

Masterwork of the Messiah

Expositional Study Of Matthew's Gospel

The Hope Of Heaven

Written By

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Several years ago I did a series called *Got Questions*. I placed a box in the foyer for your Bible questions and, as no shock to me, you stuff it full. Ninety-nine percent of you asked one question, while one person, in typical Type A-D.C. style, stuffed a multi-page document in the box with over one hundred exact questions from one end of the Bible to the other. When I contacted that person to let them know there was no way I could possibly answer all those question combined with all the other ones in a short summer series, she was fine. When I asked “Where did all these questions come from?” she replied, “Oh, these are ones I’ve been keeping track of for years as I read my Bible.” Wow. Now there is a saint to emulate. Not only are they reading the Word, they are asking though-provoking, honest questions so they can grow and mature.

Every pastor is used to fielding questions from sheep ... and goats. It comes with the job as a teacher of the Scriptures. Jesus, of course, is our model. He constantly fielded questions in His busy ministry. Sometimes they came from believers, and at other times they came from unbelievers. Sometimes the questions were honest, and at other times they were dishonest. Sometimes the questions were unloaded and truly searching for spiritual truth, and at other times they were loaded and truly searching to trash spiritual truth.

In Matthew 19, verses 16 through 30, as Jesus is literally walking southward toward Jerusalem and the cross, He encounters some of the more important questions of life ... and He, thankfully, answers them. As you listen to these questions, I think you just might see they are,

in all reality, your questions. If so, then listen carefully to the Lord's answers because they will give ultimate purpose and meaning to life.

Key Spiritual Questions Find Key Spiritual Answers (Matthew 19:16-30)

Verse 16 introduces us to the first of two significant spiritual, theological questions:

¹⁶ And behold, one came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?"

Re-couched, here's the question, and I'm sure you are either asking it right now, or you've asked it in the past.

What Is The Path To Paradise? (Matthew 19:16-26)

Or in other words, "How do I get into heaven and the kingdom?" Who asked the question? This is all-important. Matthew tells us he was "a young, wealthy man," while the parallel accounts in Mark 10:17-31 and Luke 18:18-30 tell us, respectively, he was rich man and a rich, young politician.¹ We also learn from Mark, who is typically quite graphic in his writing, how the young man ran up to Jesus as He walked and fell on his knees with the question at hand. Obviously, from all outer appearances it appeared this wealthy man in his twenties was quite concerned about finding an answer the question gnawing away at his soul.² Amazing. He had power, prestige, and plenty of cash but he had no internal peace. Maybe he is you. Maybe the same question is eating away at you despite all the wealth you have accumulated in this life. You have financial security, but spiritual security simply escapes you. I'm sure you will find your answer in the reply of Jesus.

Taking a form critical look at the passage in question, we can readily see it moves in one direction along what we might call a four-lane path.

The Path Is Not A Process (Matthew 19:16)

Like so many today, the rich, young politician had bought into the theologically erroneous Pharisaical notion that salvation and kingdom entrance rested squarely on your acts of

¹ Luke calls him an *archon* (ἄρχων) a word which semantically can mean a judge, a ruler of a local synagogue (Luke 18:41), or a member of the Sanhedrin ... Israel's Supreme Court (John 3:1).

² This is the meaning of the Greek for young man, viz., *νεανίσκος*, *neaniskos* (Grant Osborne, *Matthew: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 718. Cf. also Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament And Other Early Christian Literature*: **νεανίσκος, ου, ό** (Hdt. et al.; ins, pap, LXX; Jos., Ant. 6, 179, Vi. 126; Test12Patr. In later Gk. more common than *νεανίας*) dim. of *νεάν.* ① **a relatively young man, youth, young man** (on the chron. limits of this period of life cp. what is said on *νεανίας* and s. Philo, *Op. M.* 105; an ins at Delos, BCH 13, 1889, 420ff, lists a series of age-classes: *παῖδες, ἔφηβοι, νεανίσκοι* and equates v. with *νεός* [Forbes p. 61]) **Mt 19:20, 22; Mk 14:51** (SJohnson, *The Identity and Significance of the Neaniskos in Mark*: *Forum* 8, '92, 123-39); **16:5** (cp. Jos., Ant. 5, 213; on connection w. **14:51** s. BvanIersel, *CBQ* 58, '96, 261, n. 52 [lit.]); **Lk 7:14; Ac 2:17** (Jo 3:1); **20:12 D; 23:18, 22; 1J 2:13f**; Hv 2, 4, 1; 3, 1, 6ff; 3, 2, 5; 3, 4, 1; 3, 10, 1 and 7; Hs 6, 1, 5; 6, 2, 6; GPt 9:37; 13:55; AcPI Ha 3, 28; 4, 2 (of a heavenly being).

