

Can the Lord's answer to the Rich Man in Matt. 19:17 be used to show how the Jews were to be saved?

By Darren Smith - Originally Published: 6/19/2016 Last Updated: 6/19/2016

In Matthew 19, the Lord Jesus Christ has a conversation with an unnamed individual who had "great possessions." The unnamed rich man asks our Lord the following question:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶...Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?

The Lord's answer to this man is often summarized with the Lord's following statement:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁷... if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

The question this document will attempt to answer is this: can this passage be used as an example of what the Lord Jesus taught about how a Jew was to be saved? Did the Lord Jesus teach that the Jewish pathway to eternal life was "keeping the commandments?"

Many dispensationalists will use this passage as a "proof text" to illustrate the theological premise that, while those in the Body of Christ today are saved "by faith apart from the works of the law," (Rom. 3:28) Jews and converts to Judaism in the previous age were saved by "faith plus works," i.e., faith plus obedience to the law. I have personally used this passage in the past to illustrate this very thing. However, is this a legitimate use of this particular passage?

Presented below is the entire interaction with the unnamed rich man:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? ¹⁷And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God:* but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. ¹⁸He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ²⁰The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? ²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. ²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

A surface reading of the text above does seem to lend some credence to the idea that the Lord Jesus Christ taught "keeping the commandments" as a requirement for individuals to be saved during the age in which He ministered. A man comes to the Lord, asks about eternal life, and the Lord does tell the man that he needs to "keep the commandments" if he is to "enter into life." But there are many other components of this passage which indicate much more is going on here

than a basic presentation of the methodology of Jewish salvation. There are very clear indicators that beg for a deeper investigation...

There is the fact that the unnamed rich man used the phrase “Good Master” and the fact that the Lord seized upon that specific phrase to begin His reply. The fact that the Lord seemed to exclude even Himself from being “good” is another red flag (“Why callest thou me good? There is none good, but one, that is, God...”). What is the Lord Jesus’ purpose in saying that?

When the unnamed rich man presses the Lord to clarify which specific commandments need to be followed, the Lord Jesus does not reiterate that all the commandments need to be followed...He only lists six, five of which are part of the “Ten Commandments” and one that is from Leviticus 19:18.

Did Jehovah instruct the Israelites to obey TEN commandments...or only five of them? And did Jehovah not instruct the Israelites to obey the entire law? We know, from James 2:10, that “whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” Why, then, would the Lord Jesus tell this man he only needs to obey five commandments...instead of ten (with an additional commandment added in for “good measure”)? Why wouldn’t the Lord Jesus tell this man that he has to obey the entire law (i.e., all the commandments), if the law is truly the means for the Jew to obtain “eternal life?”

What if this man keeps the total of six commandments given to him here by the Lord Jesus, but then makes unto himself a “graven image?” Wouldn’t this rich man, on the basis of James 2:10, be guilty of breaking the entire law? And, by the Lord’s own words, wouldn’t this rich man’s inability to “keep the commandments” disqualify him from “eternal life?” And, worst of all, wouldn’t the Lord Jesus’ instruction to the man in this passage be proven to be false or – at the very least – terribly misleading and potentially fatal?

If “keeping the commandments” is truly what the Lord Jesus is setting forth to this man as a legitimate, attainable means of salvation, the fact that the Lord only tells the rich man to obey six commandments is a major problem!

Finally, in the Lord’s initial statement, He tells the man that all he has to do to obtain eternal life is “keep the commandments.” That seems very concise and very straightforward. However, at the end of the interaction, the Lord tells the man that he is still lacking one additional thing not previously mentioned: He tells the man that he needs to sell everything he has, give the money to the poor, and come to follow Jesus...

Yes, during His earthly ministry, our Lord emphasized that all of His followers had to sell everything they had and give the money to the poor before they came to follow Him. It was such an emphatic requirement that disobedience to this principle even cost Ananias and Saphira their very lives (Acts 5:1-11). But here is the important question in relation to our passage: is selling everything you have and giving it to the poor one of “the commandments?”

In other words, is just “keeping the commandments” necessary for eternal life (like the Lord initially answered)...or is “keeping the commandments,” selling everything you have, giving the money to the poor, and following the Lord Jesus Christ necessary for eternal life? Which is it? Was the Lord’s first answer inaccurate or incomplete?

One may make the case that – in asking the rich man to sell everything – the Lord Jesus had moved on from outlining the requirements of salvation to the topic of gaining eternal rewards stored up in heaven. This could be asserted based on the fact that the Lord introduces the topic of selling everything by saying, “If thou wilt be perfect.” However, the Lord’s clearly states in verse 23 that “a rich man shall hardly [even] enter into the kingdom of heaven”...let alone have a reward there! The Lord ascribes the rich man’s refusal to sell everything he has as evidence of his lack of entrance into the kingdom, not evidence of his lack of reward in the kingdom!

Don’t all these legitimate questions call for a deeper study?

Finally, the young man goes away sorrowful...and the Lord Jesus lets him go! Many who teach that this passage is a good story to instruct us on how people were supposed to be saved during the Lord’s earthly ministry will base their teaching on the premise that this man came seeking salvation! They will say that the rich man’s sole, stated concern is to obtain “eternal life!” And the rich man in this story has certainly come to the right place to find salvation, has he not?

Why, then, does the Lord let him walk away? The Lord Jesus essentially just turns to his disciples and begins talking to them about the topic...but the Lord Jesus lets the man who was seeking “eternal life” just walk away! What about the “Great Shepherd” leaving the 99 and pursuing the one? That very principle was taught by the Lord Jesus himself just one chapter prior to the Lord’s conversation with this rich man (in Matthew 18:11-14). So, shouldn’t our Lord have gone after the rich man? How do we explain this?

Again, there is much more going on in this story than a simple Jewish eternal life prescription being given to a potential patient. There are too many questionable circumstances in this story to just accept that very basic premise.

After many years of personally teaching this story as a salvation recipe for those living during the time of Christ, I have come to see this story quite differently. Yes, a deeper analysis of the words used in this story is critical, but what will really yield the clearer, proper emphasis of this story is the context surrounding it. My approach will be to first take a wider look at the relevant context of this story and then bring that context into the detailed analysis of the individual parts of this interaction. I want to start all the way back in Matthew 13.

A Necessary Principle for Understanding the Gospels

In Matthew 13, a concept is taught by our Lord that is repeated over and over in the Gospel accounts. It is a concept that any reader of the Gospels needs to understand and embrace in order to fully comprehend a lot of the actions taken by our Lord during his earthly ministry.

The quotation below begins right after the Lord has finished telling the parable of the sower and his seed to the multitude of people gathered around Him. The Lord finishes up the parable with a phrase He often uses to introduce us to or remind us of the vital principle we will be discussing:

MATTHEW 13

⁹Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁰And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? ¹¹He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ¹²For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he

hath. ¹³Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. ¹⁴And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: ¹⁵For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ¹⁶But blessed *are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.*

The principle laid down by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel accounts is what I refer to as the “Measure of faith” principle. It is the responsibility that mankind has to hear, receive, and embrace the truth the Lord gives to the individual. It also involves the Lord’s reaction to an individual person’s faith – or lack thereof. If the person receives, embraces, and acts on the truth, they are given more truth. It is like they pass the “Faith 101” class by believing what the Lord says, so they then proceed on to the “Faith 201” class. And so on. And so on. The Lord will teach them more and more and more, as long as they continue to receive the lesson at hand!

But the “Measure of faith” principle also works the other way: if the Lord conveys truth to an individual and that person does not receive it at all, they have now become responsible for their lack of faith. The Lord will deal with that person appropriately. He will give them no more truth because they haven’t accepted the initial truths conveyed to them!

MATTHEW 13

¹²For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.

The particular phrase the Lord Jesus uses that makes this concept easier for me is when he uses the word “measure.” He uses this phrase in the book of Matthew during the “sermon on the mount,” (Matt. 7:2) but it is really all tied together very well in the book of Mark:

MARK 4

²³If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. ²⁴And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. ²⁵For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.

There are many more places in the Gospels that the “Measure of faith” principle is taught or alluded to, such as Matt. 11:15, 13:43, Mark 4:9-12, 7:16, Luke 8:8-10, 18, 14:35, 18:26.

Again, what these passages reveal is that the Lord is going to respond to individuals based on their “Measure of faith” – whether they have faith or whether that faith is lacking. But it also shows that the Lord will reflect each person’s perspective of God (or of spiritual things) back on them. Your “measure,” i.e., how you view things, will be reflected back (“measured back”) to you in the Lord’s dealings with you. Each individual will be dealt with appropriately. Examples of this abound in the Gospel records, but one of the best examples of the Lord dealing with individuals based on how they perceive things is the story of the journeying nobleman in Luke 19:12-27.

In the story, the journeying nobleman temporarily entrusts three servants to care for some of his money while he is away. For the purposes of this paper, we only need to focus on the one servant in the story who was given a single pound by his master. While the other servants did something

profitable with their master's money, the particular servant we are focusing on simply hid the pound in a napkin so that he would not lose it. His reason for doing this is critical to see:

LUKE 19

²⁰And [the last servant] came, saying, Lord, behold, *here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:* ²¹For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.

This is the “measure,” the mindset, the perspective that this man has of his master. He thinks his Lord is ruthless. He thinks his Lord is harsh. He feels his Lord is unfair, profiting in places where he shouldn't. So, how does the master in the story deal with him?

LUKE 19

²²And [the nobleman] saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: ²³Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? ²⁴And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give *it* to him that hath ten pounds. ²⁵(And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) ²⁶For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. ²⁷But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay *them* before me.

Doesn't the master in the story turn out to be very harsh and ruthless? Does this indicate the servant with the “single pound” was right? No! It does not! The nobleman is simply taking the very perspective that the servant had of him – the “measure” the servant used - and the master “measured it back” to the servant! The servant thought his master was an austere, harsh, ruthless master, so the master acted like an austere, harsh, ruthless master, did he not?

LUKE 19

²²And [the nobleman] saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.

“If that is your perspective of me, that is what you are going to get!”

And what does the nobleman say towards the end the story? He reiterates the very “Measure of Faith” principle we have been establishing:

LUKE 19

²⁶For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.

Faith and acceptance merits more. A lack of faith and a lack of acceptance merits loss. And a bad perspective of God will merit appropriate treatment from that God!

So this is where our study in the Gospel of Matthew needs to start: with the “Measure of Faith” principle that the Lord Jesus Christ establishes in Matthew 13:

MATTHEW 13

⁹Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. ¹⁰And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? ¹¹He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ¹²For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. ¹³Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. ¹⁴And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: ¹⁵For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. ¹⁶But blessed *are your eyes*, for *they see*: and *your ears*, for *they hear*.

