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### *The Gospel According to Matthew*

### *Salvation is of the Lord*

*October 27, 2019*

**Sermon Text:** Matt 19:16-30

**Scripture Reading:** Romans 10

Mat 19:16-30 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

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

(18) He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, (19) Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

(20) The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” (21) Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”

(22) When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

(23) And Jesus said to his disciples, “Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”

(25) When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, “Who then can be saved?” (26) But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

(27) Then Peter said in reply, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (28) Jesus said to them, “Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (29) And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. (30) But many who are first will be last, and the last first.

In Luke's account of this incident we find out one more detail regarding this young man:

Luk 18:18 And a ruler asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

What does it mean that he was a “ruler”? William Hendriksen summarizes the 3 Gospel descriptions:

The stranger here introduced is called by Matthew a *young man*, by Luke a *ruler*, and is by all three synoptists described as a *very rich person*, one who owned much property. Therefore the composite title *rich young ruler* is generally applied to him. He was probably one of the officials in charge of the local synagogue. [New

Testament Commentary, The Gospel of Luke].

That this was not some superficial question he asks, we see in Mark:

Mar 10:17 And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

He is zealous for the Law of God so that he might have “eternal life.” But as we saw last time, his zeal was wrongly directed:

Rom 10:2-3 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

It is interesting that his question concerned what he must do to inherit *eternal life*. This tells us that the Jews knew about this doctrine, and they knew it from the Old Testament:

Isa 9:7 Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with

righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

**Dan 2:44** And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever,

**Dan 12:2** And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

An everlasting kingdom requires everlasting citizens, and therefore, eternal life. On this point they were correct, but as to how to obtain it, they were on the wrong road called the Law.

Now, what I primarily want us to consider this morning is the reason for the disciples' reaction after the man went away, unwilling to obey Jesus' commands to sell all he had and give to the poor. Listen again:

**Mat 19:23-26** And Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. (24) Again I

tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." (25) **When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?"** (26) But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

The disciples were products of their day, Just as we are. To them, it was apparently unthinkable that a person like this rich young ruler did not qualify for the kingdom. And notice that they equate entrance into Christ's kingdom with "being saved." Saved from the coming judgment. Saved from the destruction of this wicked world.

It is a bit of conjecture I suppose but I believe it is safe to assume that this rich young ruler was the model of "a good man," who was surely accepted by the Lord. I think this is why the disciples were so shocked at Jesus' words. *If it were not possible for this man to enter the kingdom of God, then what chance does anyone have?* That was their thinking.

It seems that the young man's claims were not considered hypocrisy by the people. He was able to publicly say to Jesus:

Mat 19:20 The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”

And so the disciples’ question of Jesus – “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus did not soften the terms at all:

(26) But Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.”

Is it not true today that there are many, many men and women who are just certain that God thinks highly of them, and who are assumed by others to be eminently holy people, the finest Christians you could ever know? They are in our churches. Some have celebrity status. Other church members want to emulate them. And yet:

Mat 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ (23) And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

And so it was with this young man who everyone so admired for his piety. It turned out that he did not love God or his neighbor, but in fact worshipped the idol of his wealth.

*Who then can be saved?* If it is impossible for someone as “good” as this man was thought to be, then how is it possible for anyone to be saved? That is the question and it is a very good question which Jesus answers in a twofold manner:

- With man it is impossible
- With God, all things are possible

In other words, *salvation is fully and entirely of the Lord, not of man.* How is it that anyone is saved? Only because the Lord effects a miracle in them, electing them to life and raising them from the dead.

I want to spend the rest of our time this morning illustrating this truth by summarizing what John Owen writes in his commentary on Hebrews chapter 6 where the Apostle is giving warning to all of us about the danger of apostasy:

Heb 6:7-8 For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. (8) But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to

being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

The “rain,” that is, the gospel, had come to this rich young ruler. But fruit was not borne. Why? How can anyone be saved? Here is what Owen says (and I am summarizing and contemporizing his language to make it more understandable)-

“Seed is the principle of all living things. Their life and growth are all due to the vital seed from which they spring. So it is with the gospel and spiritual life. Believers grow, increase, and bear fruit because the word of the gospel came to them and they became God’s planting.

The earth, or the land is the only fitting and proper medium for seed to be sown into and it alone is capable of being farmed and cultured. God has not made any other substance capable of receiving seed so that it may grow and bear fruit. We do not sow seed into the air or into the water. It was of the earth alone that God said, *let it bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind, whose seed is in itself* (Gen 1).

The earth alone has this passive power to be made fruitful; it has that matter in it which, being cultivated and sown may bring forth fruit.