righteousness, coupled, of course, with a belief in God. Yet, the burden of getting through those pearly gates rested, first and foremost, with your religious activity. The more you do, for God, the more He will be motivated to allow you entrance into His glorious presence, or so went the thinking of the day ... thinking we still recognize is quite prevalent in our day too. No doubt, the young man missed the memo from Christ's teaching about children in the last section (Matthew 19:13-15), a section which clearly states that the hope of heaven is gained by simple, trusting, innocent child-like faith in Him as the Savior. As Jesus taught earlier,

⁴ Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18).

Humbling yourself as a sinner at the feet of the Savior tells how the sinner becomes a saint and an inheritor of the kingdom. It has everything to do with a faith event and not a process of performing all the right spiritual duties and disciplines. John records, in many places, how faith in Jesus as the Savior moves the sinner to sainthood:

“He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom he has sent’ (John 6:29).

“I said therefore, that you will die in your sins; unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

Doesn't get any clearer than this, does it?

The rich, young ruler, however, was lost in the fog of personal spiritual achievement. He, in classical rabbinical style, believed there was one more thing he could do beyond the dictates and demands of the Law of Moses to secure and assure his salvation. The attainment of paradise and the kingdom, therefore, rested on his efforts, not on God's effort. No wonder he didn't possess the hope of heaven. His works-based approach to God left the adherent, as it always does, in a state of wonderment whether he had done enough to win the favor of God. Hence, he just had to ask whether there was, perhaps, one more thing for him to do to achieve divine acceptance without question. The problem with this particular approach to God is there is *always* one more thing to do to acquire God's acceptance.

The Path Is A Perfection (Matthew 19:17-20)

In order to move the mis-guided, mis-informed young man from spiritual error to spiritual truth, Jesus answers him on his terms. Put differently, it's as if Jesus says, “Oh, you want to approach God based on your accumulation of good works, then what kind of works does God require?” Starting with verse 17, Jesus will draw the proverbial line in the sand to show the man just what he will have to do to approach God in this manner:

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." ¹⁸ 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; ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ²⁰ The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?"

Let us not get hung up on KJV which translates verse 17 this way:

“¹⁷ And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God: ...”

Literally, the Greek reads, “Why me are you asking concerning the good?” (Τί με ἐρωτᾷς περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ). The KJV follows the wording of Mark and Luke, but this is not reflected in Matthew’s Greek wording. Matthew focuses on what the young man is looking for, “the good,” which is a genitive construction denoting the quality, not the quantity, of the thing in question. The young man isn’t calling Jesus good, which He is, but is asking him what qualitatively good thing he must do to achieve spiritual assurance of paradise. Even if he were calling Jesus good and Jesus deflected goodness to God, thereby causing us to wonder if Jesus thought Himself to be morally/spiritually good, the context tell us nothing about whether Jesus believed he was morally/spiritually good, which He did, as God. Jesus simply diverted the discussion of ultimate holiness and goodness to the Father without saying anything about Himself.

What is important to focus on is how a sinner becomes a saint. The rich, young man wrongly believed heaven and the eschatological Davidic kingdom could be acquired by religious actions. Jesus will now begin to set him straight so he will have the prospect of true kingdom entrance:

“... but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments” (Matthew 19:17).