The disciples have “heard.” They will be receiving further education in the things of the Lord. Others who are “without,” who have not had “ears to hear” and have not received the things of the Lord, will not have truth extended to them. Those who do not exhibit faith will be dealt with based on how they personally “measure” things. And, as we move forward in the text of Matthew, this is exactly what we find...

Please note that the following is not intended to be an thorough exposition of all the text from Matt. 13:17 all the way through to the story of the unnamed rich man. We will be focusing on just the highlights pertinent to the topic of this particular paper.

As we move forward from the passage quoted above, we find the Lord Jesus Christ following through on the “Measure of faith” principle he has enunciated. The disciples are being educated further in the things of the kingdom. Those who do not have “ears to hear” are taught via parables so that truth is hidden, or “taken away” from them.

In Matt. 13:17-23, the Lord Jesus explains the parable of the sower and his seed to his disciples. In Matt. 13:24-33, three other parables are set forth and – in verses 34 and 35 – it is explained to us that these parables, too, were spoken to the multitude in their parabolic form, insinuating that these parables were explained later as private, necessary teaching for the disciples. A specific example of this is immediately given in Matt. 13:36 where, when the crowd is gone and the disciples come to Christ privately, they ask him to explain one of the parables he has been teaching. In this instance, it is the parable of the tares of the field, which the Lord explains to them in Matt. 13: 37-43. He ends the explanation of this passage with the phrase associated with the “Measure of Faith” principle:

MATTHEW 13

⁴³...Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

The Lord offers the disciples a few more teachings about the Kingdom in Matt. 13:44-50. Please take special note of this: in verse 51, the Lord makes sure to confirm that the disciples have understood all the things that have been taught to them:

MATTHEW 13

⁵¹... Jesus saith unto them, Have ye understood all these things? They say unto him, Yea, Lord.

This verse is extremely significant because, as we will see, the Lord never stops to make sure those “outsiders,” those who do not have “ears to hear,” have understood what He has taught them! No, our

Lord's concern is solely for "those who have heard." All those outside get the parables so "seeing, they will not see," and "hearing, they will not hear."

Following this intimate, educational interaction with the Lord's disciples, we are given another example of those "who are without" (Matt. 13:53-58). While you would think that those from the Lord Jesus' hometown would listen to him, would have "ears to hear" and listen to someone with whom they are familiar, we find that they are, instead, offended at our Lord. Consequently, the Lord does not give them any more miracles due to their obvious unbelief.

Matthew 14 signals the drastic, coming rejection of the Messiah and His Message as John the Baptist is put to death (Matt. 14:1-12). After this, the Lord Jesus begins a concerted focus of educating His disciples in the truth that He is, in fact, the Messiah. The miracles and the details that follow are all designed to help the disciples see that Jesus is the Messiah who was foretold to come in the writings of the prophets. It is not necessary for the purpose of this document to go through all these details, but we do want to stop to take a very high-level focus on Matt. 15:1-20.

MATTHEW 15

¹Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, ²Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. ³But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? ⁴For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. ⁵But ye say, Whosoever shall say to *his* father or *his* mother, *It is a gift*, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; ⁶And honour not his father or his mother, *he shall be free*. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. ⁷*Ye* hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, ⁸This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me. ⁹But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men. ¹⁰And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: ¹¹Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. ¹²Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying? ¹³But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. ¹⁴Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. ¹⁵Then answered Peter and said unto him, Declare unto us this parable. ¹⁶And Jesus said, Are ye also yet without understanding? ¹⁷Do not ye yet understand, that whatsoever entereth in at the mouth goeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? ¹⁸But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. ¹⁹For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: ²⁰These are *the things* which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.

All I want to point out here is the overall pattern: the Pharisees (who are "without") ask a question. (v. 1-2). The Lord Jesus refutes them from the Scriptures (v. 3-9). Next, the Lord publicly refutes the teaching of the Pharisees to the multitude (v. 10-11). This entire interaction is then used by the Lord as an opportunity to further educate His disciples in the truth (v. 12-20)! This is all by design.

It is paramount to note that the Lord never checks with the Pharisees to make sure they understood the Scripture. He does not give a thorough explanation to "the multitude." When it came to the

“multitude,” the Lord pointed out that the Pharisaical teaching was wrong...but He left it to the multitude to do what they would with that information! He did not give the multitude any more of an explanation of the parable at all. No! The Lord continues to act upon his established principle: Our Lord is using every single circumstance to continue to educate only his disciples, only “those who have ears to hear.” Those who are “without” receive nothing more.

In the midst of the Lord’s education of His disciples, a Gentile woman comes (in 15:21-28) as an example of faith, a faith that is in stark contrast to unbelieving Israel and to the slow-learning disciples. Because this Gentile woman had “ears to hear” and “eyes to see,” the request she brought to the Lord was granted!

Then the Lord continues to testify to His true identity of Messiah through the miracles he performs and the circumstances that arise (through the rest of Chapter 15 and the beginning of Chapter 16). When the Lord arrives at Caesarea Philippi, the lessons are finally, fully received:

MATTHEW 16

¹⁵[The Lord Jesus] saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? ¹⁶And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

We arrive at the point where the “200-level” class is finally completed! The disciples finally grasp what the Lord has been trying to show them! And the verses that follow this interaction are critical for us to note:

MATTHEW 16

²⁰Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

While this may seem odd that Jesus does not want His disciples to “spread the good news,” we must realize that this is consistent with the “Measure of Faith” principle. Those who have not truly “seen” when the miracles were exhibited and those who have not truly “heard” when the truth was set forth were not to receive any more! This information, that Jesus was, indeed, the Christ – this precious, critical information – was only for those who had “eyes to see” and “ears to hear.” The next verse illustrates the “Measure of Faith” principle as well:

MATTHEW 16

²¹From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Remember how the “Measure of Faith” principle works? The “200-level” course has been passed. The disciples finally understand that Jesus is the Messiah. Now it is time to move on to the “300-level” course! Now the Lord will start to educate the disciples in what being the Messiah is going to entail. “From that time forth” Jesus began to teach them about His coming rejection and death. But he could not start to teach this particular truth until the disciples had first received the foundational truth of His Messiahship. They had finally “heard” the truth, the particular lesson that the Lord had been trying to impart to them, that Jesus was the Messiah of Israel. Now, they were ready for the “next step” in their education...

Peter’s reaction to this “higher-level course,” this new truth (in 16:21) reveals the fact that he (and all the other disciples) needed further teaching on this “higher-level” concept. The disciples did not yet understand the fact that “Messiah” meant suffering, or anything other than Kingship and royalty. The

text that follows this incident (and especially the vision of the Transfiguration in Matt. 17) are designed to reinforce the truths of the Lord's Messiahship in the face of the fact that the Lord has predicted His coming rejection and death.

This brings us to a focal point in our discussion. In Matthew 18, there are two questions set forth. These questions are not from those without "ears to hear;" these questions are from those who are in the "300-level" class. Thus, the answers to these questions will not be parabolic responses, but will be full and complete answers because these questions are from those "who hear." Question #1 is from "the disciples" and this question is related in verse 1 of Chapter 18. Question #2 is from Peter and this question is related in verse 21. The first question is below:

MATTHEW 18

¹At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

The Lord's answer to this question sets the stage for many of the lessons going forward in the book of Matthew. The Lord's in-depth answer is related in verses 2 through 20 of Chapter 18 and Peter's question in verse 21 is a follow-up to what the Lord teaches in these verses. There is an absolute wealth of information in verses 2-20, but – for brevity's sake and to keep a focus on our topic at hand – I am only going to set forth the verses that will help us with this paper's ultimate goal:

MATTHEW 18

¹...the disciples [came] unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. ⁶But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!...

...¹⁰Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven. ¹¹For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost. ¹²How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray? ¹³And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that *sheep*, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. ¹⁴Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.

Here is the Lord's focus: He wants the disciples to become like little children! A little child does not care who is the greatest! A little child does not jockey for a position or try to establish himself or someone else as the leader! A little child just trusts! A little child will follow! A little child is humble! A little child wants to learn and accepts guidance! This is the attitude and perspective that the Lord Jesus wants His disciples to embrace!

A child is a picture of one who is great in the kingdom of heaven! And receiving and accepting a little child, one who has childlike faith, is the equivalent to accepting the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

Furthermore, the Lord Jesus was sent to seek out these children, these “little ones.” He will find them...He will protect them...and He will not let them go astray.

But the following aspect of the Lord’s answer must also not be missed: Our Lord is adamantly and fiercely opposed to someone “offending” those who become like trusting, childlike “little ones.” Starting in verse 6 and extending all the way through verse 20, the Lord belabors and expands upon His pointed perspective about those who offend the “children” of the kingdom, to what extent individuals should go to not cause offense to the “children” of the kingdom, how individuals should pursue and help those who are the “children” of the Kingdom, and in what way offenders of the “children” of the Kingdom should be disciplined. Peter’s question, in verse 21, relates to forgiveness for those who have caused these offences to the “children” of the Kingdom and the Lord’s response (in verses 22-35) establishes the perspective necessary for that process.

These principles I have highlighted must be taken forward when we consider what we find in Matthew Chapter 19. These principles are the context into which the text of Matthew 19 is set.

Our Lord has established a “Measure of Faith” principle: There are those within the faith who “hear” and there are those outside the faith who do not “hear.” Those within the faith are the Lord’s concern – He is focused on educating them. The Lord is not going to give more testimony to those who have rejected His previous testimonies and miracles.

Additionally, our Lord wants the disciples He is educating to become like little children. He is fiercely and adamantly opposed to those who would offend His “children.”

Now, we are ready to proceed with Matthew Chapter 19 and on into Matthew 20. I have broken down these two chapters below into three sections, each identified by a question asked at the beginning of that section. No verses are omitted.

A Question from the Pharisees

MATTHEW 19

¹And it came to pass, *that* when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judaea beyond Jordan; ²And great multitudes followed him; and he healed them there.

³The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? ⁴And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made *them* at the beginning made them male and female, ⁵And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? ⁶Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. ⁷They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? ⁸He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. ⁹And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery. ¹⁰His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry. ¹¹But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. ¹²For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves

eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

¹³Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. ¹⁵And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

A Question from an Unnamed Rich Man

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? ¹⁷And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God*: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. ¹⁸He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ²⁰The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? ²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. ²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

²³Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. ²⁵When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? ²⁶But Jesus beheld *them*, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. ²⁷Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? ²⁸And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. ³⁰But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

MATTHEW 20

¹For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man *that is* an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. ²And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. ³And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, ⁴And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. ⁵Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. ⁶And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? ⁷They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, *that* shall ye receive. ⁸So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them *their* hire, beginning from the last unto the first. ⁹And when they came that *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they

received every man a penny. ¹⁰But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. ¹¹And when they had received *it*, they murmured against the goodman of the house, ¹²Saying, These last have wrought *but* one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. ¹³But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? ¹⁴Take *that* thine *is*, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. ¹⁵Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? ¹⁶So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

A Question from a Mother of Two Disciples

MATTHEW 20

¹⁷And Jesus going up to Jerusalem took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, ¹⁸Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, ¹⁹And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify *him*: and the third day he shall rise again.

