

# THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30  
Yeshua §127

*MATTHEW 19:16-30 (ESV)*

**16** And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” **17** And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.” **18** He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not 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 I have kept. What do I still lack?” **21** Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” **22** When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

**23** And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. **24** Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” **25** When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” **26** But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” **27** Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” **28** Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new

Part 1.	The Coming of the King
Part 2.	The Authentication of the King
Part 3.	The Controversy over the King
Part 4.	The Training of the Twelve by the King
Part 5.	The Opposition to the King
<b>Part 6.</b>	<b>The Preparation of the Disciples by the King</b>
Part 7.	The Official Presentation of the King
Part 8.	The Preparation for the Death of the King
Part 9.	The Trial of the King:
Part 10.	The Death of the King
Part 11.	The Resurrection and the Ascension of the King
Part 12.	The Sequels

**world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last, and the last first.**

Half way through cutting the lawn, the blades stopped turning. I researched possible causes: broken belt, failed mandrell, blown fuse, failed electric clutch. I've learned the hard way that the best approach to diagnosing is to KISS it; Keep It Simple Stupid. Many times the simplest fix is the right fix. So I looked at the switch that turns the blades on and found the plug was loose.

In our study this morning, we have a major problem. I'm going to suggest the simplest fix is the right fix though it may be very different from what you've been taught.

As we resume our series, *Yeshua Messiah King*, Jesus is in the final days of public ministry leading up to His crucifixion in April of 33A.D. Along the way he encounters the man we've come to know as the rich young ruler.

*MATTHEW 19:16-30 (ESV)*

**16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"**

Mark tells us this man ran up to Jesus and knelt before him (Mark 10:17). Both Mark and Luke tell us he addressed Jesus as, "Good Teacher", and Luke includes he was a ruler (Luke 18:18).

This Jewish ruler, humbly, publicly kneeling before Jesus, asks,

**"(Good) Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?"**

What is he asking?

Many of us have been conditioned to see a self-righteous Jewish man opposing Jesus and Jesus' message that salvation is by grace through faith and not by works. We have been taught that this man is asking what he must do to go to heaven when he dies. It is assumed his question, "...what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" means "...what good deed must I do to go to heaven when I die?" Therefore, we're lead to believe that, in opposition to Jesus, the rich young ruler is insisting that salvation comes by obeying the Law of Moses.

When we see him in this light, we see a man who needs to be corrected. What a wonderful opportunity for Jesus to correct this man and to teach all who are listening that salvation is a gift to be received by faith. It is a wonderful opportunity for Jesus to share what He shared with Nicodemus:

*JOHN 3:14-16 (ESV)*

**14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.**

**16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.**

If, as we assume, the rich young ruler is trying to work his way to heaven, we assume Jesus will correct him so that he will believe and be saved. We're taught to see that the rich young ruler believes he needs to work for his salvation by obeying the Law of Moses. Surely Jesus will correct him so that he believes and is saved!

But how did Jesus answer the rich young ruler's question, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"?

**17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments."**

What was Jesus' answer?

**“...keep the commandments.”**

In other words, obey the Law of Moses.

This answer doesn't fit our assumptions.

Either Jesus contradicts Himself or some of our assumptions are wrong.

If the man is asking “what must I do to go to heaven when I die?”, Jesus would not have answered “...keep the commandments”. Jesus taught justification salvation is by faith as we saw in His conversation with Nicodemus. Salvation by faith is the theme of the Gospel of John:

*JOHN 20:30-31 (ESV)*

**30 Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.**

But Jesus tells the rich young ruler:

**“...If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”**

What do we do with this seeming contradiction?

We have a choice to make.

On the one hand we can continue to insist that this man is asking how to go to heaven when he dies. We then need to explain Jesus' answer so that it doesn't contradict salvation through faith. If you read the commentaries, you will find commentators attempting to explain away the plain meaning of Jesus' answer.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The *Hypothetical View* suggests Jesus is setting up a hypothetical situation that “if” a human being could keep the Law perfectly, then they could obtain eternal life by keeping the commandments. But, of course, such a thing is not possible. Another explanation is the *Faith-plus-Works View*. This view holds there are two stages to justification salvation. Stage one is initial faith (John 3:16); stage two is a life of works that proves the genuineness of the faith in stage one and is required for justification salvation. In this view, the rich young ruler was asking about this second stage of justification salvation.