“Forget looking for one more spiritual duty to perform,” Jesus replies. “Just perpetually keep the commandments of Moses.” The imperative “keep” (τηρέω) is a present tense active verb denoting ongoing, continual activity. The article “the” before the word “commandments” (τὰς ἐντολάς) clearly delineates that Jesus is talking about the big ten from Exodus 20. Grammarians would classify this as the par excellence (or monadic, viz., the one and only) use of the article. God, therefore, from an Old Testament perspective was not looking for sinners to become saints by doing good works, as nice and needful as they were/are, but for them to be consistently obedience to His divinely revealed Law. Stated differently, God looked for perfection from imperfect creatures. That is what the absolutely good God requires ... absolute goodness tied to absolute adherence continually to His revealed Law.

At that point, I’m sure the rich, young ruler gulped. Jesus was now probing around in his well-ordered, well-controlled life, and this moved him to back up a bit and ask for some clarification:

“¹⁸ He said to Him, "Which ones?"

This is not an honest question. All Jews were taught the Law of Moses in the school system and in the synagogue, and if this man were a ruler of a local synagogues or a member of the Sanhedrin, then the question is incredulous.

Jesus' answer will begin to set the man up to see his true spiritual condition before a holy God:

And Jesus said, "You shall not commit murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; ¹⁹ Honor your father and mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 17).

Jesus touches upon the sixth (Exodus 20:3), seventh (Exodus 20:14), eighth (Exodus 20:15), ninth (Exodus 20:16), and fifth (Exodus 20:12) of the Ten Commandments, plus He adds Leviticus 19:18 (i.e., loving your neighbor) which He will later teach is the second greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-40). These, of course, merely represent the other Ten Commandments and the sense can't be missed: If you, a sinner, want to be on the path to paradise, if you want to be a partaker of the Messiah's kingdom, and you want to do it through the Law, then you must obey all of the Law all of the time. To deviate at any one point is to bar you from Paradise and the kingdom. As James teaches:

¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all. ¹¹ For He who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not commit murder." Now if you do not commit adultery, but do commit murder, you have become a transgressor of the law (James 2).

Break one commandment one time and you have broken them all. That's the kind of perfection God looks for, but it is the very thing we, as sinners, cannot give him. The Law, as Paul argues, couldn't save us because it merely pointed out our sin and inability to be perpetually obedient, internally and externally:

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them." ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "The righteous man shall live by faith." ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "He who practices them shall live by them" (Galatians 3).

So, Christ is spot-on with His analysis of the Law. To approach God through the Law, you had better have perfect obedience.

Hearing this, the self-indulged, narcissistic young wealthy man makes the most arrogant statement:

²⁰ The young man said to Him, "All these things I have kept; what am I still lacking?" (Matthew 19).

His statement drips with pride, doesn't it? Really, had he kept ALL of the Law? Really? Isn't it amazing at how those who approach God with their works can become deceived and blinded by those works? Smugly they can, and will, feel they are superior spiritual people because of what

they do; however, in all reality they are far from God, and equally far from paradise and the kingdom.

Jesus gave this young man a wake-up call in the next few verses. He didn't have the perfection a good God looks for. Perhaps his wake-up call from Jesus is one you need to have as well. It's all tied intrinsically to the concept that ...

The Path Is A Proposition (Matthew 19:21)

Knowing the heart of the young man is enamored by the size of his financial portfolio, Jesus probes a little deeper with this challenge:

²¹ Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me."

To enter paradise, to be a member of the messianic kingdom, calls for complete trust in the person and work of Jesus as Savior. No half-hearted allegiance will open the door for anyone, no matter how much money they have or how powerful and prestigious they are. You, like a child, either completely trust in whom Jesus is and follow Him, or you don't. There is no middle ground. For this man, he has, as Osborne correctly points out, "an exaggerated sense of his own piety that has led to self-sufficiency."³ And because this is a reality, he is, contrary to this thinking, on the path to eternal destruction not to eternal life.