²⁰Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him. ²¹And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. ²²But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. ²³And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but *it shall be given to them* for whom it is prepared of my Father. ²⁴And when the ten heard *it*, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. ²⁵But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

²⁹And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. ³⁰And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David. ³¹And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David. ³²And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? ³³They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. ³⁴So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Three questions from three sources: one question from the Pharisees, one question from a rich unnamed man, and one question from a mother of two disciples. The structure of the text following each question is remarkably consistent and should not be overlooked.

In all three instances, there is a question asked which is refuted as incorrect thinking by the Lord Jesus Christ:

- In the case of the Pharisees' question, they asked if it was lawful to put away a wife for any and every reason. Jesus sharply rebuked the idea as a bad one by quoting from the Scriptures in Genesis, the Scriptures which lay the foundational truth for marriage.
- In the case of the unnamed rich man's question, he asked what good thing he could do to inherit eternal life. The Lord Jesus immediately refuted the idea that anyone could be good other than God alone.
- In the case of the question asked by the mother of two of the disciples, she asked if her sons could sit in places of prominence in the Lord's coming Kingdom. The Lord instantly refutes her by saying she's asking about things she does not understand.

In all three instances, there is further discussion and further rebuke, clarifying why the original ideas behind the questions were completely wrong. In each instance, the Lord is taking the restrictions, the requirements, and the bar for understanding to extreme heights:

- In the case of the Pharisees question, they debated the Lord's initial answer further by raising the fact that Moses had allowed divorce. Jesus not only firmly refutes their thinking, but takes the divorce restriction even higher, discounting Moses' provision and disallowing any divorce at all except for cases of marital unfaithfulness. No divorce. Only one exception.
- In the case of the unnamed rich man's question, the Lord quickly takes the requirements for eternal life to a very high bar (right after his initial response) by telling the man he has to obey [all] the commandments. The level at which this "high bar" is set not immediately understood and the Lord continues to show how high "the bar" is until ultimately the unnamed man walks away. The Lord makes it absolutely clear how extremely high He has set the bar by saying "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."
- In the case of the question asked by the mother of two of the disciples, the Lord clarifies that not only can't the positions being requested not be obtained by simply "asking," "worshipping," or familiarity with Christ, but it would entail something at the very least akin to following the Lord in His suffering and death! This is not something that is going to be granted by a mere mother's request! The Lord takes it even further by saying that only God the Father himself can know about the individuals who will be rewarded as such!

In all three instances, the disciples have an antagonistic reaction to the discussion that shows that they, too, have been infected with the bad idea that the questioner was expressing:

- In the case of the Pharisees question, the disciples react to the Lord's extreme prohibition of divorce by essentially throwing out marriage altogether! They say, "If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is good not to marry!" *If those are really the rules, a man shouldn't get married at all!*
- In the case of the unnamed rich man's question, the disciples react to the Lord's "camel through a needle" analogy by being "exceedingly amazed," and saying "Who then can be saved?" *If these requirements for eternal life are really true, how is anyone going to make it? (i.e., how is anyone going to earn it?)*

- In the case of the question asked by the mother of two of the disciples, the disciples hear about the discussion and are moved with indignation against the two brothers. The 10 disciples were not upset because James and John were being so selfish, they were upset because the two brothers had beaten them to the punch! James and John had cut in on their turf! They were most likely upset because they thought the two brothers may have made some headway obtaining a position they all wished to have!

Finally, in all three instances, the source of the initial question was completely forgotten as the Lord decidedly and completely turned His attention to the disciples...who needed further teaching to refute the idea which was presented by the question:

- In the case of the Pharisees question, the Lord, after verse 9, completely forgets about the Pharisees and focuses solely on the disciples reaction to the interaction. The Lord proceeds to work with the disciples directly in Matt. 19:11-15. The Lord's method of instructing His disciples here is very unique and I will say more on what the Lord does here later in this paper. Suffice it now to say this: the Pharisees didn't matter. The disciples did.
- In the case of the unnamed rich man's question, the unnamed rich man leaves the scene at the end of Matt. 19:22. He's gone. The Lord's instruction to the disciples on this topic goes from Matt. 19:23 all the way through Matt. 20:16. Again, I will review more on that teaching later in this document. But the unnamed rich man, like the Pharisees, is out of the picture.
- In the case of the question asked by the mother of two of the disciples, the mother is not mentioned again after her initial question. The conversation continued a bit with the two sons (James and John) in Matt. 20:22b-23. However, from verse 24 through to the end of the chapter, the Lord's focus is on teaching the entire group of disciples. The method of teaching the Lord uses is, again, very unique and it is important to the discussion of this paper. I will touch on that teaching later in this document. But, for now, note that "Mom" is gone too.

In summary, the similar structure that exists in the content following these three questions cannot be missed. The "Measure of Faith" principle the Lord Jesus established earlier in the book of Matthew is clearly being implemented. In each instance, the Lord does not exhibit any overt concern for the questioner. He is instead focused on how the disciples react to and learn from the questions and the interactions that followed.

Taking a closer look at some of the pertinent points from the discussions following all three questions will yield a wealth of understanding that can be applied to what the Lord is really doing over the course of these two chapters.

The Question from the Pharisees

First, let's start with the question asked by the Pharisees. The Scripture specifically says that the Pharisees question was meant to "tempt" the Lord. They had a perspective, a policy about marriage and it was a policy that was generally embraced by the people. Would the Lord dare to go against that "policy?"

The Pharisees wanted to know about being able to divorce your wife for "any and every reason." The Lord answers the question using the authority of the Scriptures, citing the verses from Genesis in regard to God creating mankind "male" and "female." He then quotes from Genesis 2:24 where the Scripture says the two become "one flesh." Finally, He makes several emphatic and absolutely non-negotiable conclusions from this Scripture passage: 1) The two – the man and his wife - are truly one,

2) they were made a union of one by God Himself, and 3) mankind has absolutely no right to put asunder that which God has joined together.

Can a man put away his wife for any and every reason? The Lord Jesus Christ's answer is an extreme and emphatic "No!" Absolutely not! No wiggle room. No extensive discussion. To think that any man should be able to divorce his wife for any and every reason is a completely and without a doubt wrong idea!

But the Pharisees continue to want some wiggle room. They go to the Law where Moses allows a certificate of divorcement. The Lord Jesus refutes this strategy as well, saying that Moses only permitted divorce because of the hardness of Israel's hearts, their refusal to accept the foundational truth about marriage. The Lord hearkens back to the creation account again to reinforce His initial answer and discount anything – including even the provision by Moses himself – that might appear to contradict the Lord's unwavering condemnation of divorce. He "doubles down" on His bold, uncompromising initial answer:

MATTHEW 19

⁹And I [the Lord Jesus] say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

This, again, is as straightforward as it can be. It is clear as crystal. No matter what the Pharisees say, no matter what the married man says, no matter what Moses himself said in the law, divorce without fornication is adultery. It is a sin. It is wrong. Period.

The answer to the question about allowing divorce for any reason is an absolute, unequivocal "No!"

But here is where the conversation turns: At this point, the Lord Jesus does not ask the Pharisees if they have "understood all these things." He doesn't ask the Pharisees if they will start teaching marriage properly now. He doesn't ask the multitude if they understand the Pharisees teaching has been wrong on this subject. The Pharisees are completely absent from the narrative from this point forward. The Pharisees, those who do not have "ears to hear" are not the Lord's concern...

The disciples have been listening to this entire interaction. And when the Lord Jesus establishes His position on the solemnity of marriage as a staunchly firm, black and white, immovable position, the disciples completely understand the ramifications and react:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁰His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry.

As mentioned previously, the disciples are ready to throw the "baby out with the bathwater!" They essentially reason that – if marriage is such a restrictive institution – it would be better not to be tied down with it at all! *Why risk it? Why put yourself in a situation that would bind you up in such an unforgiving way? Why should a man restrict himself in that manner?*

Why, indeed...

Based on the reaction of the disciples, it should be obvious that they themselves have absorbed or developed the same destructive idea that the Pharisees have about marriage! It is as if they completely agree with the Pharisees!

There should be an easy way out of marriage! And – if there is not an easy way out – it may be better to not jump into it in the first place!

So, here is the question: Is the permanence of marriage such a “detrimental” feature that it outweighs any potential benefits it might bring? Should that single characteristic of permanence be the primary deciding factor about whether to get married at all? Are the disciples thinking correctly?

Before we really attempt to pin down what is going on here, let’s observe the two events that follow this statement made by the disciples. The Lord’s method for dealing with the perspective His disciples are expressing at this point in time will at first seem extremely odd, but with further contemplation, it will be revealed to be absolutely genius:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁰[The Lord’s] disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife, it is not good to marry. ¹¹But he said unto them, All *men* cannot receive this saying, save *they* to whom it is given. ¹²For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

My first reaction to these statements was “*Why bring up eunuchs here? Is the Lord agreeing with the disciples that marriage just isn’t worth it? Is He saying that the disciples should consider taking the tough road of being a eunuch to serve their Lord?*” And the event that happens next initially seems to be completely out of place in this context:

MATTHEW 19

¹³Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put *his* hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven. ¹⁵And he laid *his* hands on them, and departed thence.

Let’s start with the Lord’s sudden desire to discuss eunuchs. In responding to the disciples horrified reaction to the utterly “unfair permanence” of marriage, you would expect the Lord to say something like, “*Well, you could always just remain single. That’s your choice!*”

But that’s not what the Lord Jesus says! He doesn’t go near the idea of just staying single at all! First, He essentially says, “*Yes, you are right. The restrictions on marriage are very tough. Not everyone can accept these rules.*”

Then, instead of saying, “*You could always just remain single,*” the Lord starts talking about eunuchs!

MATTHEW 19

¹²For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from *their* mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive *it*, let him receive *it*.

A eunuch is, of course, a man who has had his sexual body parts removed. The Lord essentially says, “*Yes, there are some who were born eunuchs, some were made eunuchs [such as young men who*

were captured in battle], and some make a personal decision to become eunuchs for the kingdom of God. This is an extremely tough concept to accept too. Some can receive it, some cannot.”

So what is the obvious, purely physical difference between just “remaining single” and actually becoming a eunuch? Isn’t it the fact that, with the eunuch, there is absolutely no physical way for that man to ever have sexual relations? With a eunuch, that person has lost the ability to experience physical intimacy with a woman!

