



LESSON 16

Jesus confronts the rich young ruler

MATTHEW 19:16-26



To receive eternal life, depend on Jesus alone.



“Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me’” (Matt 19:21).

Supporting Truths

1. Do not depend on yourself.
2. Depend because you are not good.
3. Depend by following Jesus alone.
4. Depend because only God can save.
5. Eternal life is being alive with God.

Objectives

1. Explain what was wrong with the man's question.
2. Compare yourself to the Law's requirements.
3. Explain why Jesus told the man to sell everything.
4. Describe Jesus' illustration and the disciples' reaction.
5. List the four terms this passage uses for eternal life.

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Lesson Summary

As Jesus began to travel toward Jerusalem, a rich young ruler fell at Jesus' feet and asked what he could do to receive eternal life. Instead of leading the man in a simple sinner's prayer, Jesus exposed the man's pride and selfishness. The man went away sad because he depended on himself and loved his wealth instead of trusting and loving Jesus alone. Jesus explained that no one can be saved by his own efforts, but only by the power of God.

Spotlight on the Gospel

God's law reveals sin, but it cannot save. Its purpose is to pronounce a guilty verdict on all humanity, for it is impossible to perfectly obey God's law. The law is necessary and good because it shows a sinner his sin and helps him see that he needs salvation. This is why Jesus pointed the rich young ruler to the 10 commandments; and this is why the rich young ruler departed from Jesus' presence without salvation: he refused to acknowledge his sin.

LAST WEEK



**Jesus is gloriously
transfigured**
Luke 9:27–36

THIS WEEK



**Jesus confronts the rich
young ruler**
Matthew 19:16–26

NEXT WEEK



**Jesus teaches the
parable of the equal
wages**
Matthew 19:27–20:16

JESUS' MINISTRY IN GALILEE

JESUS' JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM

Lesson Commentary

To receive eternal life, depend on Jesus alone.

The gospel of Matthew shows that Jesus is the **Messiah, the expected King and Savior** (Matt 1:16). Yet despite Jesus' teaching and miracles, most people rejected His message. They received free food, but not Jesus Himself (John 6:35, 66). They embraced the glory of the kingdom, but not the cost of following the King (Matt 16:21–24). They wanted a king, but only one they could control (John 6:15). They did not receive, follow, and submit to Jesus because they did not see how great Jesus is or how helpless they were. To keep us from that deadly error, Jesus warns us that eternal life is only for those who follow Him in total dependence.

Deny your own goodness (19:16–20)

A man came to Jesus with a question (Matt 19:16), but notice when he came. Jesus had left Galilee for the last time before briefly staying in Perea across the Jordan from Judea (19:1). Now He was traveling toward Jerusalem, where He would die about two weeks later (Mark 10:17, 32–34). Also, right before the man came, Jesus declared that the kingdom of heaven is reserved for those who, like little children, are completely dependent (19:14; 18:3–4). Therefore when the man asks, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life" (19:16), there is a major problem. He does not realize that he is as helpless as a newborn and that he needs Jesus Himself (Luke 18:15).

The man wants **eternal life**, but what does this mean? First, it is eternal, life that begins in this life and never ends. Second, Jesus calls it "life" (Matt 19:17). Just as a body with physical life responds to its physical environment, so also a person with eternal life is responsive to spiritual life, knowing God truly and personally (John 17:3). Third, eternal life is the **kingdom of heaven** or **kingdom of God** (Matt 19:23–24). It is life under Christ's glorious and eternal reign (Rev 21–22), a gift received only by those who allow Christ to be their king. Fourth, eternal life is being saved (Matt 19:25). It is salvation from sin, Satan, sadness, enmity,

judgment, disease, death—from every aspect of the curse. This salvation is reserved for those who realize they need to be saved, those who submit to God in total devotion and dependence.

But the young man did not understand eternal life because he did not see his need to be saved or his need to know God personally. He did, however, understand that something was missing from his life. Even though he was rich, young, powerful, moral, and highly respected (19:22; Luke 18:18), he ran up to Jesus and fell at His feet (Mark 10:17). Still, as good as the man was, he did not understand that he fell far short of God's definition of "good." Jesus explained that it is God, not man, who defines what is good (Matt 19:17). Humans may construct their own standard of "good," but it is nothing like God's. We substitute evil for good and good for evil (Isa 5:20) in an attempt to justify our own sinful desires. But man-made standards are not pleasing to God. He alone is holy (1 Sam 2:2), and He alone is the standard of good and evil.