*And so it is with the souls of men with respect to the seed of the gospel. Their minds, and these alone, are a ground capable of receiving it and of nourishing it.* Man’s mind is the only ground given God’s care and cultivation. We are given, as human beings created in God’s image, the mind, the will, and the affections capable of receiving the gospel and bringing forth its fruits. This ground, this “earth” is to be found in *no other creature on this earth.*

However, the earth by and of itself brings forth nothing that is good and useful. God originally blessed it and sowed it with all seeds. But after the fall, once all creation was cursed because of sin, the womb of the earth was cursed with barrenness and now left to itself it brings forth only thorns, briars, and noxious weeds in such abundance that they choke out what is good and useful. And it is especially so when the rain does not fall upon it.

*And such are the hearts and minds of men by nature. They are dark, barren, unprofitable, and which, without God’s cultivation, will never bring forth the fruits of righteousness that are acceptable to God. All that of themselves they can bring forth are noxious weeds.*

Among the weeds of unfertile earth some are painted, colorful, and beautiful...but they are still weeds. And among the fruits of fallen, unregenerate man, some may carry a more pleasant appearance than others, but *they are all, spiritually considered, sins and vices still.*

The minds of all men, by their fallen nature, are universally and equally barren with respect to fruits of righteousness and holiness acceptable to the Lord. There is a natural difference among individual people as to their intellectual abilities. Some are of much sounder judgment than others. Some have a natural inclination to gentleness, sobriety, and modest while others are morose, lustful, and perverse. And so as to natural natures, there are great differences among people.

*But as to the fruits of spiritual holiness and righteousness, all men by nature are equal and alike. When it comes to living for God, there are no more sparks of grace in one person than in another.*

And so, in regard to the rich young ruler, in respect to his "righteousness," he was no more an eminent saint than the worst and lowliest evil tax-collector, pagan, or harlot.

Owen continues now to cause us to consider this matter called *rain*:

The theme of "rain" in the Bible is remarkably big. The land of Canaan was not like that of Egypt because Canaan's land drank water of the rain of heaven (Deut 11:10f). And it is, says Scripture, the nature of the earth to drink in the rain, receiving it gladly. The Psalmist writes that the Lord visits the earth and waters it (Ps 65:9-10). When there is drought, it is presented to us in Scripture as a judgment of the Lord for sin.

Now, by "earth" the Apostle intends us to understand it as a symbol of the minds and consciences of men. And the rain is the Lord's administration of His Word, the gospel, upon their minds. We see this for example in Deuteronomy 32:

Deu 32:1-2 "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. (2) May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb.

The rain of His Word then, like rain upon the dry earth, is that by which God waters and refreshes the barren souls of men and women, communicating to them all things that will enable them to be fruitful. *The*

*word of the gospel is in every way to the souls of men as rain is upon the barren earth.*

Therefore, the word of the gospel, in the preaching of it to men and women, being compared to rain, is an effect of the sovereign power and pleasure of God. There is nothing in nature that God assumes to his prerogative than this giving of rain. He causes rain to fall in one place, and not another. It begins and ceases at His command just as in the days of Noah. He sends it upon the good and the wicked as a demonstration of His goodness, the rain even serving as a witness to His existence.

And so it is in this picture of rain upon the earth that we see that the conversion and salvation of God's elect depends not only upon His sending of the rain of His Word, but upon His blessing the earth to bring forth a crop.

In His sovereignty, therefore, God causes the rain of the doctrine of His Word to fall upon one place and not upon another, at one time and not another.

1Co 3:6-7 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. (7) So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.

And THIS is the reason the rich young ruler went away grieving, unwilling to follow Christ and give up his riches. This is the reason others immediately left everything the moment Christ said to them, "Follow Me."

This is the "impossible thing" that Jesus was speaking of to His disciples. This is the thing that is impossible with man, and that is what the Jews, including the rich young ruler, had not understood. With man, salvation is impossible. Try as he might, by his own efforts and merit he will never enter the kingdom of God. *We must be born again and it is only the Lord that can effect this new birth.*

Now I want to challenge each one of us in this regard as we end today. Not only as to our own salvation, admitting to ourselves and to the Lord that our salvation must be entirely of Him, but also in our thinking and estimation of others. We fall into a dangerous trap when we regard anyone to be a picture of piety and godliness by measuring them by their works. That thinking is an example of this very thing that Paul warned us of:

2Co 10:12 Not that we dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. **But when they measure themselves by one another and**

**compare themselves with one another, they are without understanding.**

Salvation is entirely of the Lord. Do you see that you are not “good”? Excellent. Do you think then that because you are not “good” that the Lord will not save you? Then you are wrong. Because as in the case of the rich young ruler who thought himself to be soooo “good,” we learn that Christ did not come into this world to save the “good” people, but to save sinners.