

The Church of the Servant King
Survey of the Bible Series
The Gospel of Matthew
(Lesson SB-MT19B)

Matthew 19:13-30

Jesus Uses Children as an Object Lesson Again (19:13-15)

Children in Jesus' day were often brought to rabbis and elders to be blessed, usually by placing hands on them (see Mk 10:13, 16). Jesus seizes the occasion to use the children as an object lesson for His disciples similar to the method He used in Matthew 18:1-9. There, Jesus taught that the humility that characterized little children would also be present in those who will be great in the kingdom of heaven (the Messianic kingdom over which Jesus Christ will rule on earth). Jesus used the child as an ideal of humility and unconcern for social status. If the disciples did not trust only in Him as Savior, they could not enter the Kingdom. The Kingdom (and eternal salvation) cannot be gained by personal merit (18:1-9) or by violent force (11:12). He reinforces those principles in 19:13-15.

Principle: Humility characterizes those who will populate the "kingdom of heaven."

Point: Humility in this context is unconcern for social status derived from a mindset of trust in Christ alone and an acknowledgment of Him as the Messiah.

Principle: The more a believer sees a true, clear picture of Christ, the less concerned he/she is about his/her own position in this world.

Principle: The world seeks its own glorification and approbation. The spiritual believer seeks the glorification of Christ. (This is stimulated by a correct understanding of our own spiritual depravity in view of the person and work of Christ).

Point: It takes (spiritual) character to recognize and appreciate (spiritual) character. Humility = spiritual character.

Jesus Rejects Works as a Means of Entrance Into the Messianic Kingdom (19:16-22)

The question by the rich young ruler (see also Luke 18:18) provides a direct contrast with the principles regarding humility and entrance into the Messianic Kingdom that Jesus has just presented in the previous verses. The man views good works as necessary to enter the kingdom. Humility realizes that the good works of no human are sufficient to satisfy the righteousness of God for the purpose of salvation. However, this man believes that there are good things he can do beyond keeping the Law to obtain entrance into the Kingdom and eternal life.

(During Jesus' ministry, salvation was obtained by trusting in Christ alone as the Messiah. This meant that one had accepted His offer of the Kingdom. The Jews of Jesus' day had contorted the Law into a system of works to be kept for salvation.)

Verses 17-22 – Jesus is not teaching a salvation by works (keeping the Law or commandments). Rather, Jesus was proving the error of the man's claim to have fulfilled God's law. If the man had loved his neighbor to the extent required by the Law of Moses (v 19 and Lev 19:18), he could take up his cross (Mark 10:21), forsake the wealth of the world, and follow Jesus.

This passage is not teaching salvation by works, rather Jesus is merely making the point that in this man's case, his wealth was interfering with his ability to place his trust in Christ alone.

No doubt, to obtain wealth in that day and society, the man had to maintain associations with certain of the respected Jewish religious circles who opposed Jesus. Even though this man was extremely moral, his attachment to the world and its circles of influence was keeping him from having the humility (like a child – 18:4-5; 19:14) to disregard social status and to accept Jesus as the Messiah on the basis of the revolutionary terms that Jesus presented (i.e. servant-hood verses the powerful overthrow of the Roman yoke).

The man was looking for some “good” thing beyond the requirements of the Law since he had found no inner peace and assurance of eternal life by his good deeds. Jesus gave him a requirement above the Law when He commanded the man to “come, follow Me” in verse 21. No Old Testament passage mentions that stipulation. Obviously, this would have required the man to turn his back on all of the circles of power and influence that he had nurtured to accumulate and protect his wealth.

Principle: There is nothing inherently wrong with wealth. (The Jews – and many Christians today – believed that wealth was a symbol of God’s blessing upon a person’s life. While this is sometimes the case, e.g. Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Joseph of Arimathea, etc., it is probably the exception rather than the rule.)

Principle: Things of the world will always be a test of one’s priorities and can be a distraction.

Principle: One can be moral and respected in the world’s opinion of greatness, yet not humble.