However, consider this: under God’s “terribly restrictive” moral law, hasn’t the single person who decides against marriage lost the exact same thing? Can a single person under God’s moral law have intimate relations with a woman any more than a eunuch? No! This is why the Lord brings it up!

Doesn’t the Lord’s method of taking the discussion to extreme levels concretely establish His point?

*It is as if the Lord is saying, “Yes, marriage is very, very restrictive. It is very tough to accept that, but understand the difficulty of the choice you are proposing in foregoing marriage: The choice you are making is an extremely tough thing to accept as well. Will you really sacrifice God’s gift of physical intimacy with another human being? If you can accept that, then you are free to make that choice...but you have to realize what you are losing...you have to consider **everything** you are losing out on if you take this selfish perspective about marriage...”*

MATTHEW 19

¹³Then were there brought unto him little children...

Wouldn’t they lose out on children as well?

If the disciples “receive the [difficult] saying” of the Lord’s about marriage, that the institution is meant to be an extremely restrictive one, and the disciples use that as the sole criteria to reject marriage, to not participate in it, then they not only lose out on experiencing the blessing of intimacy that God created between the male and female, but they also miss out on the blessing of children!

Eunuchs “for the kingdom of God” have, of course, made that choice. They have made the difficult choice to forego intimacy with a female. They have consequently made that choice to forego the blessing of children.

Is it any wonder, then, at this point in the context, that...

MATTHEW 19

¹³Then were there brought unto him little children...

Where in this entire discussion about the marriage relationship has the ultimate purpose for marriage been brought up? Where in this discussion about marriage was the ultimate, unique blessing a marriage relationship can provide to people considered?

What about the children? Aren’t they a critical part of marriage? Did not God – at the beginning – cite the following as one of the primary purposes of the marriage relationship?

GENESIS 1

²⁸...Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...

The Lord has been dealing with the disciples here on their “Measure of Faith.” Because of the conversation with the Pharisees, because of the bad teaching and influence from the Pharisees, the disciples have a very dim view of marriage.

The Pharisees question was all about personal freedom. It was about selfishness. The Pharisees perspective on marriage was all about the man’s actions, the man’s freedom regardless of the woman...and the man’s freedom regardless of how any other person may be affected by this selfishness. It entirely discounted the design and purpose of marriage...and the disciples had bought into this concept.

The Lord Jesus brings the woman and God’s beautiful design of human intimacy back into the conversation. He, taking the conversation to an extreme, reminds them of the major positives that the marriage relationship brings...in spite of the necessary “sacrifices” to the man’s personal “freedom.”

While Moses may have allowed some latitude for man’s selfish hard-heartedness, this was not the original design for marriage. There was originally a much higher, extremely beautiful plan and purpose for marriage.

The disciples had been caught up in the Pharisees wrong perspective about the man’s freedom. The disciples reaction showed that the man’s personal freedom was all that they, too, were considering about this issue:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁰His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with *his* wife [that it is so restrictive], it is not good to marry.

Remember, also, that the Lord’s instruction to his disciples in Matthew 18 was to become like little children, for little children represent those who will inherit the Kingdom! If the faith of the child was set forth as the model for the believer, so doesn’t it stand to reason that a real, literal child would be the best foundation upon which to build a candidate for the Kingdom of God? And how can the disciples have children...if they are not married?

Furthermore, if one was married with children and decided to flippantly get a divorce solely because he had the freedom to divorce “for any and every reason,” doesn’t that man risk offending one of Christ’s “little ones?” Don’t you undeniably “offend” and harm the “little children” with divorce?

But this thought has not even entered the minds of the disciples! They look at marriage and say, “*Well, if marriage is so restrictive, it is not worth it to get involved with it at all!*” It is as if to say there is nothing that the marriage relationship will produce that is worth the risk! Not only is this discounting what a truly Godly woman can provide to a man, not only does it discount the blessing of intimacy that God has made possible between the male and the female, but it totally discounts the blessing that the children would be to the man in a marriage relationship! The perspective of the disciples discounts the opportunity to rear children of the kingdom of God (who already start out with a proper, childlike faith) by marrying, having children, and raising those children properly!

Yet all the disciples can say is, “*It’s probably not worth it!*” The Lord essentially says, “*Well, that may be true for you because those are the rules and they are not negotiable. You could always become a eunuch and serve the kingdom of God that way. Would that be easier? Could you serve the Lord and develop converts for the kingdom easier that way?*”

Then some little children come and want to be with the Lord! This is not a coincidence! This, too, like all of Scripture, is extremely instructive. What we see is that the reaction of the disciples is completely consistent with the horrible, wrong perspective they have just illustrated:

MATTHEW 19

¹³...and the disciples rebuked [those who brought the little children]...

In the perspective of the disciples, the little children are not important! The little children are not relevant enough to take up the Lord's time – or their time! In the minds of the disciples, the King has to be about the important job of building His Kingdom! There is real work to be done that the men must be about! Men have all sorts of critical work to do that must not be interrupted! It is absolutely inconceivable that the Lord Messiah Himself – or them – should have their time restricted by having to deal with something...as...insignificant...as...the little children.

This is the selfish attitude in the disciples that the Lord has identified through His interaction with the Pharisees and the subsequent discussion about the Pharisees' initial question. There is something the disciples needed to witness, a concept they need to be reminded of once again:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁴But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

The Lord does have time for children! The Lord does not want the children to be hindered when they would come to Him! And why? The Lord reiterates again that little children are the essence, the picture of what the kingdom of heaven is...and will be! And, if that is the case, is there anything more important than the "little children?" Could there be a greater priority?

The disciples are so worried about their own selfish work for the kingdom of heaven, all the many things the "real men" have to do! They are so focused on themselves and their own priorities that they miss the essence of the kingdom of heaven right in front of them!

The Lord Jesus Christ clearly shows His disciples that – in His mission to be about building the kingdom - He always has time for children! In fact, it is all about children...the young ones, the older ones, and the ancient ones! The Lord has time for any child! And...so... should...the...disciples!

Remember how this entire section of Scripture started with the Lord trying to teach His disciples (at the beginning of Matthew 18) that the disciples themselves needed to become like "little children?" He taught them that the childlike heart is where the qualifications for the kingdom begins, did He not? And He also said:

MATTHEW 18

⁵...whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

This is the teaching: There is absolutely no more fertile ground, no better place to grow, and no better place to harvest candidates for the Kingdom of God than in little children. And there is only one matchless, beautiful provision for creating children:

Marriage.

Viewed from that perspective, does marriage sound like such a terrible, restrictive thing that should be avoided?

The question about marriage from the Pharisees exposed a selfish attitude the disciples themselves had picked up, an attitude that the Lord Jesus needed to address. This selfish attitude that allows divorce for any and every reason focuses entirely on the man and his freedom. This attitude will not only negatively impact the man's spouse, but it will negatively impact the children of that marriage relationship. It will hinder his family members from coming to Christ. It is an attitude that completely negates what God has said about marriage, clouding the wonder and the beauty of God's design! The attitude of the disciples is an attitude that should not be present in any of the Lord's servants!

Is it any wonder, then, that we find the disciples literally hindering children from coming to Christ in this story? In this context? The symbolism wrapped up in this incident tell us much more than many words could tell us about the wrong perspective the disciples have adopted, a wrong perspective most likely adopted from the Pharisees. The Lord has to repeat the lesson He already taught His disciples in Matthew 18; that the Kingdom of heaven is made up of "little children." Our Lord and Savior is still trying to make that lesson "stick" in the minds of His own "little children"...

The Question from the unnamed Rich Man

This brings us to the story about the unnamed rich man. And the way Matthew introduces this particular story should not be missed...

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶And, **behold**, one came...

"Behold!" Having completed the narration about the debate on the Pharisees' question, Matthew draws special attention to what happened next. Another significant event is about to unfold in Matthew's narrative and it, too, was initiated by one who came to the Lord Jesus...with a question...

While the question asked by the Pharisees clearly betrayed their selfish attitude, their claim to the freedom to divorce for "any and every reason," the motivation behind the unnamed rich man's question is not often detected by most who read this passage. But the rich man's motivation is something the Lord Jesus calls out right away...

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶...**Good** Master [says the unknown rich man], what **good** thing shall **I** do, that I may have eternal life? ¹⁷And he [the Lord Jesus] said unto him, Why callest thou me **good**? *there is none good but one, that is, God...*

This text here shows that the Lord Jesus immediately perceived the rich man's wrong thinking and our Lord refuted that wrong thinking right away. In this rich man's eyes, teachers (or, as they were called, "Masters") can be "good." The rich man himself, then, believes that he can also do "good" things, things that are so "good" that he, too, in essence can be classified as "good." The word used here is the Greek word "agathos" (#18 in Strong's Concordance). This word "describes that which, being good in its character or constitution, is beneficial in its effect...God [for example] is essentially, absolutely and consummately 'good.'" [quoted from *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*].

So, can any teacher in this world (or anyone else for that matter) be innately "good" in their character and make-up?

Now, the obvious truth is that the Lord Jesus Christ *is* absolutely and consummately “good,” isn’t He? The Lord Jesus, being “one with the Father” is - in His very essence – thoroughly and completely “good!” Thus, viewed from this perspective, the unnamed rich man is completely right! Jesus Christ is a “Good Master,” is He not? Christ – and Christ alone - could legitimately be called a “Good Master!”

However (and this point is critical to understand), the unnamed rich man doesn’t know who the Lord Jesus really is! The rich man is not one of the disciples...the rich man is one who is “without!” The Lord’s answer confirms this! And, because the rich man doesn’t know who Christ really is, that changes everything! The rich man doesn’t know that Jesus is “from above!” He has not learned the lesson that the disciples have finally learned, that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God!” This fact about the situation betrays the rich man’s belief that a man – *in and of himself* – can be “absolutely and consummately good.” This, of course, is very wrong! And it explains why the Lord immediately refutes that very wrong idea...

MATTHEW 19

¹⁶...[the Lord Jesus] said unto him, Why callest thou me good? *there is none good but one, that is, God...*

This is the perspective that the unnamed rich man had completely wrong...and the real truth is as basic as it can get: there are NONE “good” (Rom. 3:10-12)! Only God is “good!” Because of the “measure” this rich man is taking about man’s potential “goodness” (and specifically because of the fact the rich man doesn’t know that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God”), the Lord Jesus here lumps himself in with the rest of humanity! The Lord lets the rich man continue to perceive Him as only a man in order to teach the rich man the lesson that needed to be understood. The Lord Jesus does this because, according to our Lord own word here, to call any man “good” is a misrepresentation of the truth! It is completely wrong!

But how do you get a man confident in his own righteousness to see this truth...if that individual truly believes that any man can – in and of themselves – be inherently “good?” Don’t you need to show that man how high the bar defining “good” is really set? Don’t you need to show that man he absolutely cannot achieve it?