THINK ABOUT IT

A person can be sincerely religious, yet not have eternal life.



Since God's law reflects God's character, Jesus quoted the 5th through the 9th commandments (Matt 19:18–19; Exod 20:12–16), plus the 2nd greatest commandment that sums them up (Matt 22:39; Lev 19:18). Jesus chose these commands that deal with human relationships because the way we treat people reveals what we think about God (1 John 4:20). Unfortunately, the young man thought that these laws covered only outward behavior. He did not see that God's law also concerns the heart (Ps 51:6), that anger is the same as murder and lust the same as adultery (Matt 5:22, 28). Blinded by pride, he thought he actually loved his neighbor as himself. Eternal life eluded this man because he depended on his own goodness and not on Jesus.

Devote yourself to Jesus (19:21–22)

When Jesus gave one more command (19:21), he was not teaching salvation by works. He was exposing the young man's heart, showing what this man really

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loved and trusted most: possessions. Wealth is an idol both of the rich and the poor. We all want more. We love money because it gets us what we want. We trust money because it gives us security. We think possessions give us control, but more often than not, our possessions control us. Jesus was not explaining how this man could earn eternal life. He was warning him that it was impossible to serve two masters (6:24). To live in Christ's kingdom, we must serve Christ alone.



THINK ABOUT IT
"You cannot serve God and money" (Matt 6:24).

It is impossible to follow both wealth and Jesus. The path of wealth is the path of prideful pleasure and self-confidence. But the path of Jesus is the path of humble self-denial (16:24)

and trusting submission to the Father (1 Pet 2:21–23). But why must we follow Jesus to have eternal life? Because Jesus is eternal life (John 14:6; 1 John 5:20). Why must we follow Jesus to enter God's kingdom? Because Jesus is the King. The young man did realize that the life he was asking for was standing right in front of him.

Unfortunately, this man was controlled by his wealth, not by Jesus, so he went away grieving (Matt 19:22). He wanted eternal life, but he did not want Jesus. He wanted to be good, but he did not want to admit he needed Christ's goodness on his behalf. He wanted



THINK ABOUT IT
What is your greatest love?

Jesus to teach him, but he would not let Christ control Him. He showed by his refusal that he was seeking eternal life out of love for himself, not out of love for Jesus.

Depend wholly on the Father (19:23–26)

This lesson was for Jesus' disciples too. They had tried to turn the children away (19:13), but they had no

problem with a rich man interrupting Jesus. They too needed to learn that salvation depends on God, not on human achievement. Salvation is not for those like the rich man, who think they can gain salvation by their own strength or resources. It is for those who, like infants, depend wholly on the Father.

Just as camel—the largest animal in Palestine—cannot go through the eye of a needle, so the rich cannot enter heaven (19:24). It is impossible. But why single out the rich? In those days, wealth was seen as a sign of God's blessing. It was seen as evidence of God's favor and approval. The Jews thought the rich were the most likely to be saved. But if it is impossible for the rich to be saved, as Jesus said, then no one can be saved (19:25).

To be clear, Jesus said it again: with men, salvation is not just hard—it is impossible (19:26; Rom 3:20). Even our best behavior is like dirty, nasty clothes (Isa 64:6). We cannot even repent unless God intervenes (2 Tim 2:25). We cannot come to Jesus unless the Father draws us (John 6:44). We are blind unless He opens our eyes (2 Cor 4:4–6). We are spiritually dead—not just sick or weak—and totally lost in our sins, unable to do anything to come back to life (Eph 2:1).

Then comes the best news ever: what we cannot do, God can (Matt 19:26), for "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" (Ps 3:8; Jonah 2:9). You can resist His power, like the rich young ruler, and die without joy. Or you can depend on His power like a little infant, and live with joy, for it is because of the LORD's faithful love that we do not perish (Lam 3:22). Look to God, and rest upon His strength: "For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is from him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken" (Ps 62:5–6).

THINK ABOUT IT
Salvation is exchanging living death for dying life.



Lesson Outline

To receive eternal life, depend on Jesus alone.

AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE



To receive eternal life . . .