Principle: The view that one can produce some “good” capable of eternal life is arrogance (even when that view is held by the most moral of persons).

Principle: Arrogance and humility are antithetical. They can’t coexist without spiritual chaos and anarchy in the soul. (This is why the rich young ruler had no assurance of his ability to enter the Kingdom that was being presented by Jesus).

Jesus Uses the Rich Young Ruler’s Rejection as an Object Lesson (19:23-26)

As I mentioned above, most Jews expected the rich to inherit eternal life because their wealth was viewed as evidence of God’s blessing on their lives. Yet, Jesus teaches that it is impossible to enter the Kingdom when one believes that good works produced from a position of power and influence are sufficient to satisfy God’s righteous requirements. Such is not the humble attitude like a child (Matt 18:4-5; 19:13) that can only trust in something greater than him/herself rather than personal ability.

Jesus’ analogy of the camel through the eye of the needle teaches the impossibility of entering the Kingdom if one is relying upon his/her own resources. The “needle” was not a small gate in the city wall through which a camel could just squeeze through on its’ knees. (This is sometimes taught by those who want to acknowledge the fact that Jesus was not excluding rich people from the Kingdom.) Rather, the context is that of a rich man who is depending upon his own good works to enter the Kingdom. Any rich person who so tries to buy his way into the Kingdom through the production of good works will find entry as impossible as a camel trying to go through the eye of a sewing needle. This is Jesus’ point in verse 26 – “with men this [production of good works sufficient to satisfy God’s righteousness] is impossible.”

Point: There will be men of wealth in the Kingdom, e.g. Abraham, Lot, Solomon, Joseph of Arimathea, etc.

Jesus Teaches the Disciples That Their Sacrifice Will Be Rewarded (19:27-30)

The disciples had been influenced by the same thinking that was prominent in Jewish society, i.e. the wealthy were blessed of God. Therefore, the disciples found it hard to believe that the wealthy had not earned God's approval to enter the Kingdom. Jesus' teaching of the impossibility of earning God's favor for salvation by a "good" work caused Peter to react. Peter spoke on behalf of all the disciples when he reminded Jesus of all that they had sacrificed. After all, had not they done just what Jesus commanded the rich young ruler to do (19:21b – "come, follow Me")? Jesus then teaches them that their sacrifices would be richly rewarded.

The "regeneration" (palingenesia) is a reference to the birth or inauguration of the Messianic reign of Christ on earth. The fact that the kingdom of heaven was at hand in the person of Jesus as the Messiah was the gospel of the Kingdom. [Note: The Greek word is used only twice in the NT. The other passage is Titus 3:5 in which it is used to in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life at the moment of salvation (i.e. "by the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit").]

Verse 28 – Those disciples (the 12 apostles to Israel) who have followed Christ will sit on twelve thrones and rule over the twelve tribes of Israel. This is evidently a rule in two distinct phases:

- The Messianic (Millennial) reign of Christ on earth – believer's of all past dispensations will rule and reign with Christ during this period (Re 3:21)
- The New Jerusalem in eternity after the Millennial reign of Christ (Re 21:14).

Here are some passages that I believe support the view that the New Jerusalem will be inhabited by believers of all dispensations who have died prior to the Millennium.

Passage	Topic	Dispensation in the New Jerusalem
1 John 5:4-5	Overcomers = those who believe in Jesus as the Son of God	Church Age Believers
Revelation 3:21	Overcomers sit with Christ on the throne	Church Age Believers
Revelation 12:10-11	Believers are overcomers	Tribulation (Age of Israel) Believers
Revelation 21:7	Overcomers inherit the New Jerusalem	Eternity
Revelation 21:12, 14	Mention of the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles	Age of Israel and the Church
Hebrews 12:22-24	"Spirits of just men"	All dispensations prior to the Church Age
Revelation 5:10	Saints reign on the earth	Church Age Believers
Revelation 7:9-17	Believers serve the Lord in heaven	Tribulation Believers
Revelation 21:24-27	Believing rulers in the Millennium bring homage to the "Lamb" in the New Jerusalem	Millennial Believers