Our Lord proceeds with the “Measure of Faith” principle He established earlier in the book of Matthew: “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” If this rich man’s “measure,” this rich man’s perspective, is that man can in and of himself be “good,” won’t the Lord “measure” that back to him? Won’t the Lord treat this rich man according to the perspective – the “measure” - the rich man has taken?

And that is exactly what the Lord does:

MATTHEW 19

¹⁷...[the Lord Jesus] said unto him...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

Doesn’t this rich man think he can do “good” things and, therefore, become “good” in and of himself? Doesn’t this man think that he can perform deeds that are so “good” that they provide God an obligation to give him eternal life? Yes! Then the Lord will respond to him accordingly!

The Lord Jesus essentially says, *“If you want to accomplish this, to reach the goal of being inherently and consummately good, here is the standard:...keep [all] the commandments!”*

This particular story was initially, incredibly frustrating to me the first time I really started to study it! When I read the Lord's answer to this rich man, I wanted to say, "No! Don't tell him that, Lord! You know he can't do that! He can't "keep all the commandments!"

ROMANS 3

²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...

GALATIANS 3

²¹...if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. ²²But [NO!] the scripture hath concluded all under sin..

The Scriptures clearly teach that the "commandments," i.e., the law, cannot secure anyone eternal life...because no one can keep them all! This is what initially frustrated me so much about the story of the unnamed rich man! The Lord Jesus knows that "by the deeds of the law there shall be no flesh justified in [God's] sight" (Rom. 3:20), yet he still tells the unnamed rich man that the path to eternal life is "keep all the commandments!" When you don't understand what the Lord is doing, it seems like our Lord is "hanging this guy out to dry!"

But then I started to understand and apply the "Measure of Faith" principle to this story...and it suddenly made complete sense...

The rich man's perspective – the rich man's "measure" – is that man can – in and of himself – be "good." So the Lord dealt with him according to his perspective. It was as if our Lord was saying, *"O.K., you think you can earn eternal life? Here's how you do it! Good luck with that!"*

Now, please don't misunderstand me here: I am not saying that this answer – this direction – that the Lord Jesus gave to this rich man was a false answer. It is a very true statement that, hypothetically speaking, if a man did "keep [all] the commandments," he would then be shown to be purely righteous. That man would be shown to be inherently and consummately "good." That man would qualify for eternal life, without the need for a sin sacrifice or anything like that. This would be what the Scripture calls "the righteousness that is by the Law" (Rom. 10:5, as opposed to the "righteousness that is by faith" in Rom. 10:6-11).

But what the rich man does not understand is that those commandments, those requirements to qualify for this "righteousness that is of the Law" were never given so that anyone could successfully "complete the program!" No! In contrast, these commandments, these requirements were given to Israel to show them the fact that man is not "good," man can never be "good," and that trying to be "good" will always fall short! The law does not "qualify" us for eternal life, it "disqualifies" us!

ROMANS 7

⁷...I had not known sin, but by the law...¹⁰And the commandment, which *was ordained* to life [i.e., it could have ended in eternal life, but – instead], I found [it to produce] death. ...¹³Was then that which is good [the commandments] made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.

When faced with the commandments, anyone who is being honest and truthful about themselves will realize that they do not measure up, that they do not meet the standard! The commandments should make them realize that they are not "good" at all!

The commandments reveal our sin...they don't reveal our "goodness." The commandments, when allowed to perform their intended purpose, break down our reliance of ourselves and cause us, like a little child, to have to depend on someone else to save us.

Our Lord here, in His response to the unnamed rich man, sets forth the commandments, the "righteousness of the law," as the standard in order to let the Law perform it's God-intended purpose on this rich man's pride.

MATTHEW 19

17...[the Lord Jesus] said unto him...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.

The standard is now established. The powerful, two-edged words of the Lord are going to start to do their work on this young man and expose his true perspective. The Lord has set before the rich man an absolutely unscalable mountain, an unattainable goal.

It makes the unnamed rich man flinch a bit; it starts to reveal the existing "cracks" in the rich man's armor of "goodness" and "righteousness"...

MATTHEW 19

18He [the rich man] saith unto him, Which?

Doesn't this question show the effectiveness of the Lord's words? Hasn't the two-edged sword, the words of the Lord (Heb. 4:12-13), started to expose this man's true thinking and betray his true motivation?

"Surely this 'good master' could not mean to obey ALL the commandments! Let's be a little bit more realistic! Let's narrow it down to a shorter, 'manageable' checklist because – once it is narrowed down to a manageable checklist – then I can surely 'check all the boxes.' This will prove me to also be a 'good person' and to have 'earned' my ticket to eternal life."

Does this guy actually think he can negotiate the standard? Does he think he can barter about what the standard is? Apparently so!

Again, how do you deal with a man like this? How do you get a self-righteous man to see that he cannot even accomplish a "short list" of commandments, let alone all of them which God would require for perfect righteousness?!?

The Lord Jesus does this in a way no one else can. Please note, the Lord Jesus is still dealing with the man on the "measure of his faith." The Lord does not refute the man's obvious perspective that following just "some" of the commandments would be acceptable to God, even though following all the commandments would be what the law really requires. No, the Lord deals with this rich man where he is at. He plays the 'game' according to the rich man's "measure," the man's world he has personally created. The Lord Jesus goes into this man's fantasy world where we can pick and choose to obey just "some of the commandments" to obtain eternal life...and the Lord uses the sword of the Word on the man right...where...he...lives...

MATTHEW 19

18...Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour thy father and *thy* mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

What has the Lord done here? Did the Lord compromise the standard? Did He omit part of the Law's requirements?

The Lord, in this circumstance, has granted the rich man's request! The Lord narrows down all the requirements of the law to six basic commandments! One may instantly object:

*"Wait a minute! Why should everyone else have the entire 10 commandments to obey as well as the rest of the law?! Isn't the entire law the standard for everyone else? Lord Jesus, you are letting this guy off the hook! You are letting him slide with only having to obey **six** commandments! That's not fair at all!"*

Now, obviously, the Lord Jesus is not compromising the standard for the "righteousness which is of the law." He is clearly up to something else...

Let's analyze the six commandments the Lord has chosen...and the infinite wisdom behind these selections. The Lord narrows "[all] the commandments" down to these six:

- Do not murder (commandment #6 of the 10, Ex. 20:13)
- Do not commit adultery (commandment #7 of the 10, Ex. 20:14)
- Do not steal (commandment #8 of the 10, Ex. 20:15)
- Do not lie (commandment #9 of the 10, Ex. 20:16)
- Honor your Father and Mother (commandment #5 of the 10, Ex. 20:12)
- Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18)

Which of these commandments would you say most people would rank as the easiest to obey?

Would it not be the first one? Have you killed anyone? Are you worried that you might someday kill someone? Most people could "check the first one off the list" pretty easily, couldn't they? That is, if they had not heard the Lord Jesus' "sermon on the mount" and how the true spirit of this Law should be understood.

If someone took this commandment – "do not murder" - solely by the letter of the law, it would be a pretty easy one to follow, would it not? Has the rich man done this one?

Check the box! Of course the rich man has done this one! That's easy!

Now which one of these commandments would be the second easiest to follow?

Wouldn't you say the second commandment the Lord puts on this list would be it? That is, again, assuming you are just going on the "letter of the law" – the technical definition of adultery - and had not heard the Lord's "sermon on the mount" clarifying the true spirit of this law. This commandment is a little harder to keep than the first one on the list, but it is still fairly easy to follow for one pursuing righteousness. Has the rich man done this one?

Check that box too!

Next, wouldn't you say it is a little harder not to steal (the third commandment on the list) than it is not to commit adultery (the second commandment on the list)? And, following that, isn't it a little harder not to lie (the fourth commandment on the list) than it is not to steal? Don't these commandments get increasingly more difficult to follow the further down the list the Lord gets?

The Lord seems to start the list out with easy directives...choosing commandments which one pursuing his own self-righteousness could easily “check off the list.” It seems the Lord is initially playing right into the rich man’s hand! The rich man wanted a checklist...and the Lord appears to be giving it to him! You can imagine the rich man mentally checking the boxes off in his head as the Lord starts through a list like this. However, by design, the process of “checking the boxes” should happen a little slower each time a new commandment is added to the list...

When you get to the fifth commandment the Lord lists, it gets much harder to quickly “check the box,” doesn’t it? While you can definitively know if you murdered someone or not, or if you have committed adultery or not, or if you have stolen or not, or if you have lied or not, “Honoring” someone is quite a bit more vague, isn’t it? It gets harder and harder to “check the boxes” the further you go down the list, doesn’t it?

Do you see the purposeful intent by the Lord here? Do you see how He is increasing the pressure on this man? While the earlier commandments selected by the Lord are much easier to follow and to “check off the list,” the very last one on the list is no doubt the absolute hardest, most impossible requirement there is!

This is a brilliant strategy! And it completely follows the “measure of faith” principle!

This rich man wanted a checklist! The man wanted to quickly – in a single conversation - justify himself before the Lord as a good person! He wants to be recognized for having done “good” things so he himself can be labeled as “good!”

So the Lord complies with the rich man and gives him a checklist!

And the Lord Jesus does it in a way that accommodates the rich man at the start, but gradually applies more and more pressure on the man as the Lord goes through the list! You can almost imagine the man in his mind, feeling very confident as the Lord begins...

- Murder? *Give me a break! That’s easy! I’ve never done that. Check! I am good!*
- Adultery? *Of course not. Would never do such a thing. Check! I am good!*
- Stealing? *Well, no. All my business has been on the up and up. So, no. I am still good!*
- Lying? *Hmm. Maybe not full disclosure...but not an outright lie. I’m O.K. I’m still good!*
- Honor Mom & Dad? *Honor? Well...I treat them pretty good. The Pharisees said I had done all I needed to do in regard to them, so I have completely satisfied that requirement. So... I can say I honor them! Yes, I’m good! (see Matt. 15:3-6, which was the common thinking of the day).*

Every one of us would approach such a list in this same manner, would we not? As someone goes through a list that gauges our performance, every single one of us would mentally justify or condemn ourselves as each standard was established. And we all want to judge ourselves in the best possible light, don’t we?

In writing out my list of the rich man’s hypothetical reactions, I did not even try to put words inside of his mind when it came to the last commandment on the list. The Lord told the rich man to “love his neighbor as he loves himself.” Isn’t that an extremely tall order? With this one, final commandment, aren’t we back to the realm of an “unscalable mountain?”