But things could have been different for him had he just stepped aside from his self-sufficiency and placed His faith in the person of the Savior. It is a proposition each of us still have to deal with honestly. Jesus calls us to follow Him, and this all starts with the step of faith in who He and what He can and will do for the sinner who comes to Him. Those who want the things of the world and Jesus will not find Him. Those who see their utter spiritual bankruptcy and inability to please God through spotty spiritual performance will fall, by faith, at His feet, seeking His eternal forgiveness and restoration.

What will you do with the proposition?

What did the rich, young man do? The ensuing verses tell us.

The Path Is A Problem (Matthew 19:22-26)

For one, the path of total trust in Christ as the Redeemer is just too problematic because they won't dare turn loose of their god or gods. For this man, who had convinced himself he was spiritually doing pretty good, he found out the hard way he had a false god in his life. Of course, this easily demonstrated he had broken the first commandment to "have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3). His love of money also demonstrated he had broken the last commandment that "You shall not covet" (Exodus 20:17).

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

³ Osborne, Matthew: 718.

The present tense nature of the verb for “grieving” (λυπούμενος) demonstrates the perpetual hold the love of money had on this man’s life. This love was his true god and he wasn’t about to let it go, even while standing in the presence of the Messiah, the author of life and the Lord of Paradise. He wanted this world and the next world but wasn’t willing to give up his love of Mammon so he could truly inherit eternal life. Tragic. Tragic is the hold of the love of money on the lives of some people.

In light of this I am compelled to ask you, “What false god is keeping you from trusting in Jesus as the true God who can save you from your sin?” For some it is the fact they have a sizeable financial portfolio. This reality gives them false security, false comfort, and the feeling of self-control, which by definition, can lead to not wanting to come to Christ without a false god in your hand so He can redeem you and give you Paradise. Your false god may also be your own spiritual performance, your strict allegiance to spiritual rules and regulations handed down from your parents.

The path to Paradise is one of grace. It is open to all those who, like children, are honest about their spiritual need and come willingly and innocently, by faith, to the Savior. Will you come in this fashion and be saved? That is the question.

Culturally, this teaching of Christ was, well, over-the-top.

²³ And Jesus said to His disciples, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ "And 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."

Note, Jesus didn’t say, “It is impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.” He just said is hard. Why is it hard?

- The allure of money is a powerful thing.
- Those with money typically don’t think they need to depend on anyone, let alone a God they cannot see.
- Those with money are used to getting their way.
- Those with money are not used to being told “No.”

Yeah, it’s hard for a person with a love affair with money to be broken over their sin and fall at the feet of the Savior. Jesus says it’s about as difficult as trying to get a camel, which was the largest animal in Palestine, to pass through the eye of a needle.

Hearing all of this, the disciples were spiritually stupefied:

²⁵ And when the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁶ And looking upon them Jesus said to them, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The disciples had bought into the unfounded teaching of the Pharisees that the presence of money in a person’s life demonstrated the blessing of God rested upon that person in every respect. Hence, from their religious upbringing, if anyone were headed to heaven it was wealthy people whose lives supposedly demonstrated God’s face smiled upon them. No wonder they said what they said to Jesus.

Jesus, conversely, allays their fears by telling them how God can take a person in love with money and move them to a point of salvation. Yes, God can so work in a person's life that He can break them of their love affair with their false God so they will pursue and be drawn to the true God.

Years ago I had a successful medical doctor come into my office to counseling. She said the teaching of the parables regarding money had really convicted her, so she came in to settle accounts with God. I don't ever handle church monies; however, that day she pulled out a check book and wrote out a check to the church and gave it to me. With that she left my office and drove away in her white Cadillac. My jaw hit the floor as I looked at the figure on the check: \$25.00. Obviously, money was her god, not Jesus. Obviously, money had a strangle-hold on her spiritual life. I never saw her again, but I've often wondered what happened to her. Yet, even in her spiritually strangled state Christ's words ring true. He can so work in a lost life like this He can guide that person to Himself.

Perhaps He's working in your life right now. Perhaps He's speaking to you most definitively right now. If you are wise, you will come to Him with the simple, trusting faith of a child. The moment you do that you will not just become a member of His heavenly family, He'll personally place you on the path which leads to Paradise and the coming messianic kingdom.