the young man chose to turn his back on Jesus. Scripture says he went away “sad,” but the Greek word for “sad” reveals that he left Jesus filled with grief and confusion over his decision.

This world offers many things that compete for our affection and devotion—even our worship. We can choose to worship the things of this world—such as money, possessions, popularity, power, and relationships—or we can surrender all of those things to worship Jesus. And this choice will have eternal consequences.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- Why did Jesus ask the rich young man to give away all his possessions and follow Him?
- Based on his response, what was the rich young man really worshipping?
- What kinds of things compete to take first place in our lives?
- What steps do we have to take to make Jesus the highest priority in our lives?