Maybe the rich man wondered for a moment why the Lord suddenly went outside of the 10 commandments. Those who focus on justifying themselves will often compare their performance to the standard of the 10 commandments, conveniently ignoring the rest of the Law. We generally feel

the 10 commandments are hard enough and we are more than willing to settle for those as the Lord's complete standard (as if the rest of the Law given by the Lord does not matter). The Lord Jesus, in taking this strategy, plays right into the thinking of the rich man. He not only focuses on the 10 commandments, but starts by listing the easiest ones for a self-righteous person to perform first! Then, at the very end, the Lord goes completely "off the list" – outside of the 10 commandments! Not only does the Lord suddenly jump outside the familiar list, He goes outside the list and chooses the hardest commandment there is! This strategy should have given even the most self-righteous individual at least a pause...right?

But here is the important question to consider: Did this affect the rich man at all? Did this man really stop to consider whether he truly loved others the way he loves himself? Who knows how he actually marked this final one off his "checklist"...but the plain record shows that he did check it off! He did justify himself! The rich man actually thought that he had loved his neighbor as much as he loved himself! Thus, he arrogantly says:

MATTHEW 19

²⁰...All these things have I kept from my youth up...

The important question here is: do you believe him? Do you believe this rich man loves his neighbor as much as he loves himself?

This story will eventually show that the rich man was not willing to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor. Whether it was the specific possessions the rich man had or the monetary wealth wrapped up in those possessions, the story clearly shows the rich man would not turn that wealth over to others, neighbors or not. Why? Because he wanted to keep that wealth for himself. That wealth was his. He did not want others to have it, did he?

Again, does this man "love his neighbor as much as he loves himself?"

You would have to say that the truth is that this man did not love his neighbors as much as he loved himself! And, yet, here is the man boldly touting his "goodness!"

MATTHEW 19

²⁰...All these things have I kept from my youth up...

Analyze this from a different perspective: I have challenged the idea that the rich man's statement here is actually true. I believe that when the rich man says he has followed all the commandments, he is wrong. I believe the story reveals the rich man has been blinded by his own arrogance.

But let's also approach it from the opposite scenario: if this statement by the rich man were really true, and the rich man had kept the (six necessary) commandments required by the Lord for "eternal life," then, by the Lord's own word, the rich man has already secured that which he seeks, has he not? He has already achieved "goodness!" He has already seized upon "eternal life!" Would that not be the case, if the man's statement were actually true?

But what happens next reveals the fact that, even though this rich man has boldly justified himself in the face of these six commandments, the truth is undeniable. There is something inherent in man that will prick his conscience, something that tells him that, despite what he perceives, despite his rationalization, despite his claims, there is still something that is...not...quite...right. He knows in his heart of hearts that he has not, in fact, arrived at "goodness."

MATTHEW 19

²⁰...what lack I yet?

Why would the rich man ask this question? If this man truly already satisfies the strict parameters for righteousness set forth by God Himself, what could he possibly lack? Why in the world would he feel that he has...still...not...quite...made it?

This question shows that the rich man does know something is still lacking even though he is not fully admitting it! In his mind, the rich man has been able to rationalize away each commandment, each requirement that he perceives the Lord demands of him. In his mind, he has categorized each one in a way that allows himself to say he has met the criteria for each one. But he knows that something is still not right! He is fooling himself!

So the Lord has to show this man that he has not “arrived,” that he is not “good,” that there is something inherently wrong with him...just like there is something wrong in every person on the face of the earth! The Lord needs to show this man that he does not “love his neighbor” as much as he loves himself! And He proceeds to do just that...

MATTHEW 19

²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go *and* sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come *and* follow me. ²²But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.

The words of our Lord do their work on the young rich man. They lay bare the fact that, in spite of what this rich man believes about himself, he is not “good.” In him, as in all mankind, there is a selfishness, a selfishness that puts ourselves over our neighbors. It is a selfishness that requires us to hold onto what we deem is ours, to grab for that which we feel we deserve.

As with the other two stories we are considering, the questioner is rebuked. The idea, the thought that the questioner brought to the Lord is exposed to be a wrong and destructive idea. The questioner disappears from the narrative and the Lord Jesus uses this opportunity to teach his disciples the “real” truth that diametrically opposes the thinking brought by the questioner.

The evil in the idea brought by the unnamed rich man is that man in and of himself can be meritorious, that man can achieve a level of “good” that obligates God to respond by granting that person eternal life. “Behold,” nothing could be further from the truth...

The Lord seizes upon the opportunity: The disciples have heard the entire interaction. They have been exposed to the wrong thinking set forth by the rich man and they have seen how the Lord Jesus “ran him off” with some precisely worded dialogue. The Lord does not pursue this one who is wandering away because the rich man is not one of His “children.” The Lord, instead, needs to make sure that His disciples, His true “children,” think correctly about this extremely critical issue:

MATTHEW 19

²³Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

The Lord, of course, purposely makes a statement to His disciples that is extreme. He “takes the discussion to the next level.” He uses an analogy that is so absurd that it leaves no doubt about what He is actually saying: that it is absolutely impossible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. There is no way. None. Nada. Zilch. Zip. Zero. It cannot happen. The pathway is impossible.

The disciples, of course, react accordingly:

MATTHEW 19

²⁵When his disciples heard *it*, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved?

The disciples have “connected the dots” here. Abraham was very rich. Isaac was very rich. Jacob, too, was very rich. Solomon was the richest man in the Bible. The Old Testament Scriptures were filled with promises from the Lord that He would make His followers an extremely prosperous people (Gen. 26:12, Deut. 8:18; 28:2-8 11-13, 29:9; 30:9, Josh. 1:8, 2 Chron. 26:5, Job 36:11, Ps. 1:1-3; 9:9; 23:1, 5-6; 25:12-13; 34:9-10; 35:27; 36:8; 37:3-4, 18-19, 25; 65:4, 11; 66:12; 68:6, 19; 84:11; 107:38; 112:1-3; Prov. 3:9-10; 4:18; 6:30; 8:21; 10:3, 22, 24; 11:25; 13:22; 15:6; 22:4; 28:10, 20, 25; Eccl. 5:19; Isa. 1:19; 30:23; 43:18-21; 45:2-3; 48:17; 51:3; 55:11; 58:11; Jer. 29:11; 33:9, Joel 2:25-26; Haggai 2:8, Zech. 8:12, Mal. 3:10-12, Mal. 4:2)!

Thus, the disciples logically reason: if the rich can’t be saved, if those blessed by God with prosperity cannot be saved, aren’t we all hopeless? Isn’t eternal life completely impossible for every single one of us?

The first thing to note is that this reaction by the disciples betrays the fact that they, just like the rich man, had bought into the idea that individuals had to achieve a standard of performance to merit eternal life! The disciples had just heard the Lord destroy the pathway that they, too, had come to believe led to eternal life. The disciples are suddenly in great distress because they now feel helpless! They have no hope! They realize the impossible task mankind is facing in it’s attempt to...earn... eternal life.

How are we going to do this? If it is like a camel going through the eye of a needle for even those blessed by God, we can’t make it either! Who can be saved? There is no way anyone can do it!

And this is exactly the correct perspective that every man needs to take to receive eternal life...

Yes, the Lord’s powerful words have done their work. And the Lord Jesus shows that the disciples have learned the lesson correctly:

MATTHEW 19

²⁶But Jesus beheld them...

This isn’t just Jesus “looked at them.” Jesus “beheld” them...He understood what they were thinking. His words had done the work they were meant to do and He realized He had them right where they needed to be! He then taught them the true, proper lesson they needed to learn from this entire encounter with the rich man...the lesson that the rich man did not comprehend in the slightest:

MATTHEW 19

²⁶...Jesus...said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

This is what the rich man had wrong and the thing the Lord wanted to make sure the disciples understood: Man cannot do it! Man cannot make himself “good!” It is “impossible” for man to make himself acceptable to God! Only God can do this! The Lord has used the question from the young rich man, a very wrong perspective presented by that rich man but shared by the disciples, to correct His own disciples wrong thinking and teach them vital truth!

Doesn't this story, too, hearken back to the lesson the Lord taught about little children and the kingdom of God? A little child is not concerned about earning its way; a little child is wholly dependent! Does a little child strive to earn its way and pay the rent? No! Little children wholly depend on their parents to protect them, to shelter them, and to provide for them! And, if the Lord would have his disciples become like little children to be great in the kingdom of God, wouldn't this apply to how they approach salvation as well? Doesn't that mean they should just depend on God to make salvation possible? And depend on God for everything?

MATTHEW 19

²⁶...with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.

Did the rich man's attitude of wanting to prove himself worthy reflect the attitude of a little child? No! Not at all! But his question presented an opportunity for the Lord to teach his own. He essentially showed the disciples that the rich man's idea, an idea with which the disciples themselves had been infected, was wrong. They needed to “let go...and let God” in regard to salvation.

Having had his most important question (about salvation) answered, Peter then considers the overall interaction. He observes that they (he and the other disciples) had, in fact, complied with the Lord's specific admonition to the rich man to sell everything and give the money to the poor. It raised a natural question:

MATTHEW 19

²⁷Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

This question does not contest the idea that God would have to provide the means for them to get through the “eye of the needle.” It simply says, “O.K., we depend on God to do the impossible and provide us eternal life. But does the fact that we left everything we had to follow you account for anything?” This is a completely legitimate question...and the Lord Jesus goes into a teaching about the rewards that is very important for those who have made the sacrifice of forsaking all and following Him:

MATTHEW 19

²⁸And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. ²⁹And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. ³⁰But many *that are* first shall be last; and the last *shall be* first.

It is not necessary – for the purposes of this paper – to go into detail about the rewards that the Lord outlines for those who sacrificed to follow him. Suffice it to say, however, that the Lord makes it very clear that our approach to rewards should entail the same childlike attitude that our approach to salvation should have. The Lord Jesus, in the passage directly above, brings up the phrase “many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” He goes on to explain this concept in detail in Matt.

20:1-16. He wants to make sure that the disciples approach rewards like a child. Others in the kingdom will receive some of the same rewards the original disciples receive...even if the others worked for a shorter time than the disciples did. But the point our Lord's explanation brings out is that it will all be completely fair. Again, we have to trust that God will do the right thing with our rewards...just like a little child has to trust that their parent will treat them in a righteous manner. This is the theme of the "first shall be last and last shall be first" teaching.

Next in the narrative, in Matt. 20:17-20, the Lord once again reminds his disciples that He will be betrayed, crucified, and resurrected after they go up to Jerusalem. This will play into the next question before us...

The Question from the Mother of Two Disciples

With the teaching about rewards established and the reminder about the Lord's impending death set forth, the stage has been set for the third and final "outsider" question of our analysis. This question comes from the mother of Zebedee's children (James and John). This question, like the others, is a question built on wrong thinking:

MATTHEW 20

²⁰Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshipping *him*, and desiring a certain thing of him. ²¹And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.