1. Admit that you are not good (19:16–20).
2. Make Jesus your boss (19:21–22).
3. Depend on God's power (19:23–26).

AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE



1. Deny your own goodness (19:16–20).
 - A man thinks he can earn eternal life (19:16).
 - Jesus said God sets the standard for what is good (19:17).
 - Jesus used the law to reveal God's standard of good (19:18–19).
 - The man was blinded by pride (19:20).
2. Devote yourself to Jesus (19:21–22).
 - Jesus told the man he must serve Him alone (19:21).
 - The man loved himself more than Jesus (19:22).
3. Depend wholly on the Father (19:23–26).
 - It is impossible for anyone to save himself (19:23–25).
 - Only God has power to save (19:26).



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Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

1. **What did the rich young ruler want?**
Eternal life.
2. **How did he think he could get eternal life?**
By doing something good.
3. **Had he really kept all the laws Jesus told him?**
No. The Law shows that no one is good according to God's standard.
4. **Who is the only one who can save us?**
God.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

1. **Who came to Jesus with a question?**
A rich young ruler, someone who was well-respected by people.
2. **What is eternal life?**
It is not just living forever (quantity). It is a new kind of life (quality), when a person lives with God. Jesus is eternal life, because Jesus is the way to be with God.
3. **Why did Jesus tell the man to keep the commandments?**
To see if the man would confess that he was not good enough.
4. **What did Jesus tell the man to do with his wealth?**
He told him to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.
5. **Why did Jesus tell him to sell everything?**
To reveal what the man loved and trusted most—himself or Jesus. To get rid of the wealth that was keeping the man from loving and trusting Jesus alone.
6. **What did Jesus tell him to do last?**
“Follow Me.” Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Only those who love and serve Jesus alone receive eternal life.
7. **How hard is it for a rich person to get into God's kingdom?**
It is impossible, like a camel going through the eye of a needle.
8. **Since only God can give eternal life, what should you do?**
Depend on God like an infant depending on his mother or father—not trying to earn it by your behavior.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

YOU CANNOT GET THROUGH

Jesus said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to be saved. Bring a needle to class and some thread with various thicknesses. Ask the children which ones they think you will be able to thread through the needle. Bring out a thick rope and ask the children whether you could thread it through the needle. Then show them a picture of a camel. What can be harder than getting a camel through a needle? In today's lesson, we will see that Jesus said something was even harder than getting a camel through the eye of a needle.

WHO WANTS TO GO TO HEAVEN?

Who wants to go to heaven? How hard is it to get to heaven? In today's lesson, a certain animal will tell us about getting to heaven. Watch and listen carefully to find out what animal it is. As you teach the lesson, paste the various parts of a camel picture onto the board until by the end of the lesson the children can see the complete camel. Ask them what this animal tells us about heaven.



ILLUSTRATE

LADDER & MIRROR

Bring in a ladder and a mirror. The young ruler thought God's law is a ladder to climb up in order to get to God. Can you ever climb up to God by your own efforts? No (Isa 64:6). But Jesus used the law like a mirror—when we look in that mirror, we see how sinful our reflection is (Rom 3:20). The young ruler looked at himself in the mirror of God's word, but his pride blinded him from seeing his own sinful reflection (Jas 1:23–24).

OR THE LEOPARD HIS SPOTS?

Bring in a stuffed leopard (or show a picture of one). Ask the children, "Can a leopard change its spots?" (Jer 13:23). Then ask, "Can you get rid of the sin in you?" Explain that just as a leopard cannot take his own spots away, so we can never be good enough—never keep the law perfectly enough—to get rid of our sin.



APPLY

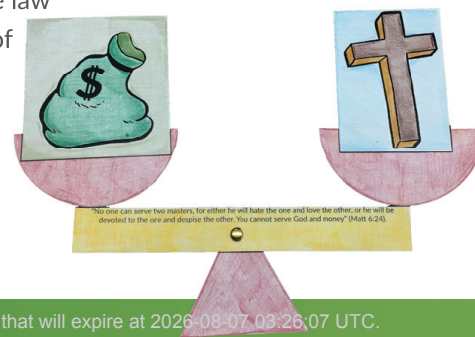
WHAT DO YOU VALUE MOST?

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft page, cardstock, crayons, glue stick, brad, scissors.

Directions: Photocopy the craft page on cardstock. Color it with crayons. Then cut every part. Use the brad to connect the verse with the base of the scale. Glue the scale pans on each side of the scale. Then glue the money on one side and the cross on the other.

What Do You Value Most?
See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1



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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

SKIT: CAN YOU GET TO MY HOUSE?