On the other hand, we can start with the plain meaning of Jesus' answer and reconsider the meaning of the rich young ruler's original question. Maybe he isn't asking about how to go to heaven when he dies. Maybe he isn't asking about how to get saved as we usually use that phrase.

Again, here is the man's question:

**“(Good) Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”**

And here is Jesus' answer:

**“...If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”**

Jesus' answer would not have sounded strange to the rich young ruler. It reflects the language of the Mosaic Law. For instance, compare Jesus' answer to God's message to Israel through Moses in Leviticus 18:4-5:

**“...If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”**

*LEVITICUS 18:4-5 (ESV)*

**4 You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. 5 You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.**

Again, compare Jesus' answer with Moses' message to the Wilderness Generation soon to possess the Promise Land in Deuteronomy 5:32-33:

**“...If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”**

*DEUTERONOMY 5:32-33 (ESV)*

**<sup>32</sup> You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. <sup>33</sup> You shall walk in all the way**

**that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess. <sup>2</sup>**

Were God and Moses talking about going to heaven when you die?

What life were they talking about?

The life of covenant blessing which included possessing their inheritance, the Promised Land. We can express it a number of different ways. It is experiencing the fruitful, joyful life of the covenant. It is the abundant life experienced when a person lives under the authority of God. We choose to call it kingdom life here and now that includes rewards in the Messianic Kingdom.

It is the blessed life that comes to those who obey God's Law. It is sanctification salvation/spiritual transformation that comes to all who obey God's Law and with transformation comes reward-inheritance in the Messianic Kingdom.

As a Jew, under the Law of Moses, the rich young ruler was asking Jesus what he needed to do in order to live life to the fullest and obtain treasure in heaven (i.e. "inherit eternal life").

The following quotes by Joseph Dillow and N.T. Wright say it clearly:

*We conclude that if we are to understand the intent of the young man's question by how Jesus answers it, it appears that by the phrase, "inherit eternal life," Jesus understands him to be asking about how to live life to the fullest and obtain treasure in heaven (i.e., "inherit eternal life"), not "How can I become regenerate?" or "How can I be sure I will go to heaven?"<sup>1195</sup> Furthermore, by His answer Jesus affirms the common Jewish belief that an inheritance is a reward for work done and is not a gift obtained by faith alone.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 4:1, 8:1, 11:8-9, 16:20.

*This squares precisely with the way the words “inherit” and “inheritance” are used throughout the Scriptures (e.g., Colossians 3:24). It is also what Jesus teaches directly in the concluding summary of the passage, Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:30, and in Matthew 25:34-35.*

*We suggest, then, that N. T. Wright is absolutely correct when he says that the young man’s question about inheriting eternal life has nothing to do with the modern question: “What must I do to go to heaven when I die?”<sup>1196</sup> Instead, according to Wright, the ruler wants to know “what must I do to have a share [inheritance] in the age to come.”<sup>3</sup>*

Based on Jesus’ answer, it is more accurate to understand that the rich young ruler was asking what he must do to live life to the fullest and receive treasure in heaven.

**“(Good) Teacher, what must I do to live life to the fullest and obtain treasure in heaven?”**

And Jesus’ answer is:

**“...If you want to live life to the fullest and obtain treasure in heaven, keep the commandments.”**

We conclude our study at this point. We have not studied out the entire passage; we will in subsequent studies. For now, I challenge you to carefully review your notes and pay very close attention to the extended quote I’ve provided.

Keep in mind, this interpretation of the passage does not deny that justification salvation is by grace through faith in the crucifixion, burial

---

<sup>1196</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 301. By sharing in the age to come, Wright means membership in the sense of having a possession there.

<sup>1197</sup> Louw-Nida, 1:657.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph C. Dillow, *Final Destiny: The Future Reign of the Servant Kings*, 4th Edition (Houston, TX: Grace Theology Press, 2018).

and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Put another way, this interpretation does not suggest justification salvation is based on works of any kind.

However, this passage does emphasize that experiencing life to the fullest and receiving reward in the Messianic Kingdom depends on obedience to the Law of God, which, for us, is the Law of Messiah, since we are no longer under the Law of Moses.

Does understanding the rich young rulers' question to be "how to live life to the fullest and receive treasure in heaven", better explain the rest of the passage?

Don't get tripped up by the word "salvation" in verse 25. From what, in the passage, might someone need to be delivered?

Finally, if you find it difficult to consider a different explanation of this passage than what you've been previously taught, why? What concerns does an explanation like the one offered in this study, stir up?