This is a question about status, position, and honor. The mother of the two disciples feels that, if they come worshipping and they leverage her family's relationship with the Lord Jesus, that it can somehow secure a position of prominence in Christ's kingdom. The Lord's rebuke of this idea is the shortest and most blunt of all the rebukes we have considered:

MATTHEW 20

²²But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask...

In short, you don't have any idea what you are talking about! These are things far beyond your comprehension! To even ask this shows you don't have any idea how this thing is supposed to work!

But – again – how do you deal with someone that is thinking this way? How do you get them to see the folly of this thinking? And – more importantly – how do you make sure that your disciples are not going to be continually infected with this thinking?

Again, the master of all thought and language changes the narrative to exactly where it needs to go:

MATTHEW 20

²²...[Jesus obviously says to James and John] Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

The first thing that Jesus has to correct is the fact that the disciples are thinking about positions in the eternal kingdom at all! The Lord Jesus just finished telling these disciples not to worry about who is going to receive what reward in the Kingdom (Matt. 20:1-16)! He has also just finished teaching these disciples (in Matt. 20:17-20) that they were not going up to Jerusalem to take the throne, but to face real betrayal, mocking, scourging, and crucifixion! Did they forget that? Did they not believe Him? Why are they talking about royal positions at a time like this?

The two disciples have finally embraced the fact that Jesus is the Messiah...and their mother seems to be prompting them to let their minds wander about what that will mean to them in the future! Their minds have wandered so much and they have become so self-focused that they have stopped listening to what the Lord is saying to them! So the first thing the Lord has to do is get their attention back!

“Are you ready to go die? Because that is what you need to be thinking about! Remember what I told you back on the road to Jerusalem? There is real peril in front of us! You need to think about that before you start thinking about any rewards! Can you go through the very real peril that will potentially lead to the rewards you are contemplating?”

And – once again – I think the disciples receive the lesson. I believe their thinking was properly adjusted by the Lord’s piercing words. The two disciples don’t pursue the “seats in the kingdom” thing any more. They just answer the question:

MATTHEW 20

²²...They say unto him, We are able.

This is the proper thinking that the Lord wants to see at this time! Focus on what is before you. Nothing else. The other things will take care of themselves. This is the desired, child-like perspective that is needed. Just...trust...God.

The disciples have considered the Lord’s challenge...and responded appropriately. *“If suffering is before us, if that is truly the case, O.K., Lord. We’re ready. We will do it.”*

The Lord’s tone softens with this response from James and John. The Lord then takes the conversation back to the idea of rewards...and answers their question the best way He can:

MATTHEW 20

²³And [the Lord Jesus] saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father.

The Lord, of course, appreciates their willingness to sacrifice themselves. It is as if He says, *“Yes, I know you mean it. You are good servants. I know you will indeed have to sacrifice yourself in the same way that I am having to sacrifice myself. But – dear friends – I cannot grant you what has been asked. That is out of my hands. It is something that is beyond your comprehension.”*

Again, the solution is that these two disciples will have to just trust God the Father...like a little child would trust their parents to do right by them.

The mother – who asked the question – is long gone from the narrative. The Lord has used the wrong idea embodied in the mother’s question to teach two of His disciples the correct thinking. Now the opportunity for the whole group comes into play as the disciples react to what they have heard about this interaction with Zebedee’s family:

MATTHEW 20

²⁴And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.

Were the other ten disciples indignant with James and John because they thought James and John did not have a childlike attitude? No! The ten, of course, were indignant because they were afraid that James and John had made some headway on securing those two desirable seats! They, too, have the very same wrong idea in their heads about rewards! The Lord, again, uses the opportunity to set their thinking straight, just as He did with James and John:

MATTHEW 20

²⁵But Jesus called them *unto him*, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. ²⁶But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; ²⁷And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: ²⁸Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

It's about being a servant. It's about taking your eyes off the rewards, the status, and asking what you can do for others. A little child, after all, never tries to exercise dominion over others...but he can choose to be a good helper to the rest of his or her family.

The Lord's teaching here corrects the wrong thinking introduced by the mother of James and John, a wrong concept that had spread through every one of the disciples minds. What is interesting is that there is no confirmation in the narrative that the disciples all received this teaching. But I think it can be understood. There is one significant story that follows which wraps the entire interaction up...

MATTHEW 20

²⁹And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. ³⁰And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David. ³¹And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, *thou* Son of David. ³²And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? ³³They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. ³⁴So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

Isn't it appropriate, in this context, that there are *two* blind men? That Matthew tells us a story about *two* blind men right after a story about *two* confused disciples (James and John)?

The two blind men are sitting there and they hear that Jesus was passing by. They cry out to the Lord! They cry out to Him and, in their cry for help, reveal the only thing they know about Jesus – that He is the “Lord, the Son of David.” He is the Messiah. He is the King.

Isn't that the state of the disciples at this point, including James and John, after the confession in Matthew 16:16? They, too, believed that Jesus was the Messiah, that He was the “Son of David.” But their eyes were still blind in certain areas...

The multitude tries to rebuke the two blind men, much like the disciples tried to rebuke the little children for wanting to come to the Lord and much like the 10 were indignant with James and John. But the childlike faith of the two blind men cause them to cry out even more. They cry out, totally depending on the fact that the “Son of David” will take care of them and open their eyes.

What a testimony!

The “Son of David” approaches and asks:

MATTHEW 20

³²...What will ye that I shall do unto you?

And the two men, in complete confidence that the Lord can – and will care for them – say:

MATTHEW 20

³³...Lord, that our eyes may be opened. ³⁴So Jesus had compassion *on them*, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him.

The two disciples of the Lord – James and John – need only to come to the Son of David, believing that He is the Messiah, believing that He will take care of them. If they have wrong thinking, the Lord will have compassion on them...and He will “open their eyes.” And that is what the Lord did!

Conclusions from the context

All that has been presented above has been presented to show the context of the unnamed rich man’s question in Matthew 19:16 and the context of the Lord Jesus Christ’s answer to that question in Matthew 19:17. The entire interaction which occurs between the unnamed rich man and the Lord Jesus is part of an intricate structure: a structure that follows extremely vital instructions the Lord Jesus Christ made to His disciples in the early verses of Matthew 18.

In the beginning of that chapter, the Lord Jesus instructed His disciples to “humble themselves like little children.” He told them that those who “humble themselves like little children” would be “great in the Kingdom of heaven.” The Lord Jesus Christ’s desire was that His followers, those who had “ears to hear,” would embrace this basic, saving childlike faith.

But that passage in Matthew 18 was also quite emphatic about something else: The Lord went to an extensive length to point out that He had no tolerance for those who would offend these “little children” of His. He said that it would be better for someone to have a millstone tied around their neck and be cast into the sea than for them to offend one of Christ’s “little ones.”

As the narrative moved into Chapters 19 and 20 of the book of Matthew, we saw three questioners step forward with very bad ideas. These were bad ideas that were sure to “offend” Christ’s “little ones” should His disciples become ensnared by them.

First came the Pharisees with their question. Then came the unnamed rich man with his question. Then came the mother of two disciples with her question. And the symbolism could not be more profound...

Where do the bad ideas originate that can “offend us” and throw us off course? Sometimes they come from religious leaders, leaders that we should be able to trust to properly guide us in the things of God. We are often infected and overcome by the bad ideas that we hear from our church leaders, ideas that are repeated over and over until we don’t even question them anymore...

Sometimes we are infected by bad ideas that come from those who are prominent in our society. We see those that have built up their status and wealth in this world and we are more apt to be taken in by their perspectives on the things of God. It happens to all of us.

Unfortunately, the most common source of the wrong ideas we have about God come from right within our own families. Most of the time our families have very good intentions and are just passing on ideas that they themselves have unwittingly embraced during their own lives. But – in the end – our own families, too, can infect us with ideas that are very, very wrong.

Thus, in Matthew 19 and 20, we have three who “cause offenses” to the Lord’s “little children.” And the Lord Jesus adamantly and fiercely fights to defend His children’s minds from the wrong ideas being presented to them.

It is a bad idea to become so self-absorbed that you frivolously divorce your wife, essentially harming your ministry and your testimony towards your wife and children, who are of immeasurably great importance to our Lord and Savior.

It is a bad idea if one thinks that in and of themselves they can become “good enough” to enter the kingdom of heaven instead of just – in childlike faith – letting God accomplish that which is for us totally impossible.

It is a bad idea to think that we – in and of ourselves – can merit or win some type of favor with God about whom we know and understand so little. To think that we can achieve some type of merit before our God’s eyes is to show that our own eyes are blind, that we still need to be further enlightened about the awesome God we serve.

These bad ideas – whether they come from the church, whether they come from influential people in our society, or whether they come from even members of our own family – are offences to us. They are ideas that are damaging to us.

All three questions were absorbed with self; whether it is the Pharisaical selfishness in regard to an individual’s freedom to do that which he chooses (regardless of it’s effect on others), the influential individual in society’s selfishness in promoting their own worth and goodness, or the family’s desire to be placed in prominent positions for their elevation of personal status. It is all of self and each idea is the complete antithesis of how children think.

The Lord Jesus Christ – in great care for His beloved children – defended His disciples against these offensive ideas. These three questions are presented in Matthew’s record so that we can witness the Great Shepherd’s love, care, and protection for His children. The record shows how He lovingly refutes each error and properly educates His own in what is really the truth.

It is a testimony to the great God we serve – and a magnificent lesson in the fact that we – like little children – just need to trust Him!

This paper started by asking this question: can the Lord’s answer to the rich man in Matthew 19:17 be used to show how the Jews were to be saved? Did the Lord Jesus teach that the viable Jewish pathway to eternal life was “keeping the commandments?”

I think you can see that the answer to both questions is a resounding “No.” Using this passage to set forth the commandments as a true, attainable means of Jewish salvation would be a direct contradiction to the true spirit of what the passage really teaches.

Those who teach that the Lord Jesus was advocating “keeping the law” as a legitimate, attainable means for the rich man’s eternal salvation (like I previously did) make the assumption that this rich man is being presented in the Scripture as an example of one who has come to the end of

their efforts and is legitimately seeking salvation from their sin. Does that attitude accurately characterize this unnamed rich man? Is this rich man repentant for his sin and seeking God's salvation from it? Or is this rich man set forth as an example of one just trying to prove their own "goodness" and worth?

Certainly, the entire context of this passage demonstrates that this rich man is not set forth as an example of how we are to approach God! No! The complete context shows that this man is set forth as an example of how we are not to approach God! Approaching God in this manner will always end in condemnation, rejection, and sorrow!