A man comes asking whether he can come to your house to visit. Explain that he could never get there, but he insists he wants to try. Explain that you live far away (he could walk). You live very far away (he could drive). You live across the ocean (he could swim). You live on the top of a mountain, etc. Jesus once met a man who wanted to know how to get to God's "house," and Jesus had to show him that he could not get there. After the lesson, end the skit by telling the man that he cannot get to your house, but if he asks you, you can take him. Only Jesus can take us to be with His father; we cannot get there on our own.

MIRROR, MIRROR

Put dark stickers on your face. As children arrive and ask about the stickers, act like nothing is wrong. Finally, tell the children you know how to settle this: a mirror. Look at your face in a mirror and confess that the children were right. God's law is just like a mirror: it reveals our sin (Rom 3:19–20).



ILLUSTRATE

BOOTSTRAPS

The rich young ruler was attempting to "pull himself up by his own bootstraps." He sought something he could do to earn salvation. However, as Jesus revealed, salvation is impossible apart from the power of God. Bring boots to class and show the children the impossibility of pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps.

THE STANDARD

Illustrate "standard" by using height: Am I tall or short? How about compared to NBA players? What about gymnasts? What about Dutch people (the tallest people group, where 6 feet is average for men)? What about Indonesians (the shortest people group, where 5 feet 2 inches is average for men)? What is the standard for "good"? Perfection—God Himself.



APPLY

IMPOSSIBLE/POSSIBLE

See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1.

Materials: Craft sheet, cardstock, crayons, yarn, scissors, glue stick.

Directions: Photocopy the craft page on cardstock. Color it with crayons. Cut the two sides of the bookmark and glue them together. Fold the end with the writing "With men, salvation is . . ." and make a hole on the other side. Use a piece of yarn to make a lace for the bookmark.

*Impossible/Possible
See Year 3 Craft Book, Book 1.*



AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

SUNDAR SINGH, PART 1

Sundar Singh was a Sikh in India who became a Christian and traveled throughout India, Tibet, and China spreading the Gospel. On one of his travels, he met a sadhu (a Hindu holy man) who was sitting surrounded by four fires on a hot day. Sundar asked why. The sadhu said, “I am disciplining my body. I surround myself with fire all summer, and in the winter I stand for hours in the icy river below.” Sundar asked, “And what have you gained from this discipline?” “Nothing,” the sadhu replied. “I do not hope to gain or learn anything in this present life, and about the future I can say nothing.” He was trying hopelessly to earn eternal life. Story from *Sundar Singh: Footprints over the Mountains*.

HE WENT AWAY SORROWFUL

Today we’re going to meet someone who came to Jesus asking how he could become a Christian, but he went away sad—he did not receive salvation. Does that seem strange? Why did Jesus not lead the man in a simple sinner’s prayer? We’ll find out why in today’s lesson.



ILLUSTRATE

MINT CONDITION

Is an expression used to describe the condition of collectible items (action figures, dolls, toys, stamps, records, or comic books, etc.). Bring in one of these collectible items and talk with the children about how their condition affects their value: each defect lowers the item’s value. However, this is not the way it works with sin. Even just one sin renders us totally unacceptable to God (Jas 2:10).

EXTREME OPPOSITES

The Apostle Paul saw what the young man did not. Paul was very much like this young man, having every reason to boast in the flesh (Phil 3:4), but God opened Paul’s eyes to see that his own goodness was worthless (3:7). He did not trust in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness of God that comes through faith in Christ (3:9).



APPLY

SUNDAR SINGH, PART 2

On another of Sundar Singh’s travels, he came across another Hindu sadhu. His feet were tied with a rope, and he was hanging upside down from the branch of a tree. Sundar asked, “Why do you do this? What is the purpose of such torture?” “People are very surprised to see me hanging head down from a tree, but this is my method to serve God and do penance. When I am hanging upside down, I remind myself and others that all of us are bound by sin and lead lives that are, in God’s eyes, upside down. I seek to turn myself upside down again and again until in the end I stand upright in the sight of God,” the sadhu explained. Once again, Sundar struggled with the Hindu idea of penance. “It is true,” he said, “that the world is upside down and its ways are sinful. But I ask you this: Can we ever hope to right ourselves through our own strength? Must we not turn instead to God, who alone can set right what is wrong and free us from evil thoughts and desires?” Story from *Sundar Singh: Footprints over the Mountains*.