What also needs to be considered is the fact that there are other, extremely clear passages in Scriptures that reveal exactly how the Jews were to be saved during this time period. Passages like the ones quoted below are totally unambiguous and completely straightforward. We can start with the message of salvation that was set forth to the Jewish nation by John the Baptist:

JOHN 3

³⁶He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

There is no ambiguity here. What did John the Baptist set forth as the criteria for "everlasting life?" Faith. Faith warrants everlasting life. A lack of faith warrants wrath. It is really that simple. The Lord Jesus Christ continued the same message during His own ministry:

JOHN 3

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Again, the requirement is only belief. There is no "faith plus works" here, there is no "faith plus the Law" here. The formula is so clear that "little children" can embrace it: Belief (and belief alone) = everlasting life. Other passages are equally as clear:

JOHN 5

²⁴[Jesus said] Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

JOHN 6

²⁸Then [the crowd] said...unto [the Lord Jesus], What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? ²⁹Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.

JOHN 6

⁴⁰[Jesus said]...this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day.

JOHN 6

⁴⁷[Jesus said] Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

JOHN 11

²⁵Jesus said...I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: ²⁶And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die...

This is the “righteousness which is of faith,” the only righteousness which is realistically attainable for mankind. And it is a righteousness that has always been set forth as man’s proper way back God...

Shortly after the very beginning of time, right after the fall of Adam, the two methods of approaching God were clearly established. One (Abel) approaches God through God’s method, in childlike faith, offering up that which God Himself provided (a lamb - Gen. 4:4, Heb. 11:4). The other (Cain) approaches God in their own defined way, the way of self, offering up the fruits of his own labor (Gen. 4:3). Those who approach God through the “righteousness of faith” are accepted. Those who approach God offering their own labor are rejected.

Abraham himself testified of this. When Abraham exercised faith in God’s word, believing that he would have a son in his old age, the fruit of that faith (Isaac) was accepted and was the recipient of blessing. When Abraham and Sarah grew impatient and began to doubt God’s eventual provision and put forth their own effort, their own “plan” for producing a child (Ishmael), the fruit of that effort was rejected (in regard to the blessing).

The types are plain. Childlike faith – the way of Abel – is blessed. Self effort – the way of Cain – is rejected and condemned.

Was the rich man approaching God in the way of childlike faith? Or was he approaching God in order to be rewarded for his own self effort?

Does, then, the story of Christ’s interaction with the young rich man reveal our Lord’s commitment to establishing “keeping the commandments” as an attainable means to secure eternal life or does this story reveal a strategy of using the law “lawfully,” a strategy of taking specific parts of the law in order to convict a man of his failure to comply with this law?

Was the Lord’s purpose to show the rich man he would be accepted by his attempts to keep the law or was the Lord’s purpose to show that this rich man’s efforts to keep the law and establish his own “goodness” would eventually be the very issue that would continue to separate this man from the God he claimed to serve?

Certainly this story testifies to the fact that those who attempt to achieve “goodness” or reward through the law will only find themselves walking away from our Lord in shame. Is that not the lesson being taught here? All of the “red flags” in the context of this story are there to guide us, to show us what the Lord is really doing during that interaction.

The Lord answered the unnamed rich man, telling him that he needed to “keep the commandments” because the Lord in His wisdom needed to refute the unscriptural idea this rich man was postulating: that man in and of himself could be “good enough” to legitimately fulfill the “righteousness which is of the law.” The Lord used the Law for it’s intended purpose – to convict and “stop the mouth of the sinner” (Rom. 3:19). And the Law certainly worked the way it was intended: in this case, it “convicted” and “shut the mouth” of a self-righteous rich man.

To lift the rich man's question (and the Lord's initial answer to that rich man) out of its context to prove that the Lord taught an attainable salvation by "keeping the commandments" is to do violence to the real lessons that the Lord is trying to communicate to us in this context.

May we always seek to take the approach that Miles Coverdale took:

*"It shall greatly help ye to understand the Scriptures if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, **with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after.**"*

Some notes on the parallel passages in Mark 10 and Luke 18

While the focus of the foregoing study was an analysis of our Lord's conversation with an unnamed rich man detailed in Matthew 19, it would be remiss not to mention what are commonly called the "parallel accounts" of this story in the Gospel of Mark (Chapter 10) and the Gospel of Luke (Chapter 18). Both Mark and Luke tell the story of our Lord answering a question about eternal life that was asked by an unnamed rich man. While many of the details in the stories related by Mark and Luke match the story we have reviewed in Matthew's Gospel, there are also many differences between the accounts, both in the details of narrated conversation itself and the events that are described as the context of the conversation. Both the similarities and the differences in these accounts need to be taken into consideration.

First and foremost, it must be understood that the differences in the Gospel records of this conversation are not indicators of a lack of the Holy Spirit's inspiration; On the contrary, an in-depth study of each of these two "parallel accounts" will reveal even further and utterly unique truths drawn out of the Lord's conversation which are applicable to the aims of each individual writer. Indeed, a lengthy exposition could be written about each individual account in both Mark and in Luke - just as this study has been prepared on the narrative from Matthew.

For the purposes of this particular paper, I will only set forth some points I feel are pertinent to the arguments I have set forth.

**While the story details may differ, the nature of
the question and the answer remain the same**

The primary thing I would point out in regard to these "parallel accounts" is the fact that, while the narration of the conversation differs, and the context surrounding the conversation differs, the nature of the question and the answer remain the same. In other words, the question in all three accounts is a question that seeks to determine the level of man's "goodness" necessary to achieve eternal life. In all three accounts, the Lord uses the Law to expose man's inability to be "good," to "shut the mouth" of the sinner (making him go away), and correct the perspective of the disciples, whose minds had been infected by the same type of thinking. The Lord's focus in all three Gospel accounts is eliminating this bad perspective because it is not a "child-like" attitude; it is an attitude that is in direct conflict with the mindset our Lord is trying to instill in His disciples.

All three accounts of this story reinforce these basic premises, although they do it in different ways, with slightly different focuses, and with different supporting words and stories. Mark's Gospel account, for example, includes this unique statement that doesn't appear in Matthew or Luke:

MARK 10

²⁴ ...Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!

In the foregoing study on Matthew's gospel, we indicated how the structure of that context showed that the Lord was protecting His "children" from the "offences" – the bad ideas – of others. Here, in Mark's gospel, we see this idea reinforced by the fact that the Lord, in this unique interaction, actually calls His disciples "Children!"

In Mark's gospel, I believe that the rich man's love of money is emphasized a bit more than in the other accounts. In Mark, the rich man uses the word "inherit" (Mk. 10:17), while in Matthew's account, he does not. Mark mentions the fact that the Lord said, "Defraud not" (Mk. 10:19) instead of mentioning the fact that the Lord said "Love your neighbor as yourself" (as in Matt. 19:19). And, again, in Mark, we find the unique narration of the Lord saying, "Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God!" While Matthew and Luke both discuss the fact that it is "hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven," Mark is the only one who specifically mentions the fact that the rich man trusted in his riches! Again, each gospel brings out unique and wonderful blessings that could only be gleaned by studying each individual account in depth!

However, my point here is that none of the unique features in these parallel accounts would change the answer to the question this document has set out to answer.

The account in the book of Luke can also be used to reinforce the points made in this document. In the foregoing study on Matthew, we very firmly took the position (based on the text that is there) that the motivation of the unnamed rich man was not to succumb to God's method of salvation, but to justify his own "goodness." The parallel account in Luke completely reinforces this concept in a way that is not very subtle at all! In the context of Luke's gospel account, he "sets the stage" for the Lord's conversation with the rich man by including the following:

LUKE 18

⁹And [the Lord Jesus] spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: ¹⁰Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. ¹¹The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹²I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. ¹³And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as *his* eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

The fact that this statement (in verse 9) and this parable (in verses 10-14) precedes and sets the stage for the Lord's conversation with the rich man in the Gospel of Luke could not be more profound! This shows that Luke told the story about the unnamed rich man to also establish the point that one trusting in themselves will be rejected (abased) and that those who humble themselves (like a little child) will be the ones who will be accepted!

Right after this passage of Scripture in Luke 18, the young children are brought to the Lord (verses 15-17). This event parallels with Matthew 19:13-15. Then, directly after the children are brought, we have the story of the Lord's conversation with the unnamed rich man (Luke 18:18-23). Luke presents a different, but equally powerful way to set the proper context for this story!

In conclusion, while the details about the Lord's conversation with the rich man presented in each Gospel account differ, the spirit of the question and the purpose of the answer we have studied are very consistent. All three gospel accounts reveal a gracious, caring God who wants all people of all ages to come to Him, not in arrogant self-promotion or conceit, but in humble, child-like faith. Just as the Jews simply needed to trust Christ then, let us just trust Him - and trust Him completely - with every area of our lives today. He is more than willing and more than able to watch over, defend, and take care of us!

Appendix II

Salvation “under the law”

The Lord’s direction to the unnamed rich man in Matthew 19:17 to “keep the commandments” as a means to “enter into life” has been so often taken out of its context (and therefore removed from the real lesson that this story means to convey), that many still stumble over what they need to do to be saved. I myself have certainly caused “offense” by teaching this passage incorrectly in the past.

The stumbling point has always been whether the Law or “works” play any part at all in salvation. Dispensational teachers, of course, properly emphasize that – “today” - we are saved by grace, “through faith; and that not of [ourselves]: *it is* the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). However, some of these same teachers will also teach the concept that in other ages, men were saved through a different means! They will call it “faith + the Law” or “faith plus works.” They emphasize that, in other ages, men were born “under the law” and this affected their means of salvation. Christ Himself, of course, was “born under the law:”

GALATIANS 4

⁴But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law...

However, as pointed out in this document on pages 35 and 36, what did this “Son...made under the law” teach in regard to obtaining eternal life?

JOHN 5

²⁴[Jesus said] Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

JOHN 6

⁴⁷[Jesus said] Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

Did the Lord teach something incorrect here, since He was “born under the Law?” No! John the Baptist, too, was born “under the law.” What did he teach in regard to obtaining eternal life?

JOHN 3

³⁶He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

Please do not misunderstand me: I fully recognize the fact that the Lord Jesus was subject to the law (Gal. 4:4) and, indeed, taught those with Him to be subject to the law (Matt. 23:1-3). But what dispensational teachers need to recognize is this: when it came to obtaining eternal life, the Lord never pointed one of His Jewish children towards the Law! He always said “believe,” i.e., “faith!”

Resurrection and inheritance in the Kingdom of God (i.e., eternal life) has always been associated with who is Abraham’s seed...and who is not (Gen. 12:7). The law never cancelled out the promises to Abraham (Gal. 3:17). Whether we are speaking about ourselves today or a Jew who lived long ago under the law of Moses: those who have the “faith of Abraham” are his seed (Rom. 4:16, Gal. 3:7, 29) and that simple, basic faith in God’s word, then, gives us eternal life (Gal. 3:9, Col. 1:12-13).